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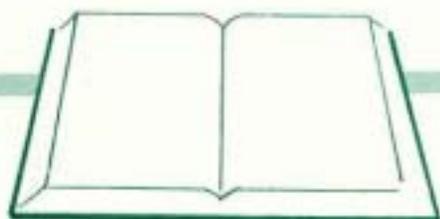
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"And it came to pass. . ."

—Luoma Photos



According to the Word

DID OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE GROW?

During these past days, weeks and months we had many "coffee breaks," which seemed very important to us. But more important is the "Bible break"—the ten or fifteen minutes that every one of us should spend in private with our heavenly Father, reading the living Word and talking our daily problems over with Him. Without doing this, our work, whatever it may be, will not amount to much. It must be Christ working in and through us that counts.

A silver dollar has two sides. We Christians also have two sides. One side is that we are born in sin. Our whole nature, our whole being is sinful. On the other side, we are born again, we are new creatures in Christ. Now the old sinful side brings forth immortality, impurity, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, envy, and a hundred other sins. On the other side with Christ's Spirit in us, we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, etc. When we look at our own life we will find "the good I would like to do, I just don't do, and the bad things I do not want to do, I find myself doing." Explanation! We are bothered with anger, some small things happen and we find our anger boiling. Envy, we cannot stand someone else getting more praise than we. What can we

do about it? With Paul who had the same experiences, we cry out, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver us from this body of death?" The answer for Paul is the same as for us. Christ delivers us.

This is the other side of our life. We have been redeemed by Christ. His birth at Christmas was the beginning of His great work of saving us poor, wretched sinners. In Him and in Him alone we have the forgiveness of sins. Do we really believe that? Do we want our sins forgiven? If they are forgiven, then there is nothing that can separate us from our heavenly Father. Now we can talk to Him day or night. We call this having peace with God. This is our greatest joy—that we are now back home and having the most wonderful fellowship with our dear Father.

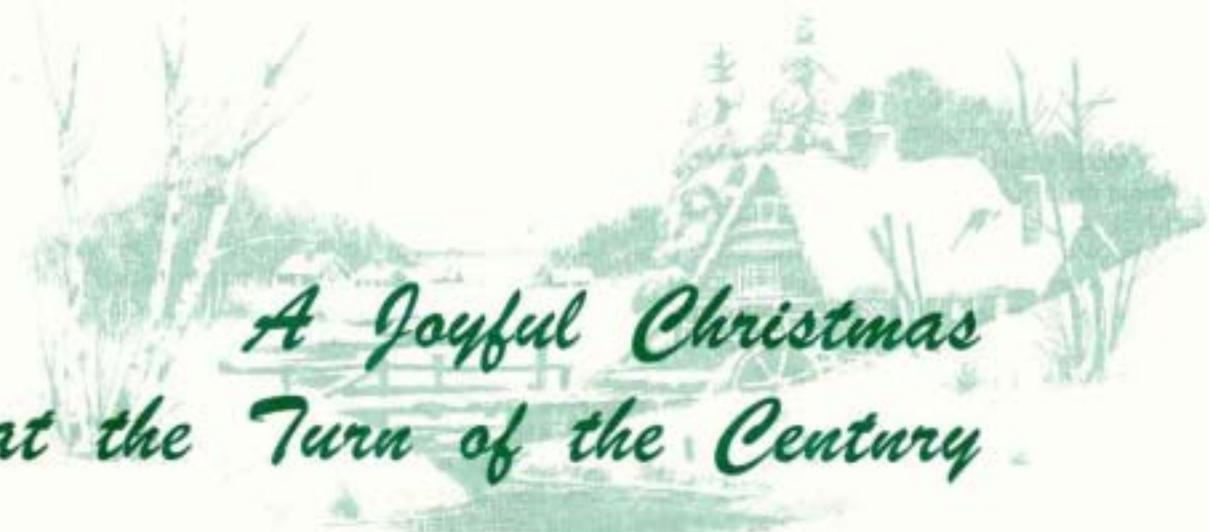
Why do we allow earthly goods to rob us of the present of all presents, namely Christ, the gift of our dear Father sent down from heaven. There should be nothing in our life that would come anywhere near the joy and gladness that is ours now in Christ. Are we going to have this forgiveness of sin first, when we die, or when we are in heaven? No! No! *It is ours now.* This is the result of the great Christmas gift. Can the folks that we live with see and feel this joy of ours? Does it awaken in them a longing desire that they might share our joy in the Lord? Do our faces indicate the great joy we have? In other

words, do we advertise our Christianity by being a sourpuss or by the gladness we now have. By putting our faith and trust in Christ, we have all the other gifts—the resurrection, new body, seeing God face to face, eternal life, new heaven and earth. This is all ours if we have the down payment, the forgiveness of sins.

