

THE LUTHERAN 

JANUARY 2015

AMBASSADOR



pil-grim \ˈpil-grəm\ *n* [ME, fr. OF *peligrin*, fr. L *peregrinus*, alter. of L *peregrinus* foreigner, fr. *peregrinus* adj., foreign, fr. *per* through + *agr-*, *ager* land — more at *AGE*] (*13c*)
1: one who journeys in foreign lands: WAYFARER 2: one who travels to a shrine or holy place as a devotee 3 *cap*: one of the English colonists settling at Plymouth in 1620

pil-grim-age \ˈpil-grə-mij\ *n* (*13c*) 1: a journey of a pilgrim; esp.: one to a shrine or a sacred place 2: the course of life on earth

pilgrimage *vi* -aged; -ag-ing (*14c*): to go on a pilgrimage

New Year, new life

BY LIZ TONNESON

It is midnight in Ecuador on New Year's Eve. Across the country there are thousands of *Año Viejos* being burned with much revelry and celebration (and with many loud fireworks). These Old Year (*Año* = year; *Viejo* = old) representatives are made out of paper maché, rags, and old clothing, and are stuffed with sawdust and newspaper. Some are made in the image of cartoon characters, celebrities, unpopular politicians, world leaders, or animals. Others are made to look like a relative or family member. In the weeks leading up to December 31, they are sold on almost every street corner, and are sometimes stacked in haphazard and rather eerie piles with arms and legs sticking out everywhere. Piles of masks lie along the sidewalks, hawked by hopeful entrepreneurs trying to make a few bucks. By New Year's Eve, every household has bought or made a dummy and they are ready to be ignited. At the stroke of midnight, the *Año Viejos* are burned out in the middle of the street to symbolically make an end to the old year and to joyfully welcome in the new.

The month of January is a month of new beginnings, of New Year's resolutions, of new gym memberships, and a fresh resolve to do/start/accomplish _____ (you fill in the blank). It is the start of a new year that has yet to be marred with tragedies and sorrows. A whole 365 days of promise and opportunity. In my family, there were two birthdays in January—Dad's on January 19 and mine on January 27. When Dad was born, my Grandma



Angeline couldn't have known that the same month that saw her son's birthday would also see him die 53 years later. He died on the 23rd, and his funeral was held on my 22nd birthday.

In the beginning of a new year, maybe it is strange to talk about death. Happy thoughts, optimism, and best-face-forward thinking might be more acceptable topics. But in truth, the death of a Christian is a new beginning. The *Año Viejos* are burnt to commemorate the end of the old and celebrate the start of something new. My dad wasn't burned, but his body was destroyed—first by cancer, and then by the natural processes of decay. We can no more get him back than we can scoop up the ashes of an

Año Viejo and remake Superman out of it. Thankfully, what we are unable to do, God is willing and able to do. Somehow, incredibly, He has brought my dad back to life. Not life here on earth, but life forever in heaven. God has a glorious history of taking dust and making miracles.

This may be the beginning of your last year on earth. Or maybe you have 83 years left. Whatever the case may be, a future month will hold our death-day, just like one held our birth-day. And I for one am thankful that God holds both in His hands.

Tonneson, a former missionary kid in Ecuador, lives in Cloquet, Minn., where her husband, Ryan, is the seminary intern at St. Paul's Lutheran.

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Editor Pastor Robert L. Lee
rlee@afcl.org

Managing Editor Ruth Gunderson
ruthg@afcl.org

Editorial Board Oryen Benrud
Pastor Jerry Moan
Pastor James L. Johnson

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It is certainly the duty of every true Christian, to esteem himself a stranger and pilgrim in this world; and as bound to use earthly blessings, not as means of satisfying lust or gratifying wantonness, but of supplying his absolute wants and necessities.

—Johann Arndt

[We are but travelers on a journey without as yet a fixed abode; we are on our way, not yet in our native land; we are in a state of longing, but not yet of enjoyment. But let us continue on our way, and continue without sloth or respite, so that we may ultimately arrive at our destination.]

—Saint Augustine

A pilgrim was seen on the way to gloryland; dangerous pitfalls oft affright him, devils are trying to trick and spite him, but he's singing: "Onward to my home."

—Author unknown

Each and every one of us has one obligation, during the bewildered days of our pilgrimage here: the saving of his own soul, and secondarily and incidentally thereby affecting for good such other souls as come under our influence.

—Kathleen Norris

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster; let him in constancy follow the Master. There's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

—John Bunyan



PILGRIM IN THE HOLY LAND

BY RUTH GUNDERSON

I stood atop Mount Nebo, the warm setting sun casting its long embrace on the arid bluff as I faced west. In the near distance, the rolling hills of Bethany gave way to the Jordan River, its valley running farther right and left than my vision carried. As I peered through the hazy sunlight the land west of the Jordan rose up to Jerusalem, perched like a crown on the brow of Israel. The Holy Land.

I was a pilgrim, in the land of pilgrims. A seeker in the home of the One who came to be the Answer.

Yet, standing there, my back to the zealous crowd of tourists and pilgrims, I was conflicted. Walking where Jesus performed miracles, where John baptized, where Moses talked with God, where a young nation wandered north to their Promised Land—would any of this change my relationship with my heavenly Father? My head said no, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). But my heart ... my heart was changing.

Just four short days earlier, as I winged my way over the Mediterranean Sea and dropped down over Israel, I peeked out the plane window to spy the glistening stacks of white sugar-cubed homes that announced our arrival in Amman, Jordan. I was one of six religious journalists invited by the Jordan Tourism Board to visit biblically historical sites within Jordan. Ten non-stop, jam-packed days filled with centuries’ worth of head-spinning historical facts, miles of dusty trails to trod, and beauty beyond my years of imagining.

I was ready for the adventure of a lifetime. But I was dead-set against being a pilgrim.

Why? A pilgrim, I thought, was someone who traveled a difficult path to reach a holy site in an effort to build up brownie points in heaven. A worshiper of a place, of relics, rather than a worshiper of the One who created all things and offers salvation as a free gift. I was skeptical that visiting a place could change my relationship with God.





TOP: The view of the Jordan River Valley looking west from Mount Nebo.



FAR LEFT: A lone olive tree stands sentinel on a bluff overlooking the Jordan River Valley. Jordan has more than 80 varieties of olive trees.



NEAR RIGHT: The octagonal tiles of a Byzantine-era church are part of the ruins of Umm Qais in northern Jordan.



