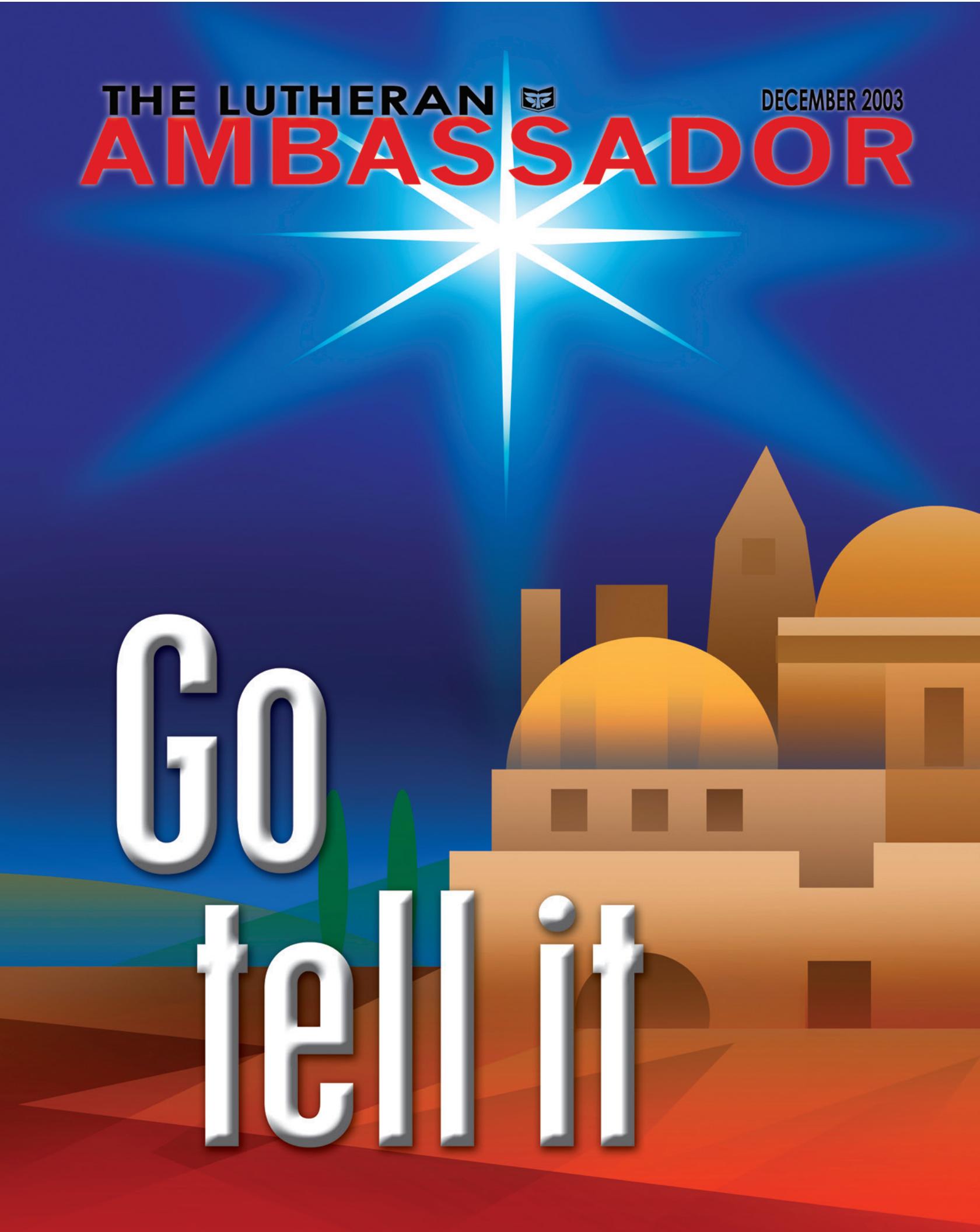


THE LUTHERAN
AMBASSADOR

DECEMBER 2003



Go
tell it

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

December 2003
Volume 41, Number 12



The magazine of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441. 763-545-5631

Editor: Rev. Craig Johnson

Assistant to the Editor: Ruth Gunderson

Editorial Board: Rev. John Mundfrom, Oryen Benrud, Rev. Jerry Moan, Rev. James L. Johnson.

CONTENTS

The light	page 4
Why the shepherds	page 6
Christmas greetings	page 8
The way, truth, life	page 10
Faith and family	page 12
Service outreach	page 14

The Lutheran Ambassador

(USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413)
is published monthly by the Association of
Free Lutheran Congregations.

For editorial inquiries and information:

The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441; 763-545-5631; fax 763-545-0079; e-mail craigj@teleport.com
ruthg@aflc.org

For subscription changes and information: *The Lutheran Ambassador*, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441. 763-545-5631 or e-mail at luthamb@aflc.org

Subscriptions rates:

\$15.00 a year, Group Rate, U. S.
\$16.00 a year, Individual, U. S.
\$18.00 a year, International

Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN and additional mailing office.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Ambassador*, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55441

Encouraging Word

King of Kings

“On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”
(Revelation 19:16).

I recently discovered through our family history that I am the 32nd generation of direct descendants of King Harold “Fairhair” Haarfagre of United Norway. I know little about this king, except that he was the first King of United Norway, reigned 872-930, and he had many wives.



**Glorianne
Swenson
Calvary Free
Lutheran,
Fergus Falls,
Minn.**

biblical genealogy.

I am proud of my Norwegian heritage and traditions (except lutefisk) that have evolved as a result of this heritage.

As my children were growing up, my advice to them often was, “Remember who you are and where you came from.” I was not referring to our Norwegian heritage, but rather the rich Christian heritage we have received through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now that I’m excited about!

We give thanks for another year of life in Christ. His love always prevails in a quiet, unassuming, yet powerful manner in our daily lives. He smiles with us when we’re content, laughs with us when we’re happy, cries with us when we

grieve, forgives us when we sin, and always — always — loves us. The King Christ reigns in heaven and earth. His term does not expire. He will never be removed from office. He is sovereign. He is almighty. He is everlasting. He will reign forever.

At Christmas we are reawakened with the joy and love that baby Jesus brought to the manger scene so many years ago. We rejoice in His birth, and bask in the glow of the star that leads us to the manger. Like the kings and shepherds, we come to worship Him. May His presence in our lives be sensed in all we are and do and hope to be every day. May the Christ Child be the candle of light that guides us through the coming year, bringing joy to our hearts, peace to our souls, and Christmas to all the seasons of our lives. As we follow the star and keep seeking the King of Kings, we will meet Him at the manger and give Him our love. He welcomes our visits. May our way be blessed. Glory to the newborn King!

*Our precious Jesus, we cradle
You in our hearts. In the stillness of
the night, in the busyness of the day,
in the fullness of the season, we
await Your coming.*

*O Lord, caress us with the spirit
of Christmas in giving and forgiving.
Let the love of Christmas over-
whelm us so that we never stop seek-
ing and sharing that love. Let Your
love be new and fresh every day of
our lives. Help us to remember who
we are, where we came from, and
where we’re going. Come, Lord
Jesus, come.*

Amen.

Our president writes

Beginning in **BETHLEHEM**

“And the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).

One of my favorite ways to learn from the Scriptures is a word study, and these familiar Christmas verses contain a powerful lesson for the congregation. The phrase “bring good news” is one word in the original: evangelize. Yes, it is correct to say that the angel was evangelizing the shepherds when he told them about the birth of Christ. Luke uniquely seems to love this word, using it numerous times throughout his Gospel and the Book of Acts, and our English Bibles usually translate it as “preach” or “preach the gospel.” Wycliff’s version, the first Bible in the English language, says, “I evangelize to you a great joy.”