When we think of what has happened in the world this past year, we realize that life is also very uncertain. We read of crime, heartache, accidents, pain and sickness, and folks becoming cold and indifferent to others. This makes us realize how much there is for us Christians to do and so little time to do it. This is no time to quit or retire! Every last one of us has work to do in the kingdom of God, be it great or small, whether we be pastor or layman. We can all tell of Jesus and what He has done for us, as individuals, as an association of free, living congregations. I hope every one of us will look into the year of 1968 and say, "My, there is so much we could and should do and with God's help we are going to do it." Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord," but Paul knew that this would be hard for us to do, so he said, "Again, I say, Rejoice." May the year 1968 find us working harder than ever, but also being happier and rejoicing in our great God more and more.

—G. H. Spletstoesser

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A Joyful Christmas at the Turn of the Century

by Elizabeth Kleppe Haugen
Newfolden, Minnesota

" 'Tis Christmas eve; quick, stir the
fire,
And in its ruddy glow
We'll live again those happy hours
Of Christmas time long ago."
—W. M. Maupin

Christmas is wonderful—and Christmas was wonderful at the turn of the century in a farm home in southern Minnesota. When the first snow fell our thoughts turned to the holiday season. Mother sat up late at night to knit, to sew, to make little gifts. There were new dresses to be made for the daughters—green jumpers with white blouses—and shirts for the boys. The children made gifts for mother and father—inexpensive but cherished. Instead of ribbons for the gift parcels, we crocheted in chain-stitch long strings of woolen yarn in bright colors. Many of the gifts on Christmas Eve were made-over ones. At the age of four I received my first doll and each succeeding Christmas that doll was renovated—usually a new dress, but one year the doll had a new head with long hair. The preparations for Christmas were not elaborate but the season was full of wonder, awe and joy. We sensed that Christmas was more than gifts.

"Julen er ikke flitter og stas;
Julen er ikke stemning og toner;

Jul kan ei skapes av travelhed og
mas
Jul kan ei kjøbes for ører og kro-
ner.
Julen er Jesus i hjerte og sind."
(from the Danish)

The preparation of Christmas food began when mother put the dry codfish to soak in a lye solution where it was processed for several weeks and came out as "lutefisk." Food fragrances filled the air. When cardamon seeds, currants, raisins and citron were used in Christmas bread and cookies, the resulting foods were beyond words to describe. Mother let us have a share in the baking. We made star cookies and kringla. Some of the other foods that were "musts" were lefse, rulle pølse, head cheese, primost, flat bread, fattigmand, spreets, goro kager, sand bakkelse and mince meat pies.

Our home took on a holiday mood during the weeks preceding Christmas. Every nook and corner had to be cleaned; there were freshly starched curtains at the windows; newly washed runners with turkey red embroidery for the bureau. A red and white checked damask table cloth replaced the old oil cloth on the large oak table in the kitchen. The dining room table was laid with a white linen tablecloth over which was spread a colorful Norwegian runner. A small Norwegian flag was placed on the table. Father was kept busy getting ready Christmas wood and we

children gleefully carried it into the house. A bushel basket was heaped high with dry corncobs.

The Sunday school in the home had the Christmas emphasis, too. In addition to the religious instruction there was the memorizing of Norwegian carols and of Norwegian recitations. There was no radio or victrola to give us Christmas music but as mother worked she hummed and sang favorite Christmas songs which we learned to love. How precious are Christmas memories!

It was customary in our community to ring the church bell at dusk on Christmas Eve to "ringe julen inn." How eagerly we listened to hear the pealing of the bell heralding the arrival of Christmas.

"Juleaften, klokken ringer,
kaller hver og en
'kom til ham som lykken bringer
Jesus frelseren.'"

In the afternoon of Christmas Eve Mother loaded our little sled with baskets of "goodies" for our three nearest neighbors and away we trotted, accompanied by our faithful dog, Bessie, to deliver the baskets and to wish our friends "Gledelig Jul."

Even as children we sensed that especially at Christmas-time our parents missed the loved ones in Norway and so they tried to make Christmas as Norwegian as possible. (Det gjaldt at faa alt saa norskt som muligt.) I suppose that helped to take away the sting of homesickness in their hearts.