TOP: Pella, one of the ancient cities of the Decapolis, was also where Christians first fled following the fall of Jerusalem.

ABOVE, MIDDLE: We spied a locust at Bethany Beyond the Jordan.

ABOVE: A round stone used as a door to an ancient cave sits at the top of Mount Nebo.

ABOVE, MIDDLE: Two young refugee girls from Qaraqosh, Iraq, now make their home in a Catholic church in Amman, Jordan, after fleeing ISIS.

ABOVE: Olive trees dot the hillsides in northern Jordan, one of the few exported goods from the country.

ABOVE, MIDDLE: Two local workers continue to restore a mosaic floor at Bethany Beyond the Jordan.

ABOVE: Mukawir, site of John the Baptist's imprisonment and death.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Cardo, a 660-yard colon-naded street in Jerash, a city of the Decapolis.



But my understanding of pilgrims and pilgrimages would change over the next ten days.

The first trace of a shift in my understanding came as I pointed my camera down into the dust covering my sandaled feet. I was standing on the octagonal tiles of a Byzantine-era church in Umm Qais, one of the ancient cities of the Decapolis along the border with Syria and Israel. Here, historians believe Jesus expelled the demon Legion from a wild man and gave it permission to enter a herd of pigs, which plummeted headlong into the Sea of Galilee (Mark 5:1-17). It was only our first day touring, but as I looked at the dust, felt it chafe against my toes, I thought of Jesus. He washed His disciples' feet. Such a practical service.

Later that evening, as I sat next to my colleagues in a church service in Amman, another flicker of insight welled up in my heart as we read together the history of Christ's earthly life in the Apostle's Creed. "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived ..., born ..., suffered ..., was crucified, died, and was buried ..., On the third day He rose again from the dead ..." Right over there, to the west, I thought, that's where it all happened.

That night I sat on the edge of my bathroom tub and washed the dust from my feet. I thought again about Jesus and the miles he trod throughout Galilee during his three years of ministry. A new image of a

pilgrim was beginning to awaken inside me.

The next day, I stood face to face with a group of Iraqi Christian refugees who had fled to Amman to escape ISIS—the definition of pilgrims and strangers. As one man shared the story of his miraculous journey, his eyes shone with joy.

I asked him, "What did you leave behind?"

He shrugged, "Jesus said to leave everything and follow Him."

Everything—not one item of comfort—for the sake of Jesus, the very man who walked, healed, and gave up His life for them. For me. How could this encounter, this day, not change my definition? My heart was full.

Daily, tiny pieces of understanding began to multiply as we toured one site after another. We spied a locust as we toured the desert wilderness where John the Baptist made his home beyond the Jordan. Didn't John forsake all comfort and live off locusts and honey? Then, a glimpse of the Milky Way in the night sky as we drove south to Petra. It reminded me of the one star that marked the birthplace of the Savior. Or the sere, unforgiving desert of southern Jordan where the Israelites must have cried out to God for relief. And during our last stop in Mukawir, the cruel thought that I stood where John the Baptist suffered imprisonment and then death at the hands of Herod Antipas.

Slowly, the picture of a pilgrim in my mind began to morph into something new. The places we visited contained a common thread: every site held the story of men and women of faith who struggled through a difficult path in their time on earth. Many of them paid the ultimate price for that faith. Yet they remained faithful.

That reality hasn't changed; Christians today are still walking a difficult path in places like Iraq, Syria, China, and North Korea. I realized that to be a pilgrim is to be a stranger in this world with a homeland beyond this life.

But there was something else that I was beginning to grasp. Through the days of travel, the miles of hiking, the vast beauty of the Holy Land, God was graciously revealing another facet of His character to me—His omnipresence. As I stood atop Mount Nebo, surrounded by pilgrims of all nations, God was with me. And when I returned home and entered back into the routine of life, God would be with me in Minnesota. The story that began in the Holy Land would be carried wherever pilgrims were sent as strangers. It is a wonderfully true story of hope and salvation for all nations. And we pilgrims get to be the storytellers—wherever God has placed us.

Gunderson, managing editor of The Lutheran Ambassador, is a member of Vision of Glory Lutheran, Plymouth, Minn.

o.....A..... HEARTSET ON..... PILGRIMAGE

BY HOPE UNVERZAGT

Driving our fleet of junky vehicles is always an adventure. It keeps our prayer life strong, and we keep AAA in business. Our unofficial motto when it comes to vehicles is, “Buy used with cash, then drive until they die.” It makes life exciting, especially now that several of our vehicles have more than 250,000 miles on them. We’ve had some of them so long they have become part of the family, particularly Old Bessie, our 15-passenger van.

Old Bessie has taken our family on trips to Mount Rushmore, Washington, D.C., Disney World, and the Creation Museum. She has carried youths to the FLY Convention and Faith on Fire Drama Ministry tours. She has brought four newborn babies home from the hospital. Several of our children even took the driver’s test with her. Unfortunately, she acquired a number of scars after our Christmas Day 2008 three-vehicle accident on snowy roads. She got far uglier after a run-in with a deer a few years later.

“Just make her legal,” we told our me-

chanic after that incident. “We don’t want to put any more money into her than we need to.”

We’ve had scares for her life, but she keeps faithfully running, faithfully pressing forward.

I am on a journey a lot like Old Bessie’s. It’s a journey of the heart that began when I was born and will continue until I die. Psalm 84 touches on this idea: “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion” (vs. 5). Some versions say: “... whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.” When you are on a journey, you generally know your destination, but you have no idea what you might encounter on the trip—hills, valleys, incredible scenery, flat tires, or blown hoses. But I have discovered the destination makes a big difference in the journey. The trip is a lot easier when you are excited to get where you are going and you know Who is bringing you there.

Of our 11 children, all have been good travelers—except one. As a young child he absolutely hated being restrained in a car

seat and would scream for hours until he got sick. (That’s when my husband began keeping a pair of ear plugs in the glove compartment.) We would long for our destination the entire trip, believe me. And our arrival would be so much sweeter because of the relief silence brought with it. Apparently, the psalmist felt the same way, “My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (vs. 2).

My friend Laura shared with me recently that when her husband unexpectedly found himself without a job, they realized God had suddenly launched them into a whole new life, one that most likely would involve missions.

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“It feels like speeding downhill in an out-of-control vehicle because our hands aren’t on the steering wheel,” said Laura. “But God sees the big picture, and we know our final destination, so we’re in good hands.”