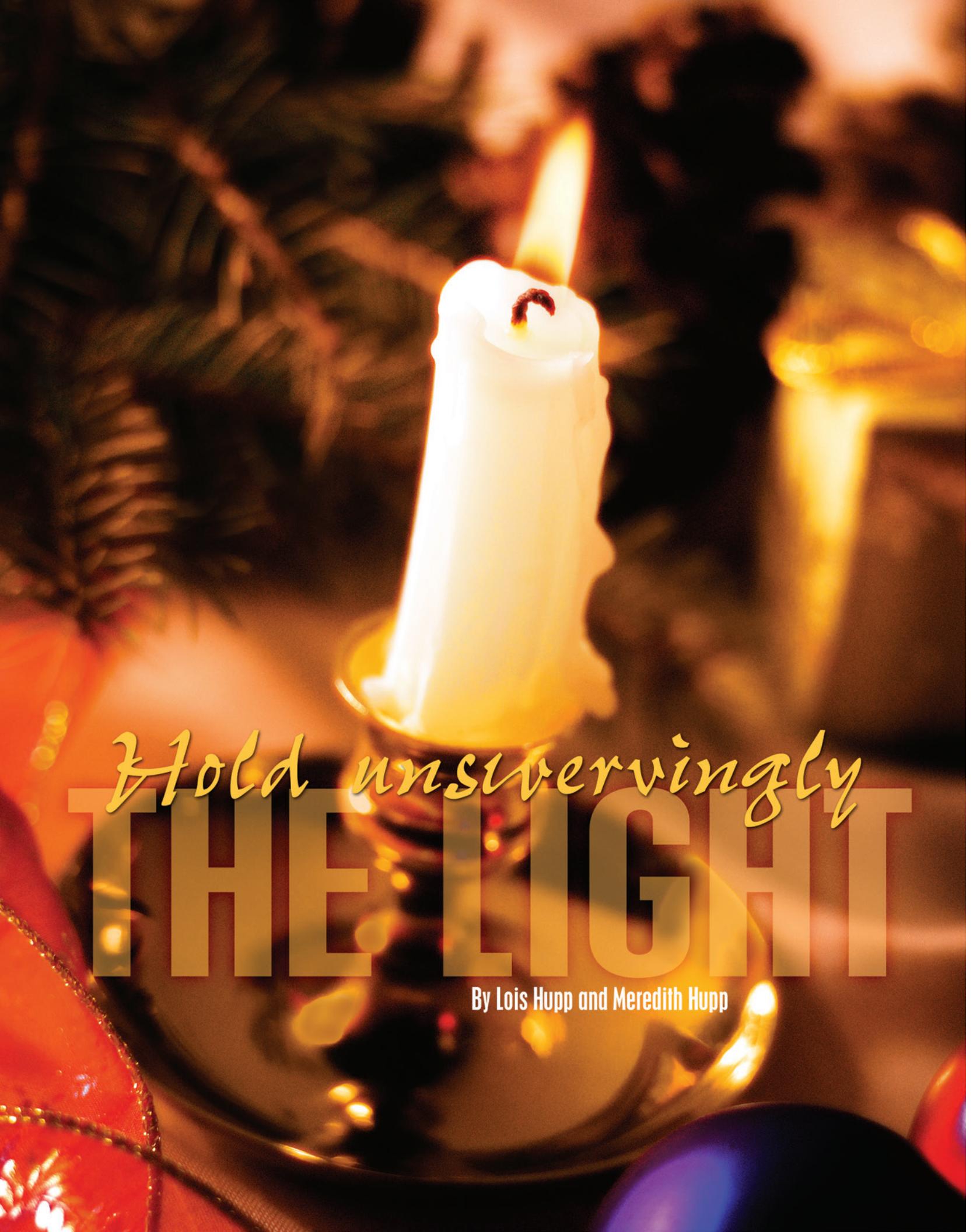
Robert Lee

New Testament evangelism begins in Bethlehem. Its basic message is the joyous good news that Christ, the Anointed, the Promised One, is born, and He is Lord. We are pointed to the cross by the use of the word “Savior,” which speaks of the enormity of our sin that He bore on Calvary. This good news is firmly anchored in space and time, and the angel points us to the place, “the city of David.” It is “for all the people.” It is “for you.”

We are told by some who study the trends of our times that Christmas may be the greatest evangelism opportunity of the year for the congregation, especially the Christmas Eve services. Some of us may have an open door to tell the good news at family gatherings, as unchurched and unsaved relatives provide a fertile mission field for sowing the gospel seed. I think of grandparents who tell of teaching the Christmas story to little ones who never hear it at home or in Sunday school.

Let the angel be our guide as we joyously evangelize, beginning in Bethlehem. Let the Savior, the Christ, the Lord, be the heart of our good news. Keep it simple, so that the little ones may know that He was born for them, too, yet recognizing that great minds also will bow before the profound simplicity of the message of the newborn Child.

Best wishes to you all during this Christmas season for a holiday overflowing with good news and great joy!



Hold unswervingly
THE LIGHT

By Lois Hupp and Meredith Hupp

Eyes widen, tiny fingers start to stretch, and then an open hand extends outward. On the small face a determined expression appears telling of the plan to touch it, to grab for it. And so, the forearm quickly extends, and without hesitation the desire appears ... *let me hold it!*

The first time this reach came from beneath the blankets, it was the wee hand of the baby tucked in your arms. The next year, the surge of energy shot from the busy fingers of the small child on your lap. Another year passed, and the curiosity-filled hands belonged to the little body sitting next to you in the pew. Again the calendar turned, the fingerprints were larger and the yearning increased ... *let me hold it!*

You have experienced it. Over and over the annual opportunity arrives and the "glimmer" once again attracts the eager hands of God's little children. Their curious minds speak through their hands as they reach out saying ... *let me hold it!*

It takes years before the small, developing hands are allowed to hold and examine the Christmas Eve candle. We guard it, carefully holding it until the time when, with assistance, it can be safely held by small, capable fingers. Then finally their small hands are surrounded by ours. Gently we add security and stability, and actually ... *let them hold it!* The candle glow at the Christmas Eve service is passed to another generation. As told in Luke 2:9, the glory of the Lord shines around them, the "good news of great joy" has arrived. The burning candle symbolizes Jesus as "the light" for a dark world.

That's what Christian parents do. We hold the light of the world, Jesus, for our children to see. We hold Him up so that He can radiate before them. We watch His spirit attract them and wait for their response. The privilege is ours! We hold before them the "one light" that changes, sustains and claims mankind for eternity.

Numbered are our opportunities and seasons. What we take time to hold before our children, what we help them support and sustain in their hearts and hands determines what they will reach for, and tightly grasp tomorrow. As parents, we must give relevance to the passed candle. The "good news" of the manger needs application.

After the sentimental candlelight service, our children must be surrounded with materials about the Jesus of Christmas. They must see and hear moral choices highlighting the decisions made at home. It's critical that mom's glow on Christmas Eve infiltrate plans and schedules that give priority to church activities on Wednesday evenings and Sundays. Dad's appointments must include prayer and Bible studies at the table and bedside. The Christmas glow has to illuminate the use of God's Word as the source of wisdom for needed answers.

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). The candle we pass inflames the need for accountability before the "light of the world" and our children. We are called to carefully and purposefully pass the Christmas Eve candle so that application of "His light" might cause our precious children to notice, watch, reach out and say ... *let me hold it!*

This Christmas, as a family, might you claim ... Psalm 34 "Glorify the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together."

— *By Lois Hupp*



Tradition in my family, after the Christmas Eve candlelight service, includes returning home to sugar cookies and hot cocoa with peppermint flavoring. Mmmm ... definitely the smell of Christmas! The evening brings with it the delightful smells of my favorite treats, but most importantly, joy, love and family.