The climax of Christmas festivities came on Christmas Eve. We all dressed up for the supper. I recall that Mother usually wore a light colored dress and a long white apron which had crocheted lace at the bottom. We were eager to eat our meal because to have so many good things at one meal was a real experience.

Before we ate, there was the reading of the Christmas Gospel. Then we joined hands at the table and sang "Jeg er saa glad hver julekveld." This was followed by the table prayer by my sister. How we did enjoy the meal which included rich mush with sugar and cinnamon, lutefisk with drawn butter, lefse, and delicious "sød suppe" with almonds. When we had finished eating, mother would smile and say "Gledelig Jul."

Then came the big moment for which we had been waiting. There had been much secrecy in the days preceding Christmas. Uncle Andrew and Papa had smuggled a Christmas tree into the living room and the tree had been trimmed when we were asleep at night. There was exciting expectancy in the shining eyes of the children.

When the double doors to the front room were opened after supper we saw the tree in its resplendent glory with tallow candles burning. We shouted with delight. As mother watched us she said, "Tenk om vi kunne vere saa glad som barna." The gifts that thrilled my sister and me most were our old dolls dressed in new pink and white calico dresses. Other gifts were soft, cuddly, knit white angora caps, mittens, scarves and wristlets. From Uncle Andrew each one of us received an orange and a stick of striped candy and a bag of peanuts.

After we had opened our gifts we had a program consisting of Christmas songs and recitations. The letters from Norway from Grandpa Kleppe and Grandpa Ohm were read. Grandpa Ohm was a teacher and he always wrote individual letters to us and how we treasured them. The Christmas

Gospel was read and we sang "Her kommer dine arme smaa." I recall that baby brother became so sleepy he fell asleep on Mother's lap. This was the end of the day for the children. The grownups sat around and visited and had bakkelse and coffee in delicate gold-rimmed porcelain cups.

What was Christmas morning like? The one at the turn of the century is remembered for its beauty of nature. Light rain and sleet had fallen during the night and the bushes and the grove of trees had been turned into a fairyland of crystal beauty.

The first one to awaken on Christmas morning greeted the others with the words "Gledelig Jul." The one addressed responded with "Takk, i like maate."

The Christmas breakfast table was festive with candlelight, instead of the usual kerosene lamp. Food specialties were buttered lefse with brown sugar, boiled eggs and julekage. The highlight of the morning devotion was the singing of the hymn "Oss er idag en frelser født." We were deeply grateful to God for the gift of Christmas—the Christ-child, our Savior. I am sure that from the hearts of our parents rose warm thanksgivings to God who had smoothed rough paths and given them courage and strength to overcome trials and hardships.

With eagerness we looked forward to the church services and the sleigh ride to church. Uncle Andrew and Father had put fresh hay into the wagon box on the bob sled and warm quilts had been brought out from the house to keep us all warm. And so the family was off to church—the sound of sleigh bells mingling with the sound of crunching snow. In the little country church, Mother and the baby and the two girls sat on the left hand side of the church aisle and the men on the right side. After the service there was the usual exchange of greetings and a time of fellowship. There seemed to be ample time to visit with friends and neighbors.

The Christmas season of 1899 stands out as a very special one—

the close of the season with a New Year's celebration. The Swedish Lutheran church in the community took note of the fact that it was the end of one century and the beginning of a new one. After the New Year's program at the church the bell was to toll one hundred times to ring out the 19th century and to ring in the 20th. My sister was heartbroken because Mother said she was not old enough to go to the service with Dad and big brother. She wept and said, "This is the only time in my lifetime that there will be a chance for me to help ring out one century and ring in another." So ended the Christmas season at the end of the century.

Yes, Christmas was wonderful in its simplicity at the turn of the century and thanks to God, Christmas is still wonderful.

The love, sharing, trust and faith of those early years sustained us twenty-eight years later when, three days before Christmas, Father, at the age of 63, was accidentally killed by a hit-run driver outside our home at Newfolden. Death midst joy. Mother said, "Sorgen og gleden de vandrer tillhobe." We thought, we can't go on with our Christmas plans, but Mother, supplied with fortitude from the heavenly Father, said, "We are going to observe Christmas Eve in the traditional manner—Papa would have wanted it that way." So with the whole family present we kept Christmas—in a subdued manner, it is true, but Christmas nevertheless. A Christmas where prayer brought God nearer to us and us nearer to God.

"And so, once again, Christmas comes.

We linger in the gloom
While ghastly forms of childhood
friends,

Troop in and fill the room.
No words we speak.
To memory's view comes visions
thick and fast,

And for an hour we live again
The dear days of the past."