We agreed that without the Creator of the universe, the Lord who has a plan for our welfare and not for evil (Jeremiah 29:11), this journey of life could seem pretty hopeless and scary.

So how does knowing the final destination affect the journey for those who love the Lord? First, travelers don’t get too comfortable where they’re not permanently staying. No sense unpacking the suitcases entirely. There is an old gospel song written

by Albert Edward Brumley that says, “This world is not my home; I’m just a-passin’ through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door, and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.” What a great reminder that it is not worth getting too attached to what is only temporary.

Second, realizing our lives are a journey should enable us to be a bit more daring. It is easier to step out of our comfort zones to share Jesus and do His work when we know Who holds our reputation and that the destination is far more important than the journey.

Last, the valleys in life, as miserable as they might be, seem much more bearable

when we are just a-passin’ through and not moving in. God sees the detours because He put them there. He alone knows the answer to our “why?” and “how long?”

Jesus wants to travel with you. Unlike our junky vehicles, He is reliable. He brings joy to the journey, meaning to the trip, and even provides survival ear plugs if necessary. “No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11). Those who go through life with Him are in for the adventure of a lifetime.

Unverzagt, who lives in Sparta, Wis., is a member of Christ is Lord Lutheran Church, Onalaska, Wis.



Things were sailing along smoothly at Prince of Peace Lutheran in Beulah, N.D. My husband, Kris, and I had been in ministry in Beulah for almost 20 years: nine years at Zion Lutheran (an ELCA church), and more than 10 years at Prince of Peace Lutheran. Our daughter, Annika, had been in kindergarten when we first came to Beulah and now she is a grown woman, living and working in the Twin Cities. After 20 years in one place, you can imagine that we had our schedule and traditions down pat. And we were looking forward to the completion of a building program that was going to enlarge our sanctuary. Things couldn't have been better—or

so we thought.

God had other ideas.

I have never been able to deal with change very well. So when Pastor Paul Nash, AFLC Home Missions director, called and asked us to prayerfully consider moving to Hagerstown, Md., to pastor a Home Missions church, our first response was, "What? No way!"

Couldn't the call be to Loveland, Colo., where we both grew up and where a Home Missions congregation was also looking for a pastor? Couldn't the call be some place more in the direction of where our family lived, not away?

God had other ideas.

There are many seasons in this journey we call life. Maybe one of the most difficult and challenging seasons could be called "starting over after 31 years in ministry." We had put deep roots down in Beulah, and had many close friends there. We loved our church family! For us this change meant:

- Going through 20 years of stuff: purging, throwing, and packing.
 - Saying goodbye.
 - Selling a home.
 - Missing out on worshiping in the new sanctuary.
 - A lot of tears and frustration.
- On the other hand it also meant:
- Leaning on God more and praying



GOING FORTH

BY PAULA NYMAN

calls Abram and his family from their country to the land that God would show them. And what does this Scripture say next? Basically, if Abram obeys he will be blessed immensely—and be a blessing to others. Have you ever thought about what would have happened if Abram had not obeyed? Ponder that for a while. We weren't there at the time, but somehow I don't think it took long for Abram to decide to obey God. I believe obedience is a decision: one chooses to obey or one chooses not to obey. It's either one or the other. Thankfully for us, Abram obeyed.

You might be asking, what does it mean to obey? I am fond of looking up the words I am studying in Scripture in their original language, be it Hebrew or Greek, just like you might look up the meaning of an English word you don't know in the dictionary. After God gave Abram the command, Genesis 12:4 says Abram, "went forth as the LORD had spoken to him." In Hebrew the verb "went forth" means walk, travel, follow, adhere to, and even metaphorically "to behave." So, when Abram obeyed God's command by following God, he behaved! Abram *chose* to follow God, and that is what is at the heart of obedience. No matter how confusing the situation might be or how much we wish it were otherwise, to obey means we must *choose* to follow God and His call for us in our lives.

Was God really calling us to Hagerstown? It took a period of two or three months and a lot of prayer and guid-

ance from others, but it finally did become clear that we were to leave our people and our Beulah land and go to the *far* country God was leading us to. Since that decision, many folks have asked us how we could ever do what we did. The only answer I can give is that there was no other choice we could have made. Either we moved to Hagerstown or we would remain out of God's will. Neither Kris nor I wanted that.

In this new season of our lives, things have not been easy. Our faith has been tested, our physical endurance has been tested, and our patience has been tested. It was not a coincidence that shortly before we left Beulah, our Wednesday night Bible study was on the topic of how God tests our faith and how to respond to it. My biggest take-away from that study was that I cannot put my eyes on the situation or circumstances in which I find myself being tested; instead, I must look to God. And if I respond poorly to the test, it is not God's fault. Instead, it is my perception of God that needs to change.

Again, this is a matter of choice. Over and over in the past two months, I have had to consciously choose to believe that we are where God wants us and we are doing the work for which He has equipped us. I choose to look with gratitude at what God is doing in our lives today.

Nyman is a member of Christ Community Church, Hagerstown, Md.

for His guidance.

- Trusting that God knew what He was doing and putting our faith in His plan.
- Being blessed in countless ways as we prepared to leave.
- Praying together more with my husband.
- Looking at this experience as an adventure and with expectancy for what God might do.
- Saying, "Till we meet again," instead of, "goodbye."

As I contemplated the adventure ahead of us, I was reminded of Abram and Sarai. Their story is found in Genesis 12:1-3: God

PILGRIMS & STRANGERS

BY PASTOR PHILL HOOPER

Pilgrim. It's an unusual word, typically associated with Thanksgiving. Based on how they are represented in culture, pilgrims wear big dark felt hats, dress plainly, hunt with blunderbusses, and seem to eat only wild turkey with dressing and cranberry sauce. The stereotype is instantly recognizable; it shows up in cartoons and marketing. And though we feel connected to them (they were in our past, after all—our cherished national and spiritual heritage!) we don't dress like them, act much like them, or live like them. We probably feel more in common with people from other, modern countries, than we feel with the pilgrims of Plymouth, Mass.

How pilgrims lived is a different story, for a different day—but have you ever wondered *why* they were called pilgrims in the first place? The reason is not what many of us think.

When we think of a definition of “pilgrim,” we often think that it is someone who goes on a trip to a religious destination. Muslims go on pilgrimages to Mecca.

Mormons go on pilgrimages to Salt Lake City. Didn't the American pilgrims consider their trip to the new world to be a religious trip, to make a society that would be a “city on a hill?” There were spiritual goals and ideals in their minds, but this is not why they referred to themselves as pilgrims. They understood the term somewhat differently.