During the season of pine scents, juicy turkeys cooking and cookies baking, God's people are called to be the fragrance of Christ. "... Through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are now perishing" (II Corinthians 2: 14-15).

I repeat, "through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him." As His precious creation, and the aroma of Christ in this world, I have the privilege of representing His presence. My actions and attitudes are to offer a strong fragrance of my Lord, Jesus Christ. That's a responsibility with eternal blessings.

Hot cocoa with peppermint flavoring should not be reserved for Christmas Eve. It should be served everyday! Our vibrancy for Christ should be displayed everyday also. With His Spirit alive in us, might the world sense and desire His peace, joy, hope and love in 2004.

— *By Meredith Hupp*



Lois and Meredith Hupp, mother and daughter, are members of Faith Lutheran, Ottawa, Ill. They are currently compiling a book about encouraging a daughter and sister with an intellectual disability.

WHY

Ilove the Gospel of Luke. Having been a research engineer and professor, I identify with Luke's investigative approach in his search for the truth. Luke 2:8-20 is a record of Luke's research according to what he said in 1:3, "... it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you ..."

In his account, Luke wrote that the Christmas angel appeared to shepherds. The angel appeared to Mary and Joseph, and to Zacharias, too. Angels had not appeared or talked to anyone for hundreds of years, as far as we know. It is easy to understand why the angel came to Mary and Joseph. But to shepherds? As a consequence, the shepherds may have said to themselves, "Are we seeing things? What is this?"

Verse nine says they were frightened, terribly frightened, i.e. scared out of their wits. So why appear to the shepherds? Why not to the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees? Ever think about that?

At the time of the appearance, the shepherds were working. After the angel's announcement they left their job and hurried to Bethlehem. Would you leave your job in the middle of your workday (night)? After all, what would the boss say? Would a shepherd leave his sheep as prey to the wolves? Would a night watchman leave his watch? Not in Rome. The punishment was death if a Roman soldier fell asleep on his watch. Leave the watch? Not on your life! Yet, the shepherds left the sheep to the wolves. Ever think about that?

The shepherds hurried off to Bethlehem. Why Bethlehem? Well, it was (and still is) a sheepherder's town. Here, a thousand years earlier, David had tended sheep. In fact, Bethlehem was called "the city of David."

God planned to send His Son into the world. If Jesus is to be a King, why not come to Jerusalem? There is a temple there. Why not to Rome? There is a King's palace there. Ever think about that?

God's Son was born in a manger. Why? If you were God, would you want your royal son to be born in a manger in a stable? And He was born in the first century AD. Why not the 20th or 21st century? Why not have the Baby born in a modern hospital with expert care? Why back then in a stable? Today it would be like being born in the parking lot of a motel.

God's Son came as a baby. Why not come into the world as a man, in the prime of His life? Say 20 years old? Why come as a baby? And He was born of poor parents. Why not of rich parents? Why not in a King's household?

There are a lot of questions about Christmas, the greatest event of history, the coming of Immanuel! But why did He come in this way?

Do you know the greatest "why" of all? The shepherds did not ask why. They went straight to Bethlehem. They made haste. I would have liked to have been there, wouldn't you? It is 2 or 3 a.m. The innkeeper is aroused, again. Mary and Joseph had already awakened him earlier. There is the sound of people running in the streets. What is going on out there? Sometime later, there is the sound of camels and three kings or more are coming. Wow! When I get to heaven I am going to ask God for a replay, aren't you?

Shepherds and Kings came to a birth. Why? At a funeral, yes, many come. But to a birth? Only Daddy and Mommy today may be allowed in the delivery room. Years ago, only the doctor and the nurses were allowed in there.

Who comes to a birth? Certainly not some strangers, smelly shepherds and kings from an unknown country. Yet God invites shepherds and kings to a birth. Why particularly the shepherds?

The answers:

The shepherds were the only ones who could understand. (See Leviticus 3:6-8.) For centuries, shepherds had watched their lambs being slaughtered on the altars of God for a sin offering. They had to be perfect little lambs, baby sheep. Those lambs the shepherds had cared for. The best of lambs under their care had to be given up. Sin and the need for a sacrifice for sin were real to the shepherds.

Evidently the shepherds had heard the words of Abraham. Every time the shepherds went to the temple, saw their lambs slain on the altar and heard the Scripture read, I imagine they paid very close attention to any Scripture about sheep, especially Genesis 22:8, "God will provide for Himself the Lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So when the angel said, "I bring you good news of great joy ... A Savior is born for you," the shepherds evidently concluded, "We don't have to sacrifice our lambs anymore." Good news! Great joy! "Let us make haste and go straight to Bethlehem."

They made haste. They left their jobs. They left their watch. They left their sheep at the mercy of the wolves. They went to see God's lamb for themselves. They did not have to be persuaded. They went with haste.

God's lamb was born at last. In a manger? Yes. Where else would you expect a lamb to be born? They went to see. Would God's lamb be perfect? This was the question. God's law required a perfect lamb for the sacrifice. I John 3:5, "And you know He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin." He is perfect! Praise the Lord! Good news! Great joy!

A manger? Bethlehem? A shepherd's town? The shepherds understood. Do you?

The afterglow:

It was night. As they left the stable, they knocked on doors and woke up the innkeeper, again, and the whole town. "Good news! Great joy! How can you sleep? God's Lamb has been born!"

The shepherds understood and spread the good news. Do you?



*Pastor Gerdeen serves Immanuel Lutheran,
Springfield, Mo.*

Christmas greetings

By Clara Gunderson

We were sitting around the dinner table, enjoying some dessert and coffee.

“Now,” I thought to myself, “would be a good time to get some feedback to my dilemma about sending out Christmas cards.” It was a dilemma because I was becoming so dissatisfied with how we handled it ... the number sent, the cost involved, what kind was appropriate.

“Jenny,” I said, “why do you send out Christmas cards?”

After looking thoughtful for a few moments, she answered, “Because.” Then she went on, “Because it’s part of Christmas, isn’t it?”

“How about the rest of you?” I asked. “Is it a problem for you? How do you handle it? Why do you do it?”

“I got started on it years ago,” offered Joan, “and now I find it hard to stop, or even cut back.”

“But,” interrupted Chris, “it’s a good way to keep in touch ... I like to send up-to-date pictures of the kids ...”

Chris was interrupted by Steve, who admitted he left the whole thing up to Karen, his wife.

Other questions were asked: Do they always have to be “religious,” or are whimsical ones not fun to send also? Do you send to people you see regular-

ly? Do you send to people who don't send to you? Is a simple card better than a letter? Or, on the other hand, does a letter serve the purpose better?

We went back and forth on that last question for awhile until Karen told us that one of her biggest problems is whether to send a religious Christmas card to friends of theirs who are Jewish and don't celebrate the birth of Jesus. "I don't want to offend them," she said, "but can't it be a way to share God's Word with them?"

Others chimed in on this one, agreeing that it is something they, too, have wondered about, usually erring on the side of caution rather than taking the chance of being offensive. There are cards available to send to those celebrating the Jewish holiday, Hanukkah, but, of course, that isn't the same if your goal is to share Jesus' love.

That brought us back to my original question: What, exactly, is our purpose in sending Christmas greetings?

Several ideas were tossed out, but the whole thing seemed to come down to the desire to keep in touch and that of wishing the recipient well. With that our talk went on to other things.

When the evening was over and our friends had left for their homes, I set about cleaning up, putting the last dishes into the dishwasher, all the while mulling over our talk about Christmas greetings.

Later, as I snuggled up under the covers, the thought came to me, "Really, Clara, this is a question of personal preference, isn't it? What do you and Dick want your greetings to accomplish? What does your dissatisfaction come from?" I was getting sleepy, and didn't stay awake long enough to think it through.