—W. M. Maupin

by Mrs. Robert Rieth
Kirkland, Washington

"Mommy! Mommy! See what I've got!" Suzy rushed through the kitchen door, forgetting to wipe off her snow-covered boots. "My teacher gave it to me! It has many lines in it. Read it to me!"

"Slow down a minute," Mother laughed, as she picked up her 5-year-old cherub, sat down in a kitchen chair and began unbuckling her red boots. "What did the teacher give you?"

"My piece, my Christmas piece! Read it to me, please, Mommy!"

Mother unfolded the already wrinkled slip of paper and, giving Suzy a hug, began to read:

"What shall I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb;

If I were a wise man, I would do my part;

But what can I give Him? I'll give Him my heart!"

"Help me say it, please!" Suzy couldn't wait to learn her piece so that she could go back to Sunday school with it all memorized. All the rest of the afternoon Suzy repeated the words, "What shall I

give Him, poor as I am?" As she played, she said them over and over. She even made a song to go with them. "What can I give Him, poor as I am? Poor as I am? Poor as I am?" Suzy no longer walked, rather, she bounced as she went about her play.

"Help me wrap this shirt in a pretty box for your Uncle John, Suzy," Mother suggested. Quickly Suzy ran to get the Christmas paper and the tape.

"We are giving Uncle John a new shirt, aren't we, Mommy? 'What shall I give him, poor as I am?' " she sang.

Mother stopped wrapping and bent down putting her hand on Suzy's shoulders. "Honey, that isn't what your piece is all about. Come, let me explain it to you." Hand in hand they went into the kitchen for a cookie and Mother explained. "When we talk about 'Him,' we are talking about the baby Jesus who came to earth because He loved us. God loved us so much but we were not always good. God wanted us to come to live with Him in Heaven but He knew that we just couldn't be good enough. So He thought and thought until He thought of a spe-



What Shall I Give Him?

cial plan, He would send Jesus, His only Son, to live on earth and do things that men should have done. Then Jesus would have to die to pay for our sins, for the things we do wrong. So you see, Jesus was really God in the form of a baby who left Heaven to live here on earth for you and me." Suzy got up and went to the small manger scene which stood on the counter.

"Baby Jesus is really God then," she whispered.

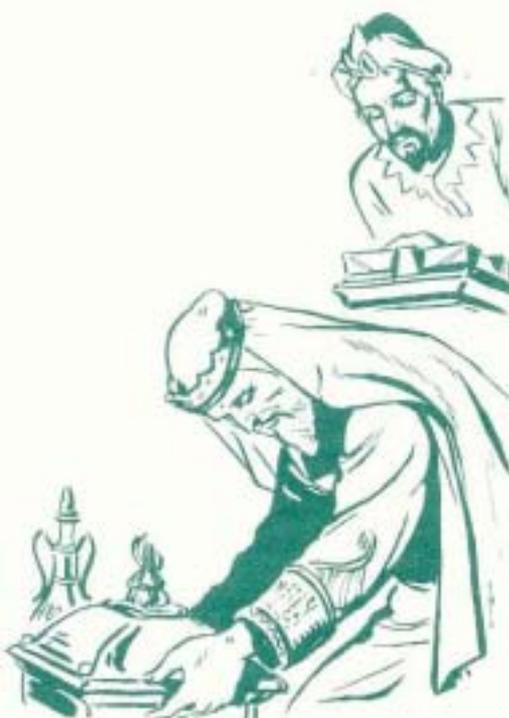
Yes, Suzy. He is."

"What can I give Him, poor as I am?" This time her voice was soft and serious. "Tell me the next part of my piece, Mommy."

"If I were a shepherd, I would give Him a lamb," mother read.

"Tell me about shepherds, please, Mommy." She reached for another cookie and leaned her head on her hand.

"Shepherds were not rich people, Suzy. They had to work long hours out of doors and many times the sheep they took care of weren't even their own. I'm sure they got very lonely out on the hillsides with few people near them and only the sheep to listen to them. And sometimes there was much danger,



too, for wild animals such as lions and wolves would come and try to kill the little lambs. The shepherd had to be a brave person. I'm sure there were young boys who would go out into the fields with their fathers and help take care of the sheep and perhaps, if they were very, very good, they might even get one lamb for their very own. How proud that boy would be of his little lamb and what good care he would take of it. He would hold it, feed it, and talk to it until it followed him everywhere he went."

Suzy slipped down from her chair and climbed into Mother's lap. "One night," Mother went on, "as the shepherds were sitting on the hillside watching the sheep a bright light shone all around them and they were very frightened. They all fell down to the ground and hid their faces from the bright light. Then an angel spoke."