The term pilgrim shows up in the Geneva Bible (which they used) twice in the New Testament. In the English of the day, the term meant someone who journeys a long way and who lives temporarily as a foreigner in a land that is not his. Hebrews 11 celebrates several of the Old Testament saints for having lived by faith, and, in verse 13, as having been “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

They were foreigners in the world, seeking and living towards a country that they didn't come from, and weren't able to physically get to. Their faith shaped their lives, so they found themselves out of place in a faithless world. They lived here, but they did not and would not fit. They desired a heavenly country.



This passage resonated with the Mayflower passengers. They came to America seeking religious freedom, having rejected the theologically questionable state church of England. They formed their own congregations, and were persecuted for it. When that persecution became intolerable, they went to Holland, and lived there as foreigners—pilgrims. When they saw their children entering into the decadent parts of the culture in Holland, their concern for their children's faith caused them, again, to leave—this time for the New World. We typically think of the pilgrims coming to America as part of a spiritual goal and vision. They thought of themselves as pilgrims because their faith in God caused them to



be unable to fit in or really settle anywhere they had previously lived. They were willing to live as strangers and foreigners, for the sake of a life of faith that God had called them to—like the pilgrims of Hebrews 11.

The book of I Peter also uses the term pilgrim. Written to early Christians now scattered throughout Asia Minor (due, in part, to persecution), Peter's letter first reminds them that they had been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1:19), later recalls to them how God had thus made them a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ..." (2:9), and then begs them, as sojourners and pilgrims, to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable

among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (2:11-12).

They were already foreigners, due to nationality. They were called to not fit in, as well, because of the identity that God had given them. The response of the locals was not guaranteed to be positive toward them; in fact, it was expected to be the opposite. Nevertheless, they were to live differently—not to earn God's favor, but because He had completely graced them with that role.

We also are called to a different life—a pilgrim life—one that does not fit in, that seems to not belong down here. Our residence may be here, but our home, thanks

entirely to Jesus, is in heaven. We will go there one day. Until that time—by the Spirit of God—may we also abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, and may we have honorable conduct while we live in this place. In this way, whether people around us are inspired, nonplussed, or even offended by the difference, they will at least acknowledge that we, too, do not seem to belong around here, as out of place as a Plymouth Pilgrim in our modern age.

Hooper serves St. John's Lutheran, Duluth, Minn.



I was lost—completely and frightfully lost. All alone, the darkness pressed in, strange sounds all around me; large, dark, formless objects enveloped me. What was that? Who's there? My foot slipped and I found myself lying face down in mud, an arm crushed under me. I cried out, "Help! Oh, please help me!"

I felt a hand shaking me firmly. "Wake up, Clara, you're having a bad dream!" Oh, what a wonderful peace! Although the dream was still very vivid, I was home safe in my own bed with my husband beside me.

I was home ... where everything was made right!

A place where everything is made right! Don't you long for that? Peace, safety, love, acceptance, no tears nor fears; no fat belly to be ashamed of, no wrinkles to try and cover up. Even all these things would be worth the wait, but add to them being in the presence of my creator, my Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, why, it will be heaven, indeed!

When I was young and heard the older generation talking about and longing for heaven, I always wondered why they were in

such a hurry. I was young. I wanted to live my life to the fullest. I wanted time to grow up, finish school, get married, and have babies all around me in our very own house. I dreamed of doing great things for the Lord ... I needed time.

As I got older and became daily aware of my own sin, and the sin in the world, I began to understand that, in part, the longing for heaven by the older folk was a desire to be free from Satan's temptations and all of the evil in the world. God Himself makes the promise in His Word that our tears will



THE FINAL DESTINATION

BY CLARA GUNDERSON

for his children: to be daily aware of the Spirit of God leading you on until the time He calls you “home,” where everything is made right.

Since ministering to Dad in his last weeks and days, I have found much joy in being an official hospice visiting volunteer. Sharing the hope of eternal life with those whose doctors have given them six months or less to live has increased my own awareness of the absolute necessity of assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ, giving the peace of mind and heart that can be had now on this earth. Jenny

was one such patient. Her eyes would light up at the mention of the name of Jesus, and I doubt there was an employee in her nursing home who didn’t witness Jenny’s joy.

At Jenny’s funeral the pastor shared that God’s children don’t pass from life into death, but that they leave this wretched “death” they are in and pass into real life with Jesus. As exhorted in Hebrews 4:10-11, Jenny has entered God’s rest, having been diligent and faithful in her walk with the Lord.

One of the most precious gifts God

gives His children while we are still living is this assurance of our salvation. There need not be any wondering about it. His Word is so clear: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). He doesn’t leave us on our own to figure it out. His Spirit helps us understand and appropriate God’s grace. And the Spirit works through the Word to preserve us for eternity.

In my baptism I was given the gift of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. I was given the very presence of the Holy Spirit to guide me all my days. And, according to Psalm 139:15-16, the number of my days are written down in God’s book. Not one day too soon nor one day too late will He call me to Himself. I’m ready. I am already registered for Zion ... God Himself has said, “This one was born there” (Psalm 87:6).

If your heart is troubled, if your way seems dark, if frightful things are throwing themselves at you, if your burdens are too heavy to bear, come to Jesus. Come home where everything is made right.

Gunderson, a member of the Parish Education Board, lives in Cambridge, Minn., and is a member of Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

be wiped away; that there will be no more mourning or crying because He will make all things new (Revelation 21:4-5).

My father talked a lot about his “destiny.” In the last years of his life he often reminisced about the different places he had gone, the different interests he had, which efforts were realized and which plans were not. He saw how the Lord had worked out a life-plan for him, and he called it his destiny. I believe it was by his Creator, who was always calling my father to Himself, where he belonged. What a meaningful legacy he left

“THY KINGDOM COME”

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

JANUARY 5

“For we have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13:14).

To most of us the word “here” may mean America, or “here on earth”; but God’s Word is not bound by time or place, for His truth endures to all generations. Praise His worthy Name.

In my early childhood a “singing mother in a singing Church” sang this message into my heart in words that became a stirring challenge:

I am a stranger here, within a foreign land,
My home is far away upon a golden strand.
Ambassador to be in realms beyond the sea,
I’m here on business for my King.

This is the message that I bring,
A message angels fain would sing:
“O be ye reconciled,” Thus saith my Lord and King.