That my mind was full of this was evident the next morning as I awoke and my dream flashed before me — a dream that spelled out my problem. I was shopping in a crowded discount store when I saw a display of Christmas cards, with a sign indicating their special price: \$1.97 for 50 cards. "Great!" I exclaimed out loud, as I quickly grabbed a couple boxes without more than a cursory glance to see that they were not "frivolous."

I chuckled to myself as I recalled my dream, then I began thinking seriously about it. Though the sale price was exceedingly low, it wasn't the cost I dwelt on. After all, everyone has their limit of what dollars they can put into something like this. And besides, I, too, love a bargain. No, it wasn't the price of the cards; it was how I grabbed them before they could be snatched away by someone else, how I didn't even bother to read the sentiment inside. I thought of how I love going to my mailbox and finding a personal note or letter. The junk mail goes into the recycle bin, the bills into a drawer, the magazines get put on the coffee table for further reading, but the letters

— for the letters I heat up my coffee, find my rocker and I'm one with the sender!

So, my first consideration is for our cards to be personal with, "Dear ...," and ending with, "Lovingly, Clara and Dick." I can do that on a card bought for \$3 or one out of a box of 50 for \$1.97! I want it to be a thoughtful act, not thoughtlessly written and quickly mailed.

It felt good to have established that one purpose. But, I thought, I can send a personal note any time of the year. At Christmas time there needs to be more to it. Just thinking of that one word — Christmas — made it as clear as can be: The Christmas message, the birth of Jesus, must be my main purpose. Thinking about our conversation of the night before, the question about sending greetings or not with the message of Jesus to non-believing friends, whether they are Jewish, Arab, Buddhist or what have you, seems to be answered for me.

The prophet Isaiah may have sent the first Christmas greeting. It's beautifully written in chapter nine of his book. Listen as he proclaims God's message to all ethnic groups:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us: And the government will rest on His shoulders; And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

John wrote a letter to "his children," telling them of the need to express what he had seen and heard, what he had handled concerning the "Word of Life" — Jesus. He proclaimed the good news that "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:1.5).

Each December, as the 25th day draws closer, I think of the anticipation in God's heart as the "fullness of time" came closer, when Jesus would be born. How full His heart must have been! Didn't it beat faster? Were there tears in His eyes when His Son was lying in Mary's arms?

Yes, God had a purpose in sending His message through Isaiah, and through John: His message of love, hope, peace, comfort, and salvation, all through Jesus, His Son. That's what I want our Christmas greetings to reflect.



Gunderson is a member of Sunnyside Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

LIFE

Bringing a child to Christ in baptism is the beginning. Teaching a child to love Jesus and to grow in Him will water this seed and encourage growth. This time of year, we have an opportunity to not only help children grow, but to perhaps plant a seed and encourage growth in friends and members of our congregations. Christmas should be a time to grow in the Way, Truth, and Life. What better way then through our children and youths at a Sunday school Christmas program.

During our church year we celebrate Christmas, Palm Sunday, Easter and others. Many of these events have become a commercialized observance — a time of year to add to our income, or impress people with our giving by thinking of only material things; this is especially evident at Christmas time.

How can our Sunday school Christmas program help us to ponder something different this time of year? There must be something more than the tinsel and glitter! Something more than finding the perfect gift or becoming so busy we miss the true meaning of the season.

Jesus is the way

A Christmas program that focuses on the true meaning of Christmas will nurture the seeds that have been planted in the hearts of children and adults alike. Jesus said, “I am the way.” The Christmas season offers a great opportunity to teach this “way.” The spoken Word, along with the beautiful hymns and carols, present the true meaning of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Families often get involved with each other at Christmas, even if at no other time of the year. Relatives and friends are invited to our churches for programs. This is an opportunity to reach the lives of believers and non-believers with the true meaning of this way — the gospel of Christ. Some may have never heard the story before. Some may have heard it many times, but have not really listened. Pray for a soft heart for those who would hear the message of the children’s program. Pray that the message will become personal to all who are there to hear.

Luke 2:10-12: “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’”

Martin Luther preached in a Christmas Day sermon: “He does not simply say, Christ is born, but to you he is born, neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to you I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to all the people.”

The message is simple. There is only one way — Jesus.

Jesus is the truth

Rushing through the Christmas story, and having some other theme may not leave time for the focus to be on the main truth of the season. The simple retelling of the story of Jesus’ birth should not be the afterthought in our programs. The truth of the gospel — revealed to us through Scripture — is what is most important.

Luther also states: “This gospel is so clear that it requires very little explanation, but it should be well considered and taken deeply to heart; and no one will receive more benefit from it than those who, with a calm, quiet heart, banish everything else from their mind, and diligently look into it.”

God’s truth does not need to be sensationalized. It is a miraculous story from the start. Anything we would add could not match the truth of the Savior’s birth.

Jesus is the life

What gives us life? JESUS! As we tell the story — simply — from the Scripture, those who hear will gain life. What a great thought! A Christmas program that brings life is not about us — not about the pretty dresses the girls wear or what perfect scenery we can prepare — the program is about Jesus and only Him.

What an opportunity to use this as an evangelism tool in our churches. As we tell the story, we can remind the congregation that the Child did not remain in the manger. He fulfilled prophecy and came to earth as a man to eventually die on the cross for the sins of the world. “Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Little children CAN tell the story. They can let adults know that Jesus loves them. The Holy Spirit uses His Word to reach the lost. As we speak and sing His Word, lives will be reached for Jesus. Let’s not let our own ideas get in the way.

Let’s keep focused this year on the way, the truth and the life — Jesus.



“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

~ John 14:6 ~

Benrud lives in Goodhue, Minn. Her daughter, Strand, lives in Kenyon, Minn.

FAITH &

By Pastor Kevin Olson



FAMILY

“Mommy, why do Grandpa and Grandma Johnson have Jesus decorations at Christmas?”

“Because, Grandpa and Grandma Johnson love Jesus, and those decorations remind them of the reason for Christmas.”

“Why do Grandpa and Grandma Smith only have lights and Santa decorations? Don’t they love Jesus?”

“Well, that is a good question. Maybe you could ask them.”

Families! You do not get to pick the one you are born into. You do not have any control over their actions, moral or immoral. You do not get to decide what they will believe. You can only choose your attitude toward them, your prayers for them, and how you share your faith with them.

In our family we have members who cover almost every extreme of lifestyle. We have the whole spectrum of political views, and the same diversity regarding the topic of faith. So how can we have a peaceful family gathering, conversation about any topic, or share the faith that we treasure especially at those special seasons? We have taken much of our example from Christ and His interaction with people.

Jesus talked to and interacted with the whole spectrum of society, just as we do. Yet His approach was inviting and appealing without being argumentative or casual regarding sin. He used two simple tools that any of us can use. Though they are simple, they have the same life-changing power now as they did when Jesus used them.

First, consider how **Jesus told stories**. He took the story of a family member who lived a wild lifestyle to communicate how much the Father loves us in the parable of the prodigal son. He took the story of a stubborn but obedient son and a compliant but disobedient son to tell them about the kingdom of heaven. He told a story about an old widow to teach about God’s justice.

Family gatherings and stories naturally go together. Everyone tells stories about what has been going on in their lives, problems that they are facing, or about another relative. Why couldn’t those same stories be used to talk about our relationship with the Lord? It just means adding to the end of the story the lesson the Lord is teaching you through that experience, problem, or

person. It will cause you to think about God’s work in your life just as much as it does them as they consider how everyday life has a greater purpose to it.

Second, consider how **Jesus asked questions**. He asked the Pharisees, “What do you think?” regarding a parable He was telling them. He asked an expert in the law, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” regarding eternal life. He asked others, “Which of these three was a neighbor?” “What is the kingdom of heaven like?” “Did not anyone accuse you?”