"A real angel? Mommy? Really?" Suzy could hardly believe her ears.

"Yes, Suzy. He told them that he had good news for them. A Savior named Christ the Lord was born that night and if they went to Bethlehem they would find the baby. Well, they went with haste and finally found the baby Jesus. It was just as the angel had told them. They knew that this baby was really God. How thankful they were to worship Him." Mother paused a moment before going on. "But what about the little boy with his pet lamb that followed him everywhere he went?"

"Oh," said Suzy. "I think the boy went along. I think the lamb followed him, too."

"Perhaps it did," said Mother. "We don't know for sure. Do you think the boy would give the little lamb to the Baby Jesus?"

"It would be so very nice if he did, wouldn't it, Mommy?" Suzy thought a long time. "That would be a very special present. 'If I were a shepherd, I would give him a lamb,'" she recited.

Several days went by and preparations for the Christmas holiday made the days happy ones. Suzy

knew the first half of her piece as well as any little girl could. And when she said the words, you could tell that they meant something very special to her. One day as Suzy and her mother were walking home in the clean white snow, carrying some last minute Christmas presents, Suzy asked to learn the next part of her piece. "The next line is 'If I were a wise man, I would do my part,'" Mother answered.

"I don't know anything about wise men. Could you tell me about them?"

"Of course, dear," Mother smiled. "The wise men saw something very strange happen. They looked into the sky one night and saw a star that they hadn't noticed before. It was so bright and seemed to be growing brighter. A star as special as this could only mean that a new King was born! They became so excited that they packed their things on the back of a camel and began the long search for the baby Jesus. They left behind them their families and friends, and all the things they were used to and traveled for many, many weeks. They weren't sure where they were going but at night they could see the star shining brightly before them and it seemed to lead them on. On and on they went until I'm sure they were tired, dirty, and perhaps a little sad. But they never gave up looking for the new King."

"Did they ever find him, Mommy?" Suzy stopped in the middle of the sidewalk.

"One day they got to a town called Bethlehem," Mother continued. "They looked that night at their star to see where it would lead them the next day, but surprise of all surprises, it was standing still and shining brighter than it had ever shone. 'This must be the place,' they cried, and together they walked the streets of Bethlehem until they came to the place that was right under the star. They opened the door and walked in. Right before them was a little baby. They knew as soon as they saw Jesus that this was no ordinary baby. This was the Son of God!

These wise and important men knelt down on the floor and bowed down before this baby. Then they gave him the beautiful presents they had brought. The presents were the best that they could bring and they had come so far to deliver them to the King. How happy Jesus' mother was."

"If I were a wise man, I would do my part." Suzy repeated the words over again. "They gave the most beautiful gifts they could find, didn't they?" Mother nodded and began to shake the snow from Suzy's coat before going into their warm house.

Suzy was tired after her long walk and her mind was full of new ideas about Christmas. After a warm supper Suzy got her little rocking chair and set it right in front of the Christmas tree. Then she got Raggedy Ann and sat down to look at the pretty twinkling lights and sparkling decorations. She thought and rocked and rocked and thought, "Christmas is such a beautiful time," she thought, "but it is more than just pretty things."

She repeated slowly, "What shall I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would give a lamb; If I were a wise man, I would do my part;" Then she remembered that there was still one line left. "Mommy, tell me the last part of my piece!"

Mother read the final words slowly and Suzy listened carefully. Without saying a word she went back into the living room, lovingly picked up Raggedy Ann and sat down to rock and rock. "My heart," she thought. "That must mean all of me." Her face was serious as she stared at the Christmas tree. "The little shepherd gave Him a lamb." And she rocked and thought and thought and rocked. "The wise men came so far to bring Him the best gifts that they had." And she thought and rocked and rocked and thought.

Suzy's cheeks began to sparkle with tears and she slipped out of her rocking chair to her knees. "Dear Jesus," she prayed. "I give you my heart."

We Really Need Christmas This Year!

"Need Christmas? Not on your life!" This is the thought of many. For them Christmas means mostly more and bigger bills, more work, tighter schedules, and more running. Such people do not need Christmas.

We do not think of Longfellow as a hymn-writer, but he has given us a beautiful Christmas hymn. This song was written when the Civil War was raging and Longfellow was so concerned for peace. Christmas was there, but there was no peace.

And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said:
"For hate is strong, and marks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men."