“O be ye reconciled to God.”
 (“The King’s Business,” by Elijah Cassel)

The Scripture and hymn make it clear that our citizenship is in heaven. We can have no title or right to it unless we seek it now by way of the Cross of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Even then our responsibility does not end until we have shared its message with our perishing fellow-pilgrims and travelers on life’s rough way; for many will never reach the Beautiful City if we fail to be ambassadors for our King. This is our responsibility while we wait for the Heavenly Jerusalem to come down to earth from heaven. Let us be true to our high calling.

Mrs. Elvera Hokonson, now deceased, lived in Washington, Oregon, South Dakota, and Minnesota, where her husband, Arvid, served LFC and AFLC parishes.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. “Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls,” wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

Serving the church

BY CASSIE MAIER

As Christians, we are each on a journey which includes taking leaps of faith and trusting God's calling and direction for our lives. Every Christian's journey unfolds differently, but each acts as a testimony to the Lord. My journey started when I was an infant and continues now as I serve as a Parish Builder.

I was baptized as an infant but came to a better understanding of what Jesus had done for me on the cross when I attended camp at age 10. Romans 10:9-10, 13 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." These verses helped me understand that I was saved by God's grace and nothing else.

After high school, God called me to AFLBS. During Bible school, God taught me how to live out my faith day by day. As I put what I was learning into practice, living by faith became more natural. The Lord reminded me that He is constant and never failing. After Bible school, I joined the AFLC Home Missions Parish Building program. A parish builder is someone who helps a congregation grow spiritually by helping lead various ministries at the church, reaching out into the community, and connecting with people in the congregation. Each parish builder has a different role, but they all share a common goal: meeting people where they're at and sharing the love of Jesus with them.

I've been a parish builder at Christ Community Church in Hagerstown, Md., for two and half months. In my short time here I've started meeting weekly with young adults at our church, assisting with other ministries, and getting to know the congregation—which is the best part! I want to be a blessing to the church by serving them however I can. Usually that means practical things: chopping firewood, going to an 8-year-old's soccer game, having dinner with a family, or helping the youth with their roles



in the church's Christmas program. I want to use the gifts God has given me to serve the church, ultimately glorifying Him.

The ways that I have been blessed through this role have overwhelmed me. Since being here I have been able to form new and growing relationships, create a tight bond with my host family, see places I never would have imagined, and become a part of an amazing church family. In many ways parish building is no different than being a committed church member. We are all called to serve, support, encourage, disciple, and equip wherever we are at on our journey. When we say yes to God's calling we also say yes to the blessings that He gives us along the way.

I do not know exactly what God has in store next as my journey here unfolds, but I do know that God will continue to be faithful as He always has. I make Acts 20:24 my prayer as I continue to serve Him, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Maier, from Faith, S.D., is a Home Missions Parish Builder serving Christ Community Church, Hagerstown, Md.



AFLC Schools host Christmas concerts





The AFLC Schools hosted a weekend of Christmas concerts on the campus Dec. 5-7 under the theme, "The Word Became Flesh." Pictured, opposite page top, members of the handbell choir accompanied a Christmas hymn. Left, members of the audience joined the Proclaim and Concert Choirs in singing the Hallelujah Chorus. Above, from top to bottom, members of the Seminary Chorus sing "God Now Dwells Among Us;" members of the Proclaim Choir sing "All Is Well;" Philip Mundfrom, Valley City, N.D., plays trombone in the Symphonic Wind Ensemble; Joshua Odell, Monticello, Minn., lights candles.

Make plans for annual conference

Save the date! The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 16-19 this year at Warm Beach, Wash. The conference is located at the family-friendly Warm Beach Camp & Conference Center, and children of all ages are welcome. Day care, vacation Bible school, and other activities will be provided for children and teens. Warm Beach is located an hour's-drive north of Seattle, Wash. For information on potential lodging options, visit www.WarmBeach.com. Camping and RV spots are available. For more information on the conference, contact Atonement Free Lutheran Church at: 360-435-9191.

WMF 2015 Bible study is now available

The Women's Missionary Federation is offering the 2015 WMF Bible study on the Book of Ephesians. The study, written by Kathy Horneman, includes 11 chapters dealing with topics from salvation, grace, and praise to relationships, spiritual warfare and the armor of God.

The books, which cost \$11 each, are available through the WMF. Send your name, address, church name and address, along with payment to Dawn Johnson, 2991 30th Ave., Wilson, WI, 54027.

Wilderness Bible Camp seeks hosts

The AFLC Wilderness Bible Camp located in scenic northern Minnesota lake country southwest of Detroit Lakes is looking for a campground host(s) for the summer of 2015. Duties would include: opening and closing the camp for the groups that use the camp each summer; cleaning; and grounds maintenance. Recreational vehicle hookup facilities are available, along with dorm-style rooms. If interested or if you know somebody who might be interested, please contact Matt Olson at 612-240-1156.

Home Missions hosts Leadership Retreat

The AFLC Home Missions department will host a Home Missions Leadership Retreat Feb. 9-12 at Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz. The retreat is meant to give both inspiration and practical support for Home Missions pastors and their wives, Parish Builders, and lay leaders within the congregation. For more information, visit the Home Missions website at aflchomemissions.org.

People and places

Pastor Kris Nyman was installed Nov. 30, 2014, at Christ Community Church, Hagerstown, Md. Members of the Home Mission congregation also celebrated the church's ninth anniversary.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee hired **Micah Johnson** as the new Director of Business Management for the AFLC. Johnson, who lives in Montrose, Minn., will begin his duties on Dec. 15. He replaces Cory Buck, who served the AFLC as business manager for eight years.

Pastor David Nelson has resigned from serving Trinity Lutheran, Brookings, Ore.

Rob Edwards, a student of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has finished serving his internship year at Bethel Free

Lutheran, Grafton, N.D., under the supervision of Pastor Tim Carlson. He is now eligible for a call.

Pastor Tom Olson, Newark, Ohio, has accepted a call to serve Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville, Minn. He is currently serving St. John's Lutheran, Newark, Ohio.

First Lutheran Church, Oklahoma City, Okla., was recently given the Distinguished Service Award by the Oklahoma City and County Historical Society in recognition of the loving care and stewardship that the congregation extended to the community while being the caretakers of a century chest. The chest, which was buried in a vault inside First Lutheran's building in 1913, was opened in April 2013, receiving national news coverage of the event.