Conversation in family gatherings can be awkward and sometimes even impossible. But if you start asking questions about a topic the other person is interested in, the dialog will flow easily. The conversation can go from general questions about a topic to specific questions regarding their experience, their opinion or their expertise. It is just one more step to ask questions that have a spiritual nature or depth to them.

Watching football can go from a spectator sport to a participation sport when commercial times are used to ask questions. Why do you like a certain team? What are your plans for this year? What are your goals for life? What if you were taken out of the game early? Any area of conversation can go from a general conversation to personal opinions, values, priorities, and beliefs.

In my wife’s family it is a tradition that the in-laws wash the dishes. For me, it is the only time that I can have a one-on-one conversation with my sister-in-law. It is also a great chance to ask her questions about life.

My stepfather went for a walk one afternoon with his brother-in-law. He was asked two questions, “If you were to die tonight, do you know for sure that you would go to heaven?” and the second, “If God would ask you why He should let you into his heaven, what would you say?” He came back from that walk trusting in Jesus for those two answers.

You could use decorations to share your faith at family gatherings, but try the two simple tools that Jesus used. Ask Him to give you stories with personal applications and ask Him to give you questions that will add purpose, meaning and depth to your conversations.



Pastor Kevin Olson is director of AFLC Youth Ministries and a member of Faith Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn.

OUTREACH

Christmas is a great time to reach out with the gospel message to the spiritually lost in your community. Jesus tells us that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus was born into this world to bring the lost to God. A Christmas service in a Bible-believing church is one of the few places where lost people can still hear the complete story of salvation. But we need to prepare the ground if the seed is to grow.

Pray

I Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” The most important part of **anything** we do in the church is prayer. Ask God to show you how he wants you to reach out to the lost.

I urge you to begin praying, along with your deacons or elders, in January, asking God what He wants you to do for the next Christmas service! Please don’t wait until November 15 to begin to pray. Make sure you give the Holy Spirit “gleaning time” through the year to show you ideas. Extended preparation is essential if there is to be a great harvest of souls in His Kingdom.

Accurate, simple

The simple, profound message of Christmas is so unique and powerful that it speaks for itself. Our job is to make sure that we present it plainly, so that the

lost can clearly hear God’s invitation to them.

Too often when congregations think about reaching the unchurched, they assume that it’s necessary to change the message. This is wrong. What we need to do is to **keep the message simple**. When a lost person comes to church, he or she shouldn’t have to wade through a river of extras and distractions — things we may have added in the hope of attracting people — to simply see Jesus.

Simplicity is especially important when it comes to the presentation of Scripture. We should not complicate the message with ornate language or elaborate settings that might distract from the simplicity of the Word read directly from the page. All that we do ought to direct people’s attention to Christ, as He is revealed in the Bible.

Music needs to be understandable and audible. Often older people (I speak from experience) have lost some hearing. Many times a great song with a fine message is lost because the words cannot be clearly heard.

When I emphasize simplicity, I’m not ruling out excellent music or a beautiful candlelight service. The key is to try to see through the eyes of the unchurched visitor. If your service involves audience participation, make sure the bulletin or program includes all the words to the songs, and explains clearly what to do, when to do it, and what is coming next. Nothing detracts from the message of the service like a panicky sense that “everyone else knows what to do, and they’re all staring at me because I’m making mistakes.”

Time-sensitive

Schedule your service at a time of day when people do not have to shift their entire schedules to attend. Many people are willing to try something new (like going to church) at Christmas. Don't put barriers in their way. If you want to have a candle-light service, it will need to be after dark (unless you have a way to shut the light out of your sanctuary). The key to being time-sensitive is to make sure that your own members are comfortable with the scheduled time. If they are, they will be more likely to bring along lost loved ones and friends.

Be sold out

Your members will not bring the lost to the service unless they are well informed and excited about the outreach opportunity the Christmas service provides. Let them know months in advance that your Christmas service will be an outreach event. Encourage them to pray for guidance as to whom they should bring. Assure them that everyone who attends will have a chance to hear the whole gospel of Christ, and to understand what it means for them.

Involve everyone

Lay people should be involved at every level. Bring them in on the planning, and make sure they are well informed about everything that will happen.

Have lay people read Scripture and provide special music, etc.

Prayerfully consider this year's Christmas service, and ask your people for ideas on how it could be made more evangelistic and visitor-friendly.

Traditionally, Christmas has been a time set aside for family. Many people who would not consider darkening a church door any other day will come along with family members to a special Christmas service and will listen with open hearts. The secret is to keep Christ the focus. Prayer must be the center of any outreach effort. Through focused prayer over an adequate time, you can prepare an exciting service that will celebrate the birth of Christ.

Don't wait till the last minute. Systematic and prayerful preparation, along with active lay participation, can make your church's Christmas service into an open door to eternal life for your neighbors and visitors. Remember Isaiah 55:11, "So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."



Rasmussen, director of AFLC Evangelism, is a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn.

Stewardship Relationships

Christmas and New Year's celebrations are soon upon us. These holidays involve many family gatherings. Over the past several decades we have seen a steady decline in family values, as well as an outright attack on the "Christian Family." The world's desire is that we take our eyes off of the family and seek after our own personal needs. God's Word has a beautiful plan for our relationships within the basic family.

Stewardship with Jesus

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the foundational element for every person. Putting Jesus first in all we do means putting aside and even putting to death our own wishes. The Apostle Paul spoke of this

relationship in a clear and vivid word picture. "I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Daily, we need to die to ourselves and live for Jesus. This is what it means to be under the lordship of Jesus Christ. You can't earn salvation by doing good things. Jesus Christ has paid the full price for your sins. Confess them to Him. If you have not

already asked Christ to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior, do it today. By God's grace alone we can give up control of our lives and live for Him. With Christ at work in our lives we can face any family difficulty. Maybe you are in what seems to be an impossible family problem. You can see no solution to or relief from the pain you are experiencing. Jesus is the answer. The problem may not change, but by God's grace, you can.

Stewardship in marriage

As the Israelites wandered in the wilderness prior to entering the promise land, God gave them a list of 10 short commands to follow. In the sixth commandment God instructed husbands and wives to love each other by saying, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Deuteronomy 5:18). In *Luther's Small Catechism* we read an explanation of the sixth commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed, and that husband and wife love and honor each other." This is God's plan for a happy union between a man and wife: respect, love, honor and serve each other. What a foreign concept today.

Ephesians 5 speaks of the kind of relationship we

need to have with others and with Christ. Ephesians 5:21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Submission, simply stated, means to yield to governance or authority, to give up personal ownership. We submit to one another because we love Jesus. We submit to one another to revere, respect, and love Christ in our home.

Christian husbands and wives are Christ's example of love in their homes. Words and actions at home speak volumes for future generations. Love your spouse with the idea of not getting anything in return. Place no conditions on your love.

Is there a battle going on in your home? Are you afraid of saying something that is going to irritate your partner? You are not alone. All marriages enter this battle zone from time to time. You may be asking, "What can I do?" "What difference can I make now?" Remember the example of Jesus' love for you. "For if, even when we were enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life" (Romans 5:10). Be an example of Christ's love to your spouse. You may have a spouse who does not love Jesus. You may feel that you are the only one giving in the relationship. Don't give up! Love your mate as if Jesus loved them through you.

Take time for each other. Our lives are so busy; the list could go on and on. Read a book together. Go for a walk together. Sit by the fireplace together. Talk and listen to each other daily. Seek out superhuman help in Christ. I love how Elisabeth Elliot used to close her daily radio broadcast: "Beloved, You are loved with an everlasting love and underneath are the arms of God" (a reference from Deuteronomy 33:27).

Pastor Antal is chairman of the Stewardship Board.



Mark Antal
Park River,
N.D.



THE CHILD COMES TO US

“All things have changed for us since the child came,” said the young and happy father. “Now what happens has become entirely different with respect to what is important or not. Now we have to always think first about what is best for the child.”