Christmas, 1967, is much like that. This is really a world of sorrow and turmoil. We are engaged in an undeclared war which is continuing to take a heavy toll of American and other lives. In its wake is untold sorrow and suffering. It is also causing political turmoil at home which threatens to destroy our unity. Our nation is in the throes of anguish over the race question, and real and imagined inequities. There are many signs of lack of patriotism and selfish fear. The economic picture is not good for multitudes of our people with inflation a real enemy, and threatening to become worse. The Scriptural standards of morality are forgotten, and a vocal generation of Americans is arising, refusing to bear any cross of self-denial. Much of the outward church is denying the authority of God's Word, and substituting dead scholarship and unproven theories, and theories already proven wrong. Judgment must be near!

We need Christmas, with its wonderful message.
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

No, God is not dead nor sleeping. Right shall triumph. This is the message of Christmas we need.

Christmas tells us that we have a Savior. We have a Savior from our sins, from our death, and even from the devil. May the joy of this truth overwhelm you this Christmas. You see, sin is the cause of all hate and suffering. We have a Savior who really saves from sin. No one but Jesus can save. Other remedies, other so-called "messiahs" will only destroy, but Jesus saves to the uttermost.

Christmas tells us we have a King. The kings of the East fell down and worshipped a mightier King, the Lord Jesus. Christ is King. He will reign forever. As His followers, we, too, will reign forever. Heaven is worth planning and sacrificing for. And this King, as a good shepherd, will guide us from day to day, making even life on this earth worth living.

We are an Association of congregations. It is our great privilege and task to tell the world about Jesus, the Savior, the King. Pastors, laymen, Sunday schools, everyone, rejoice in this message as you proclaim it this Christmas, and always.

The institutions of our Association, our Bible School, our Seminary, our Missions, our officers and committees, greet you this Christmas. Thank you for your fellowship in the Gospel. May you continue to give of yourself that the message of Christmas may be wonderful for all men. But be sure you believe it yourself!

Pastor John Strand, President
Association of Free Lutheran Congregations



But there are hearts awaiting,
It may be here or there,
And we must go to tell them,
Our Savior's love declare.

Our time may be a short one
To labor in Your care;
You promised to return one day
And gather Your loved ones there.

As You triumphed Christmas morn-
ing,
As You triumphed on the cross,
You can triumph in our hearts,
Lord,
And bring triumph to the lost.

—Mrs. L. C. Dynneson,
Nogales, Arizona

THE CHRIST OF TRIUMPH

The world was dark around us,
Our hearts were full of sin,
There was no other way, Lord,
To get our peace within.

You had to come and see us,
You had to come and die,
You had to spill your lifeblood,
Our God to satisfy.

And so you came on Christmas,
That night so long ago;
'Twas just as had been promised,
To those of long ago.

The shepherds did receive you,
The innkeeper did not;
The wisemen sought for many a
mile
To find the hallowed spot.

Another day was darkness
And You, upon the cross,
Were dying to redeem us,
From all our sin and dross.

We, too, would find You, Jesus,
Our hearts and minds to stay,
And let Your love possess us
Until that greater day.

We know this world is dark again
With misery on every hand,
And yet, we have a song to sing
And spread to every land.

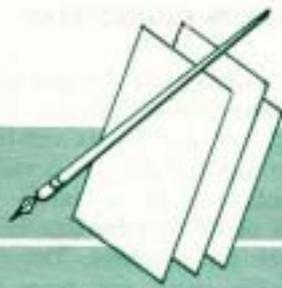
Let us take up our battle,
And give this world of sin
A chance to hear forgiveness,
A chance to live and win.

Many will not receive You;
Many may scoff and scorn.
Some will just neglect You
And face that awful morn.

Annunciation to the Shepherds



BY JACOPO BASSANO (1510?-1592)
(Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art) —RNS Photo



EDITORIALS

BUT NOW HAS CHRIST COME!

"Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.'
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
Hark, the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn King!'"

—Charles Wesley

We have come again to Christmas, that glorious season of the year in which we particularly remember God's visitation. Then God stepped into human history in a new and greater way and because of this there is joy in the world.

Sometimes there is value in considering what the world would be like if Christ had not come. Contemplating this is a bleak prospect, for what if there were no Christ, no Jesus?

Then there would be no churches, surely not as we know them today. Think of all the good things the Church and the churches mean to you and stand for. What would the world be without them? Some people think that the world would be better off without the Christian Church or the churches. But such persons are not many.

If Christ hadn't come, there would be less concern for human needs and the individual. The development of hospitals, of homes for the aged, of schools has often been tied in with the Christian message, the preaching of Christ. Time after time it has been the Christian missionaries who have brought these humanitarian concerns for the individual. And it is under Christian influence that the status of women has been elevated.