Finding joy in life with Jesus

BY KATELYN GUDIM

As I knelt down in the dark room, they slowly pulled off a blanket to reveal his small, lifeless body. He was dead. He had drunk paraffin the day before and there was nothing that the doctors could do. He was 16 months old. I sat with my friend as she called out, “Why? Why?” I sat there and thought the same thing silently. I cried because my dear friend was hurting, and the thought that I’d never see her sweet boy with his beautiful smile again hurt me, as well.

In the midst of this moment, I couldn’t help but realize how blessed I was. I was allowed to mourn with my friend. I was allowed to see the brevity of life and how quickly it can pass away. It is in these moments when I’ve known the Lord. I’ve been known by Him. I’ve been held by Him. And He’s still good.

The reality of life hit when I got the phone call to come quickly on that morning. I was honored to be a part of the burial, and it is cultural for the family and friends of the family who lost a loved one to spend three to four days at the family’s house, eating, sleeping, and mourning together.

I sat next to my friend as they handed out the *posho* and beans and she asked me to pray before we ate. Jokingly, I asked if she preferred English or Karamojong, and she laughed as she

told me to pray in her language. Recalling all I knew, I said, “*Akuji Papa, alakara, amina*” which translates to, “Dear Father, thank you, amen.” The girls laughed and laughed at the little that I could remember. One of them asked, “Katie, what are you thanking God for in this time?” As I looked around at so many dear friends seated in the dirt with me, I said, “This. I’m thanking Him for this.” Community. I was soaking it in.

We ate, they tried to teach me how to deny a proposal in Karamojong, and the children came and we fell in a heap on the ground in a tickle fight. There was laughter, hope, *life*. My friend spoke of seeing her son in heaven one day, and how she’s happy that my *jjaja* (grandmother) is there to play with him until we get there. My friend became a believer back in January. Oh, the hope we find in Christ Jesus!

The amazing thing about life is that the sorrows and pains that we experience make the laughter and smiles all the more sweet. Life is so beautiful when you are able to allow the times of sorrow to lead you to Jesus and find joy in Him.

Gudim, a short term assistant with AFLC World Missions, serves in Jinja, Uganda.

When neighbors are in need

BY PASTOR JON WELLUMSON

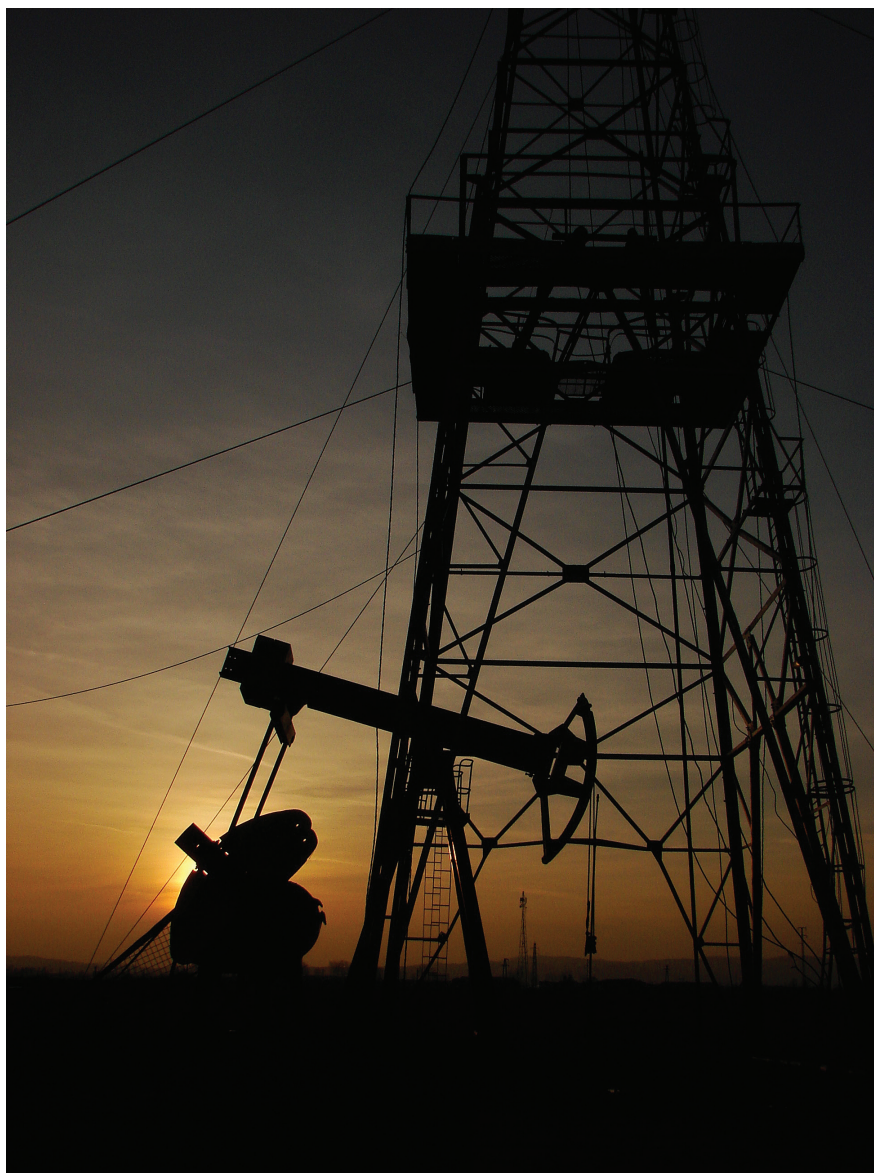
Perhaps you have heard about the oil boom in northwest North Dakota. While the economy is underperforming in most of the country, it isn't here. Many people throughout the nation and from all over the world have seen this as the place to make a new start or to strike it rich. Although many have done well, this boom has its own challenges.

For lots of reasons, men—primarily—and some women have arrived here with the clothes they are wearing and a backpack or a suitcase. Each person has a different life story, but all hope to find instant financial relief. What they find instead is that without a permanent local address, jobs are not easy to obtain. Rent is sky high, and even small apartments are hard to find. There are thousands living in camper trailers at crowded campgrounds paying high rent for the lots they are parked on. Those who find menial jobs cannot afford rent. They sleep for a while in the hospital waiting room, then move to a 24-hour grocery store, then find rest at a laundry mat. And by morning they hope they will be rested enough to do their jobs that day. Many in these situations remain in the area even when winter arrives. We have a housing problem here.