That is also true when the Child of Bethlehem comes to us. That Child also changes all things. The Child Jesus makes all things different than they were before.

There are three things that happen in our homes when a little baby is born. First, the baby makes a new use of time necessary; in the second place, it raises the tone of conversation; and thirdly, it gives us new understanding of values.

THE CHILD MAKES A NEW USE OF TIME NECESSARY

The old plan no longer applies when the baby comes. Now the baby must come first. Nothing must come in the way of the baby’s bath, and that he eats and sleeps at the right time. Favorite radio programs (and TV?) must be set aside, socializing must be cancelled and we must subjugate our personal desires. No proper mother will let her own

egotistical wishes stand in the way of her crying little baby.

Christ also changes our plan. Now and then Christians can push Christ’s program to the side and let the church’s work wait. In our busy time, Christian leaders are tempted to excuse themselves with the popular alibis: “I don’t have time to read in the Bible today” or “I am way too busy to be able to pray about anything special this week.” Such excuses are foolish and ridiculous in

the presence of the person they refer to — the Baby in Bethlehem. Shall we not have time for Him — the Child Jesus? Certainly I must have time for Him. My time must profit through thoughts about Him. He changes my plan. A little baby always does that, but this little Child above all others.

WRITTEN BY PASTOR OSCAR C. HANSON FROM “JULEBOKEN” TRANSLATED FROM NORWEGIAN BY PASTOR RAYNARD HUGLEN, NEWFOLDEN, MINN.

Continued on page 18

From page 17

THE BABY RAISES THE TONE OF CONVERSATION

It is difficult to be angry with a baby. Impatience in no way belongs in the presence of a little baby. Even the most hard-boiled will melt before a chubby baby. In one way or another, it doesn't work to be unpleasant and petty in such a situation.

The Child Jesus raises the tone of conversation so that there comes to be a new atmosphere between husband and wife, new tenderness and love between sisters and brothers. Careless talk, which judges or defames my neighbor, has no place when the Child of Bethlehem is present. Tension, fear and anxiety do not belong with the Baby in the manger. The angels, shepherds, stars and open heavens raise the tone to new peace and quietness. A little baby always raises the tone, but the Child of Bethlehem does so more than any other!

THE BABY GIVES US NEW UNDERSTANDING OF VALUES

Values change when we have to deal with a little baby. Can you understand a father who complains that his little baby costs him all too much? Something would be completely wrong if a young mother is annoyed because her little son took too much of

her time, attention and exertion. On the contrary, if the baby gets sick the mother will stay awake night after night if it is necessary. Other things don't mean much in reality. The baby must come first.

So it is also with the Child of Bethlehem. He deserves everything and asks everything. These small hands would one day be nailed to a cross. The little head must bear a crown of thorns. The tiny, little body was cut with a sharp spear and His was the blood that ran from the cross for your and my sins. He establishes what is truly of value, for nothing else really means anything. If I miss the Baby in the manger, I miss everything – heaven, life and eternity. He must have my all because He gave His all for me!

Has this Baby in Bethlehem come into your home? Has the Child Jesus come into your heart? When He does that, then other things change themselves!



The late Oscar C. Hanson was president of the Lutheran Bible Institute, Minneapolis, an evangelist and pastor of the American Lutheran Church in Oslo, Norway: 1958-1960.

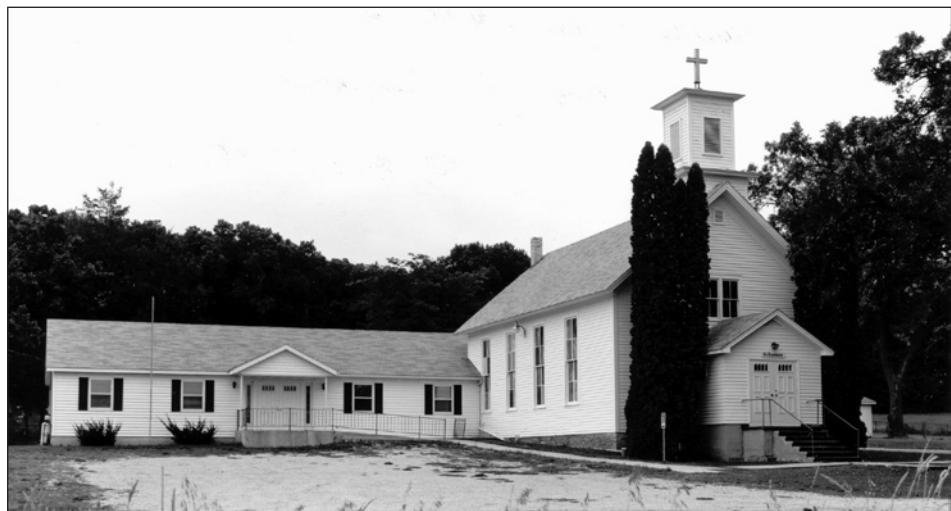
Historic church destroyed by lightning storm

Little was left of Bethany Lutheran, Brodhead, Wis., after it was struck by lightning Oct. 24. The resulting fire destroyed the building, but congregational members are ready to rebuild.

"Not building again was never discussed," said Cal Schaver, lay pastor. "I told the congregation [on Oct. 26] that we don't even want to try to replace it. We've got to go forward."

The sanctuary, built in 1871, was completely gutted, while the roof and some walls were burned at adjoining offices and Sunday school rooms.

For now, members are meeting in a local funeral home chapel. According to Schaver, the congregation has had contact from eight local congregations offering meeting space. "It's



just been mind-boggling," he said, recalling incidences where locals have donated \$100 bills to rebuild. A church in Wausau, Wis., has already donated an organ. Schaver said the congregation will likely begin meeting in a United Church of Christ building soon.

Originally named West Luther Valley, the church was renamed in 1960 after separating from East

Luther Valley. The historic church contained oil lanterns and other furnishings dating back to 1846. According to Schaver, the lanterns were lit twice a year during the Christmas holiday.

The congregation had recently updated the sound system, resided and insulated the building, installed new front steps, and placed dividers in the Sunday school rooms.



Forty-two new members were accepted Oct. 26 at Our Saviour's Lutheran, Thief River Falls, Minn. The new members include Jeff, Melody, Dana, Michael, Daniel, Levi, Jon and Caleb Dyrud; Galen, Shelby, Kyle and Donza Erickson; Garner and Julie Erickson; Mark, Kristi, Jacob, Matthew and Joshua Hutmacher; Bryce, Nicole and Brevyn Lingen; Don and Bonnie Litstrom; Jerome and Marlene Lund; Eunice Novak; Ellsworth and Clarice Senum; Kevin, Heidi, Jeffrey, Mary, Linnea, Lisa, Andrew and Annika Senum; Luverne and Judy Sorter; Eldon and Corrine Swenson; and Arlene Johanning.

ABC Bible verses

A continuation from the November issue of the Ambassador

N “No good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).

O “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

P “Pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17).

Q “Quench not the Spirit” (I Thessalonians 5:19).

R “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

S “Sing to the Lord, bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day” (Psalm 96:2).

T “Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee” (Psalm 119:11).

U “Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Psalm 25:1).

V “‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

W “When I am afraid I will trust in you” (Psalm 56:3).

X “Examine me, O Lord, and try me: test my heart and my mind” (II Corinthians 13:5).

Y “Yield not to temptation” (Matthew 26:4).

Z “... zealous for all good works” (Acts 21:20).

Pastor David Skordahl began serving as interim pastor at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fosston, Minn., in October. Skordahl recently retired as pastor at the Dalton, Minn., parish of Kvam Free Lutheran and Zion-Sarpsborg Lutheran.