Without the incarnate God in Christ there would be no salvation. What if there were no promise, no salvation, no hope of life reaching beyond the decades

one may know on earth? Then there would be no purpose, no meaning.

"Oh, what emptiness! without the Savior
'Mid the sins and sorrows here below!
And eternity, how dark without Him!
Only night and tears and endless woe!
What, though I might live without the Saviour,
When I come to die, how would it be?
Oh, to face the valley's gloom without Him!
And without Him all eternity!"

We are reminded of Paul as he writes in I Corinthians 15. He considers the question of what if Christ was not raised. Our preaching and our faith would be in vain. People would all still be in their sins. The "believing" dead have perished. Those who professed the faith would be most pitied of all.

"But now has Christ been raised from the dead." There was, and is, all the difference. Christian faith is not in vain. The departed faithful will rise. The corruptible body will be raised incorruptible. Paul could ask, "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?" And Paul could utter those magnificent words, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So also this Christmas 1967 we can say, after talking about *if* He had not come, *but now has Christ come*. God kept His promise. Through long ages He had foretold a coming One—One who would deliver and bring salvation. The prophets kept the promise alive and some believed in what they said and were counted righteous.

You see, the world is under condemnation. God didn't condemn it, but sin brought the judgment upon mankind. God sent His Son to bring deliverance. This is the message of Christmas. There is freedom from the curse hanging over the world. This is the message all true Gospel preachers will set forth this Christmas.

Judgment still hovers over the world, but, thank God, life and salvation are here, too. Into all who long to be free, the dear Christ enters. He does not come in against the will, but where He is wanted He gladly abides. Dear reader, give up your sins. They are nothing to keep. Give your heart to the Jesus of Christmas. He longs to be more than a folk custom. He desires to be *the* Savior for you.

Finally, may the words *but He has come* remind us that He will come yet again. It is at a time we do not know and so we are to live in constant expectation. God will fulfill this promise just as He did the other. This second coming will mark the final victory. Every knee shall bow, some in frenzied terror, some in loving adoration. May it be so that you are among those who receive Him with joy as Lord and King, and love Him through all eternity.

[Continued on page 18]



by Herman W. Gockel

It was Christmas Eve. Six-year-old Mary Lou was walking down a dark city street with her father, on their way to the children's Christmas service.

Her active little mind was filled with the wonders of the event which she and her class mates were about to celebrate—the coming of the Christ Child from heaven to earth, to be born a tiny infant in a lowly stable.

Above them was the velvety blue-black canopy of heaven, Swiss-dotted (as it seemed to her) with an infinite variety of brilliant lights, twinkling down to earth.

Her eyes were fixed on the shimmering tapestry above as she and her father walked, silently but thoughtfully, toward the lighted church at the far end of the block.

Suddenly she looked up at her father and with that rare insight peculiar to a six-year-old observed, "Daddy, I was just thinking—if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, how wonderful the right side must be!"

Little Mary Lou was right. No tongue or pen has ever succeeded in describing the glory, the grandeur, and the magnificence of our Father's house above.

That it is a place of entrancing beauty and matchless splendor the apostle John indicates in the Book of the Revelation by describing

THE RIGHT SIDE OF HEAVEN

heaven's glories in terms of costly jewels and precious gems and rarest metals.

How could heaven by anything else but beautiful! It is the habitation of our Lord, our compassionate and divine Redeemer, who left His home on high to dwell with us below. It is the royal palace of the King of kings!

And in that splendid palace—oh, wondrous thought!—the infant Christ of Bethlehem, the blood-stained Christ of Calvary, the triumphant Christ of Joseph's garden, has gone ahead to prepare a place for those who trust Him as their Savior.

Through faith in His redeeming mercy they will ascend someday to His home beyond the skies—more wonderful than human speech can tell.

Theologians may spin their theories as to whether or not Mary Lou's heaven is really a "place." But as she walked to church that Christmas Eve, Mary Lou had an insight which went far deeper than that of many a theologian.

It was the insight of childlike faith. To her, heaven was where her Savior was! And for her—and for us—that was a thought almost too wonderful for words.

(Reprinted from *This Day* by permission of Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri.)

What is Christmas? We can glibly say many things it is not. It is not tinsel and toys, feasts and frolic, gatherings and gifts. It is rather a remembrance of a birth for blessings, of a Savior for sinners, of a message for missions. The real heart thrills come not from the frills, but from the spill of that precious blood from One suspended on the cross. It is a Savior dying that must be related to a baby lying in a manger crib. Christmas is the birth of my Savior whose Name has become the most precious in all the world. Because I experience His blessings I must share this good news to all people. Christmas and missions go together and cannot be separated. If we have received, we must share.