We have an obligation to help those in need. How to help and care for these people has been the topic of conversation at individual churches and ministerial groups that meet in various towns. We are overwhelmed as we try to come up with solutions. We run into obstacles from city and state ordinances, from neighbors, from insurance companies, and from our own fears. Many have helped one person at a time in their own homes, but it's hard to know who you can trust in your house with your wife and kids.

For the third year, several churches in Dickinson have banded together to give men a place to stay overnight through the winter months in their church buildings. Members of these churches have carefully organized the effort to minimize the danger of violence and maximize the number of men they can help. They have seen God at work in many lives: some men have been able to make a new start and some have come to know Jesus as their Savior.

Inspired by the success in Dickinson, churches in Williston have done the same for men at a space lent to us by a man camp just outside of town. Many volunteers provide rides and supervise our overnight guests, who experience the love of Christ as their need of a safe, warm place to sleep is met. While it is gratifying to hear their expressions of thanks, those of us who volunteer know



we are blessed far more than the men we are helping as we experience the love of Christ flowing through us to them.

Pray for us here. We wish we could do much more and are continuously looking and working to help more people than we are now. May God grant all of us the joy of being channels of His love.

Wellumson serves Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Williston, N.D., and Beaver Creek Free Lutheran, rural Ray, N.D. For a glimpse into the problems in western North Dakota, the documentary film The Overnights is highly recommended.

AFLC memorials: November

AFLBS

Ruth Claus, Lori Rude,
Maryadele Knudson

AFLT

Peder Simengaard,
Cleo Brekke, Margaret
Mundfrom

Evangelism

Kevin Gann

Home Missions

Ken Nash

Parish Education

Dr. Mary Lindquist,
Pastor Dale Mellgren,

Pastor John Mundfrom,
Margaret Mundfrom

World Missions

Adeline Haugen, Evelyn
Hogstad, Pastor Albert
Olson, Margaret Mundfrom

WMF

Anna Dahle, Ethel Brooks,
Maryadele Knudson,
Mamie Howe,
Marlys Hartsoch

Youth Ministry

Erick Peterson

Memoriam: Margaret Mundfrom

Margaret Mundfrom, 95, of Kenyon, Minn., died Nov. 18, 2014, at her home. She was the wife of AFLC Pastor Gerald Mundfrom, who preceded her in death.

Born Sept. 26, 1919, in Chisago Lake Township, Minn., she was the daughter of Henry and Hulda (Broecker) Lindquist. She married Gerald Mundfrom Dec. 17, 1949, in South Saint Paul, Minn. He preceded her in death in 2003.

Mundfrom was confirmed at Bethesda Lutheran Church, South Saint Paul, and graduated from South Saint Paul High School in 1936. She attended the Lutheran Bible Institute in Minneapolis and worked at clerical jobs, including at the headquarters for the Lutheran Evangelistic Movement. After her marriage, they served various Lutheran churches in Minnesota, North and South Dakota. While raising her children, she worked part-time jobs or volunteered with the United States Census Bureau, Reyleck's Department Store in Grafton, N.D., and the Santa Cruz County Association for the Blind in Nogales, Ariz., the ARC and Country Village Homeowners Association, both in Osceola, Wis. She helped her husband start the Bible Book Store in Grafton, N.D., and assisted in his writing ministry, Mercy and Truth Publishers. She served as treasurer on the AFLC's Women's Missionary Federation, and moved to Kenyon in 2011, where she was a member of Hauge Free Lutheran.

Surviving are two sons, Daniel (Elaine) Mundfrom, Richmond, Ken., Pastor Stephen (Joanne) Mundfrom, Valley City, N.D.; three daughters, Ruth (Pastor D. Mark) Antal, Park River, N.D., Rachel (Bill) Chesley, Mesa, Ariz., and Priscilla (Pastor Martin) Horn, Kenyon, Minn.; one daughter-in-law, Lorilee Mundfrom, Beresford, S.D.; 20 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband, one son, Pastor John Mundfrom, and an infant daughter, Deborah Mundfrom.

The service was held Nov. 21, 2014, at Hauge Free Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn., with Pastor Martin Horn officiating. Burial was held in Panola Cemetery, with Pastor Stephen Mundfrom officiating. Memorials are preferred to AFLC Schools or Wycliffe Bible Translators.

In memoriam: Pastor Albert Olson

Pastor Albert Olson, 97, of Amery, Wis., died Nov. 7, 2014, at Willow Ridge Healthcare, Amery.

Born Sept. 11, 1917, in Kijunshan, Hunan, China, he was the son of Arthur and Minnie Olson, missionaries. He married Anna Marie Strand. She preceded him in death.

He attended grade school and high school in China. He graduated from Augsburg College, attended the Lutheran Bible Institute, and graduated from Augsburg Theological Seminary, all of Minneapolis. He attended the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied Chinese in preparation for missionary service. In 1946, he left for the Lutheran Free Church mission field in Hunan, China. He returned to the United States in 1950 because of the Communist Army takeover in China. He served as a missionary with his family in Taiwan for eight years. He then served congregations in Portland, Ore., Seattle, Wash., and Barronett, Amery, and Birnamwood, Wis. he retired in 1982. He was a member of Amery Free Lutheran.

Surviving are three daughters, Barbara (John) Fahrendholz, Patricia (John) Rieth, and Rebecca (Timothy) Kjeseth; 10 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

In memoriam: Anna Marie Dahle

Anna Dahle, 95, of Spicer, Minn., died Oct. 6, 2014, at GlenOaks Care Center, New London, Minn. She was the wife of AFLC Pastor Trygve Dahle, who preceded her in death.

Born Feb. 21, 1919, at Readstown, Wis., she was the daughter of Carl and Clara (Olson) Oppen. After her mother died while Anna was an infant, the family moved to Boscobel, Wis. She received her elementary education in a one-room schoolhouse. She graduated from Boscobel High School in 1936. In 1950, she attended the Lutheran Bible Institute in Minneapolis, graduating in 1952. She worked at the Bible Institute for six years, and after returning to Boscobel, worked at a variety store for 16 years. She married Pastor Trygve Dahle May 11, 1975. They lived in Spicer, Minn. She entered the GlenOaks Care Center in 2005.

Surviving are four step-children.