Good Shepherd Lutheran, Palmdale, Calif., served by Pastor J. Christian Andrews, is currently in transition. The church building has been sold by Home Missions to an Hispanic congregation. However, services will still be held in the building while members of Good Shepherd prayerfully ponder the church's future.

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee accepted a resolution to affiliate with the AFLC from **Living Hope Lutheran**, St. Michael, Minn. The congregation was founded in 2002 when members of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn., began a church plant.

Pastor Tom Brock, Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, was accepted on the regular clergy roster of the AFLC after two years on the fellowship roster.

Pastor Anthony Striffler, Denver, was accepted on the AFLC fellowship roster. He is the chaplain of the Exempla Colorado Lutheran Home, Arvada, Colo.

Pastor Michael Crowell, Arlington, Wash., has resigned from the Home Missions Board.

Pastor Rick Long, Atonement Free Lutheran, Arlington, Wash., has agreed to complete his term, which ends in 2006.

An organizational meeting of the **Sverdrup Society** will be from noon to 5 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Radisson Hotel in Fargo, N.D. The purpose of the society will be to promote understanding of Georg Sverdrup's vision of the New Testament congregation and encourage understanding and increased translations of his work. For more information contact Loiell Dyrud at 218-681-6964 or lod@wiktel.com.

World Missions India

There are 30 AFLC pastors in India. Many of these pastors have little or no formal theological training and are often just laymen who have shown spiritual leadership in their congregation and have taken on the responsibility of shepherding their church.

It is the desire of the AFLC World Missions Department to provide these men with the training that they need to reach souls for Christ. Pastoral seminars are held on a yearly basis. This winter, three AFLC pastors are traveling to India to teach at these seminars from Jan. 28 through Feb. 12.

Pastor Craig Johnson, Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., will be teaching on "Free and Living Congregations."

Pastor Doug Wagley, New Vision Free Lutheran, Spokane, Wash., will be teaching on "The Life and Ministry of Paul."

Pastor David Wold, Christ the King Lutheran, Pipestone, Minn., will be teaching "Hermeneutics."

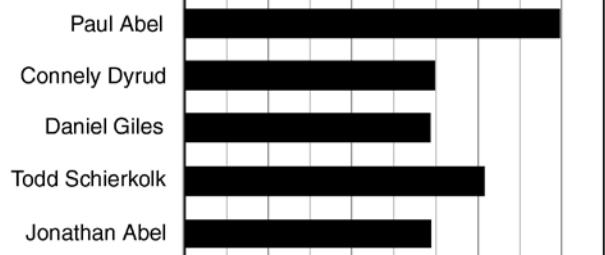
Each pastor is in charge of his own fundraising and will need to raise approximately \$2,000 for this endeavor.

For more information contact World Missions at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Or call (763) 545-5631.



Personal support units: January-October

Annual units needed: 100 Goal: 83 units



10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110

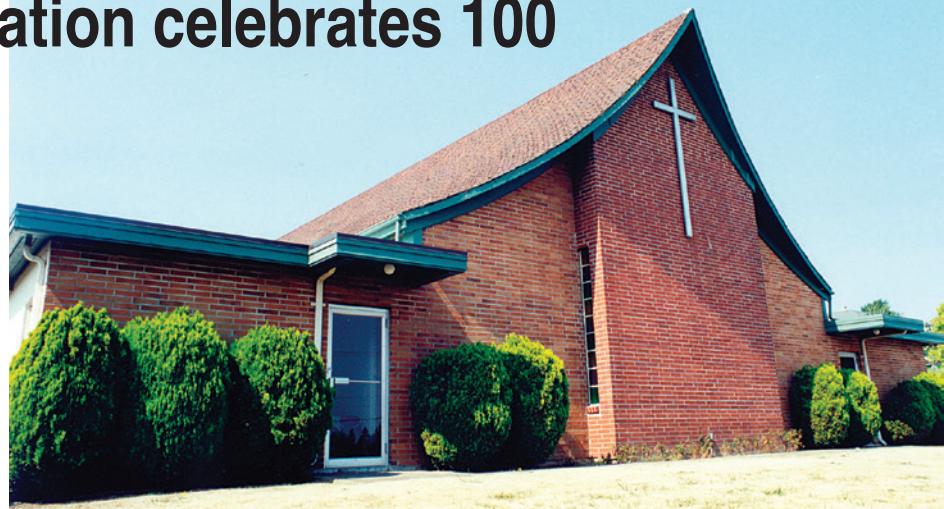
1 unit = \$50 per month or \$600 per year

Ferndale congregation celebrates 100

Members of Triumph Lutheran, Ferndale, Wash., celebrated the congregation's centennial year on Oct. 26 with a special afternoon program.

Triumph Lutheran formed in 1967 when two congregations, First Lutheran of Ferndale and Golgotha Lutheran of rural Blaine, merged. First Lutheran, originally called *Evangeliske Lutherske Frikirke*, was organized on Aug. 11, 1903, in the home of Knut Floe. Tobias J. Moen, who was paid a yearly salary of \$100, was the first pastor to serve them. Members of Golgotha Lutheran held their first service on Aug. 9, 1908, at the home of Knut Pilskok. Pastor Moen also served as pastor.

After the church merger, the members voted to name the new congregation Triumph Lutheran. The



congregation met in First Lutheran's church building. In 1968, the congregation purchased property for a new church building. Ground-breaking was held on June 23. The final service in the old building was held on June 1, 1969. The new building was dedicated on Sept. 21, 1969.

Pastors serving Triumph Lutheran include: Richard Snipstead (1964-1968); Jay Erickson (1968-1974); Richard Snipstead (1975-1978); Ronald Knutson (1979-1986); James Fugleberg (1986-1990); and Joel Lohafer (1991-present).

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

Wishing you a blessed Christmas

Give the December issue to your friends and neighbors for \$1

Or give a one-year subscription for \$16.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Indicate the giver? Yes: _____ No: _____

Your name: _____

Send to 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Plymouth, MN 55441

The 2004 Lutheran Ambassador schedule

Issue Date	Deadline	Issue theme
January	December 1	Evangelism
February	January 5	Youth
March	February 2	Easter/Lent
April	March 1	AFLC Schools
May	April 5	ARC's 25th
June	May 3	Where we stand
July	June 7	Dealing with stress
August	July 5	Conference Review
September	August 2	Christian Education
October	September 7	Missions
November	October 4	Reformation/Thanksgiving
December	November 1	Advent/Christmas

In order to improve the timeliness of news items in *The Lutheran Ambassador*, please submit news items regarding upcoming events (i.e. conferences) at least two months prior to the issue date. After an event has occurred (i.e. new members accepted), please submit the news item within one month. Please be in prayer for each issue. If you have an idea regarding a certain issue or an interest in writing, please contact the editors.

Midwinter Bible conference planned

Members of Trinity Lutheran, Grand Forks, N.D., will host a Midwinter Bible Conference Feb. 6-7, 2004. Meeting under the theme, "God's Will for the Congregation," based on Ephesians 5:25b-27, 32, the conference sessions will be at 7:30 p.m. Friday and 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturday. Dr. Francis Monseth will be the special speaker. For more information, call Pastor Bruce Dalager at (701) 772-1218.

AFLBS Concert Choir CD available for \$10

The 2003 Association Free Lutheran Bible School Concert Choir CD, "Jesus I Adore Thee," is currently on sale for \$10, including shipping and handling. Enjoy a collection of primarily a capella choral arrangements, including sacred classics, traditional hymns and spirituals. To order, write to "Choir CD" at AFLBS 3120 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Or call (763) 544-9501.

WMF memorials

Maynard Jorstad, Tioga, N.D.
Harriet Dolan, Tioga
Joyce Kjug, Upsala, Minn.

PIMO plans short-term winter mission trips

Partners in Mission Outreach is sponsoring two, two-week mission trips this winter to Mexico. The first trip is planned for the first two weeks in January. The second trip will take place sometime in March.