The service was held Oct. 9, 2014, at Green Lake Lutheran, Spicer, Minn. Burial was in the church cemetery.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Nov. 30, 2014

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$31,389	\$311,633	\$305,255
Evangelism	8,726	124,703	119,641
Youth Ministries	8,711	115,898	94,407
Parish Education	9,565	119,673	136,137
Seminary	23,350	248,713	260,245
Bible School	35,825	437,694	430,709
Home Missions	52,352	452,921	410,568
World Missions	36,235	428,758	367,449
Personal Support	32,558	403,141	412,366
TOTALS	\$238,710	\$2,643,135	\$2,536,778

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

A pilgrim and a stranger

Many years ago a preaching mission was held in a Lutheran Free Church congregation, and the speaker was a pastor who was confined to a wheelchair. One night he accompanied his message with a hymn, and the words touched at least one man's heart in a special way: "I'm a Pilgrim, and I'm a Stranger." He mentioned the hymn several times over the years, and it was sung during his funeral service.



Pastor Robert Lee

It was a surprise to this writer that the hymn is one of the few from the old *Concordia Hymnal* (No. 348) that was not included in the new *Ambassador Hymnal*. (It is included in the new *ReClaim Hymnal*, No. 251.) I hadn't missed it, which may suggest that the reason for its absence is that it was seldom sung for worship services. Perhaps it's a better solo number than one for congregational singing.

A little internet research revealed that at one time the hymn could be found in more than 300 hymnals, joined to several different tunes and sometimes with three additional verses. (The *Concordia* version has a Swedish tune, composed by Oscar Ahnfelt.) The author, Mary Shindler (1810-1883), was a prolific Southern poet whose husband was an Episcopal pastor. Her works were published in several magazines, with several set to music, but the hymn mentioned above was certainly her most popular one.

The pilgrimage theme is a striking one with a strong biblical foundation, and this issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* seeks to approach it from several directions, including the literal Bible lands pilgrimage of our

managing editor. *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, arguably the greatest literary treasure in the English language, develops this same theme, allegorizing the life journey of the Christian on the way to his heavenly home.

*There the glory is ever shining; O my
longing heart, my longing heart is
there.*

*Here is this country so dark and dreary
I long have wandered, forlorn and
weary ...*

Do we still sing about heaven? Many hymns may mention heaven in the last verse, but it seems to be the theme of only a few. It is encouraging to find some fine selections in three sections of our *Ambassador Hymnal*, but they are seldom sung except at funerals. A comparison of hymnals, past and present, reveals a general decline over the years of the inclusion of hymns with a heavenly theme. One may wonder why this is the case.

Is it too morbid to look forward to the end of life and to the glory that awaits the Christian? Is it only appropriate, perhaps, for the elderly or for those who are critically ill? Do we long for heaven less than those who have gone before us because we have it so good here? Ponder the words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote of his desire to depart this life and be with Christ and that to die is gain (Philippians 1:21-23).

A common text for one of the Sundays after Christmas is the story of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. When Mary and Joseph came to the Temple with the baby Jesus, Simeon held the child in his arms

and said that now he was ready to die for he had seen God's salvation. Artists have painted this scene, hymns have been written about it, and preachers have told the story year after year, and almost all of them depict Simeon as a very old man. Yet the Scripture never mentions his age at all. Do we assume that he must have been old in order to say to God that now he was ready to die? Would it have been surprising and even inappropriate for a younger man to make such a statement?

*Is it too morbid to look
forward to the end of
life and to the glory that
awaits the Christian?*

*Of the city to which I'm going, my
Redeemer, my Redeemer is the light;
There is no sorrow nor any sighing, nor
any sinning, nor any dying ...*

Christian, we are not home yet! The message to young and old, healthy and sick, rich and poor, is that this world is not our final home, and a true pilgrim perspective is necessary to remind us of this fact. We love our country, but our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), which we love even more, for "eye has not seen and ear has not heard ... all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

*I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger, I can
tarry, I can tarry but a night,
Do not detain me, for I am going to where
the fountains are ever flowing ...*

association retreat center

BY PASTOR DAVID JOHNSON

Joy for, and in, the journey

My family and I love trips! Some were short jaunts; these were easy to plan for. Like our trips to the ARC, where we knew everything would be provided. Not much thought or worry attached to those. You could relax, give the kids a couple books or a radio drama, and before you knew it, you were there.

Other expeditions were meandering and long, requiring much more preparation. If we wanted to have a joy-filled trip, we needed to prepare. I liked the feeling of knowing that our basic needs were covered, should our journey hit a snag or two along the way. There is something unnerving about being unprepared which robs the whole excursion of its excitement. You tend to keep looking for the next problem rather than enjoying the scenery. The joy for the journey is diminished by the lack of joy in the journey.

Yet, there are bound to be complications that are beyond the realm of reasonable preparation. Would an experienced tenter forget a ground tarp? (Yes, they might, and did.) It's in those moments that our lack becomes an opportunity to witness God's provision.

Millennia ago, the people of Israel found themselves face to face with an unexpected journey—an excursion born of a new-found freedom. This was an exciting trip, but it had come up on them rather quickly, and they had little time to prepare. However, the days and weeks leading up to their liberation contained one divine miracle after another, doing much to reduce their concern for the journey to come. Their focus was on the leaving.

However, like any large family excursion, there are bound to be problems, and soon the voices of the malcontents arose. "This isn't

very fun. I wish I was home." "Are we there yet?" "I'm thirsty." "I'm hungry!" And after a while, even God was frustrated with them. The joy for the journey had been completely drained by the lack of joy in the journey. God had just shown His marvelous power to get them out of Egypt, and the people were whining about being thirsty and hungry, as if God might not have planned for that.

In the days, weeks, and even years that followed, God would show His love and provision for Israel by sending a daily supply of manna and quail. Water would appear as needed, even the sweet water of refreshing from a rock. Yet, the people repeatedly abandoned their joy in the Lord for the weariness of worry and doubt.

Christian recording artist and teacher Michael Card wrote these words in his song *Joy in the Journey*, "There is a joy in the journey, There's a light we can love on the way; There is a wonder and wildness to life, and freedom for those who obey."

There are times in the journey of life when our near-sighted vision must be replaced by the global perspective of God who sees both the splendor of the destination and the wonder along the way. And though from time to time we may struggle to see, may we have the confidence of the blinded author, John Milton, who wrote, "[The Scriptures] amply furnished my mind and conscience with eyes, ... While God so tenderly provides for me, while He so graciously leads me by the hand and conducts me on the way, I will, since it is His pleasure, rather rejoice than repine at being blind."

Johnson, a member of the ARC Corporation, serves Disciple Lutheran Fellowship, Boyertown, Pa., and Living Faith, Boyertown.