Anyone 8 years old and older can participate in the mission trips. Participants must pay \$550 (which includes transportation, lodging and meals); bring a certified birth certificate or passport and a notarized permission slip for anyone under the age of 18 traveling without a parent.

For more information, contact LuVerne Hagen (218) 528-3523, or Gene and Rose Finstrom (701) 847-3052.

WMF scholarship

The Women's Missionary Federation granted a \$1,000 mission scholarship to AFLTS student Nate Jore, a second-year student married to Rhoda (Monseth). The Jores, who are preparing for service in world missions, have sensed God's leading to serve in Uganda, a country they visited in August while they served on a AFLC missions team. While there, they worked with African youths and children.



AFLC memorials — October

Home Missions

Fritz Schneider, Arthur Wentzel, Anna Heidmann

Evangelism

Arthur Wentzel, Pastor Hubert DeBoer

AFLTS

Thelma Botten, Pastor Hubert DeBoer; Loren Jorgenson, Leona Hammerback, Dr. Howard Franzen, Marie Olson, Arthur Wentzel, Rachel Kuster Shield, Robert and Cornelia Ligtenberg

Vision 2004

Jack Wayne, Maynard Jorstad, Pastor Hubert DeBoer, Lawrence Ferdinand

World Missions

Arthur Wentzel, Anna Heidmann,

Pastor Hubert DeBoer, Lillian Kohl (2), Arnold Ostrem

Foundation

*Frank Hatch
Pastor Hubert DeBoer*

Miriam Infant Home

Emily Hope Hanson

Youth Ministries

Mary Lindquist, Ardyce Harstad

Parish Education

Mary Lindquist

In honor of ...

AFLTS

Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah, N.D.

AFLBS Piano Fund

Don Rodvold

Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
3110 East Medicine Lake Boulevard
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

AFLC Benevolences (10 month) — January 1 - October 31, 2003

FUND	TOTAL Subsidy	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$305,568.00	\$29,056.96	\$229,051.88	75
Youth Ministries ...	48,154.00	4,319.89	32,300.75	67
Parish Education ...	90,907.00	11,394.42	69,009.95	76
Seminary	150,070.00	18,116.60	116,633.89	77
Bible School	263,356.00	20,804.78	190,474.80	72
Home Missions.....	305,087.00	25,739.20	212,698.98	70
Church Extension ...	28,945.00	1,591.23	14,512.60	50
World Missions.....	247,082.00	17,518.41	152,233.77	62
Personal Support ...	301,156.00	34,472.34	293,917.41	98
TOTALS	\$1,742,325.00	\$163,013.83	\$1,233,692.61	71
TOTALS 2002	\$1,521,284.00	\$137,324.56	\$1,296,503.43	85
Goal 83%				

The Evangelism Department received \$7,648.73 in October.
The office of director of Development received \$50 in October.

Editorial A busy time

It can get to be where we almost dread the coming of Christmas. It is such a busy time. There are cards to send, gifts to buy, decorating to do, programs to plan, events to attend. The list goes on and on. The days get full. Sometimes instead of the season bringing a greater amount of joy, it brings a greater amount of stress.

It is not suppose to work that way. When the angel appeared to the shepherds to tell them what had happened in Bethlehem, he did not give them a long list of things they needed to do. Instead “the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:10, 11, NIV). The

angel told them what God had done and then burst into praise to the

Lord.

What happened in the fields outside Bethlehem that night should serve as a role model for us on how to celebrate Christmas. This season, and every season, should be filled with time spent dwelling on the good news of what God has done in Christ. Our tendency, though, is to make to-do lists. We then worry about how we’ll get it all done. We look down on those who don’t finish their lists. We take pride in the things we mark off as completed.

No such list was handed out that first Christmas. The primary focus of this season isn’t to be on us but on what Christ has done in coming to this earth to take on human flesh and save us from our sins. We fail to give Him the glory and honor He deserves when we spend the bulk of our time focused on what we must do instead of on what He has done.

The angel who declared the good news was joined by “a great company of the heavenly host” (Luke 2:13) as they lifted their voices in praise. Praise and worship should be a central part of our celebration of Christmas.

Worship may seem like wasted time. Those precious minutes could be spent decorating, buying gifts, preparing meals, addressing cards or doing one of the many other things that we think must be done by Dec.



Craig Johnson
Editor

25. If those things aren’t done by Dec. 25, our holiday can still be joyful. If we don’t worship, however, we starve our soul and put ourselves in danger. We also miss out on the true joy of the season.

It is sadly ironic that so many get so stressed as they prepare to celebrate the birthday of the least stressed One to ever walk this earth. Jesus had only three years of public ministry. He had responsibilities far bigger than we can understand. He had teaching to give, miracles to perform, temptations to face and defeat, disciples to train. He had a lot to do in a short period of time. And yet we don’t read in the Gospels of Jesus complaining about how busy and stressed He was. He did get tired, but still He often took time to go off alone and pray. He had time to talk with a woman at a well, visit a tax collector’s home, ask a blind beggar what He could do for him. He did not waste time, but

He also did not rush about frantically, wondering how He was going to get everything done.

John Wooden, the highly successful college basketball coach, would often tell his players to “be quick — but don’t hurry.” He wanted his players to be quick, to be decisive, to not waste time on the basketball court. At the same time, he wanted them to not rush about and hurry aimlessly, but to play with a plan and under control.

As we celebrate Jesus’ first coming and look forward to His second coming, let us be quick, “making the most of every opportunity” (Ephesians 5:16). Let us also not live in a hurry.

We get in a hurry and stressed when we let the lesser things dominate our thoughts and our time. This time of year is about the good news of Jesus’ coming. Be sure you spend time thinking about that and the difference it makes. Then spend time in praise and worship, both privately and with others. And while you’re doing that try not to be thinking about what’s next on your to-do list. If you have time for the other stuff, that’s great. But if some of the other things that the world says must happen can’t happen, don’t hurry, don’t worry.

Remember the good news that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16) and rejoice this Advent and Christmas season!

**We fail to give Him
the glory and honor
He deserves when
we spend the bulk of
our time focused on
what we must do
instead of on what
He has done.**

Something to share Harvesting

"Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few."

*Matthew
9:37*

It was Sunday afternoon and there was a parade in town. I really didn't want to go. After the parade we walked downtown and I saw an old friend. At first I didn't recognize him. We talked and I could see in a short time he was going to have to make some decisions. He had been taking chemotherapy and things didn't sound very good. He said to me, "We need to sit down and talk sometime." The next day I ran into him again and he said the same thing. We met three times before we had our talk.

He was really asking me a question. He knew how the Lord had healed me of alcohol. He told me he had stopped drinking and he was wondering what was going on. I shared with him what the Bible says about the saving power of Jesus Christ. I told him he might be at a point in his life where he needed to make a decision about where he wanted to spend eternity. Heaven is only for believers. He said things were changing very fast. I told him the plan of salvation, that he could know he was going to heaven when he died. There was an interruption. Our talk ended that day, but we

decided to talk again.

I believe there are many in the hour of decision today. We are in the midst of harvest and our sickles have to be ready and sharp. Sometimes we are not always ready to harvest for the Lord, even though we are going into fields that are ready to harvest.

In our Sunday school class there are a dear brother and sister who are 91 and 92 years old. They had to give up their home to go to a nursing home. They have been telling me how they have been sharing with people there. Their sickles are always sharp. They are always ready to harvest. Some think because we are getting older we can put the machinery away; we have done our job and we have done our work.

The Bible says that the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision; we do not know when that day is going to be, but it surely looks like it could be soon. My prayer is that you will continue to be a worker in the harvest.

— *By Larry Behne
Christian Free Lutheran
Wheatland, Iowa*