—Pastor Harold Schafer, Mission Director of the AFLC

THE LITTLE ANGEL POEM

The little angel held the Child—
Mary, tired, was sleeping—
And o'er them all throughout the
night
Joseph watch was keeping.

The little angel sang a song,
The sweetest lullaby
That she had brought from heaven's
hymns
Down through the winter's sky.

She held the Child so carefully—
No harm to Him must fall—
She bowed and kissed the tiny head
Of the great Lord of all.

The fluffy lambs around her lay
And softly fell asleep
Until God sent the sun again
And woke the flowers sweet.

'Twas then His mother Mary woke
From her sleep most refreshing
And to the little angel gave
Her most gracious blessing.

—Mariene Moline,
Lansing, Iowa



edited by Mrs. David C. Hanson

THE ADVENT ALTAR

John Larson lowered his newspaper, "Martha," he said, "Isn't it time for Lois to get off that telephone? She's been chattering for the last forty-five minutes."

His wife looked up from the stack of Christmas cards she was addressing, "She's young, John; all the girls her age spend a lot of time on the phone. They have so much to talk about with all of their plans for parties. They're filled with the Christmas spirit this time of year."

"It doesn't sound like Christmas spirit to me," Timmy said. "Sounds more like plain old gossip."

Martha decided to ignore the wisdom of her six-year-old son. She looked pensively around the room. John had retreated behind his newspaper again; Timothy was lying on his stomach before the fireplace reading the Sunday comics. The room really does look festive, she thought. It was a good idea to decorate early. If I can only finish addressing the cards today, I can bake and wrap gifts next week. So many things to do for a traditional holiday! Martha glanced at her watch. Lois had been on the phone too long... and where was Peter? He had promised to be home by three. She was about to mention her elder son's tardiness to his father when the back door slammed to announce that Peter had indeed returned.

"Hi, Mother... say... will you tell Lois to get off the phone.... I'm waiting for a call from Tom.

We're supposed to go skating tonight if the arena is open." Peter wound his long legs around a chair as he waited for his parents' response.

"There won't be time, Pete," his father said. "The Advent service at church starts at seven."

"Do I have to go? I was in church this morning. Once a day should be enough for anyone," and Peter mustered a very pained expression.

Before there was time for an answer Lois came flying across the room to perch on the arm of her father's chair. "Dad, I've simply got to have a new dress. Ann is having a party on the Saturday after Christmas, and I haven't anything that is good enough for her crowd."

"Another dress? Does anyone in this family have any idea how much Christmas costs? By the time I get through paying for the gifts your mother has bought we won't be able to buy groceries. No, Lois, you can't buy another dress! And, Peter you are going to the Advent service tonight... and those are my last words on both subjects!"

The doorbell prevented further discussion and Martha left her Christmas cards to answer it. She returned carrying a large box. "It's the sweater I bought for Aunt Mary. The store delivered it to the wrong house so Mrs. Armstrong brought it over. I wish there had been more time, I would have invited her in for coffee. She's new in the neighborhood and this is the first time we have met. But I must get these cards addressed before we go to church. Incidentally, John, I've decided not to ask Aunt Mary for Christmas this year. We just have nothing to talk about anymore... nothing in common."

"Is she going to stay alone in that hospital for Christmas?" Timmy asked. "Boy, I wouldn't like that!"

"It's not a hospital, Timothy, it's a nursing home; and Aunt Mary is not all alone," his mother answered. "She's really much better off with people her own age."

The comfortable room was quiet for a few moments as Martha continued to write addresses, John

studied his paper, and the children pondered their own problems. Finally Peter broke the silence.

"I met Pastor Martin this afternoon, Lois. He asked if you and I were going carolling with the Luther League the night before Christmas. I told him I can't sing... but I couldn't think of a good excuse for you. I was supposed to tell you something, too, Dad, but I can't remember what it is."

"Carolling wouldn't be a good idea for Lois," her mother said without looking up from her list. "If she is going to sing in church on Christmas morning she should be careful not to catch a cold."



"I know what it was, Dad," Peter said. "Some of the men from the church are going out to the prison next Sunday afternoon to present a program. Pastor Martin thought you might like to take devotions. He's going to call you about it."

"Sounds fine, Pete, but I was planning to take all of you up to the farm next Sunday to get our Christmas tree. I thought it might be more fun than shopping in a lot, and we'll get a greener tree. The pastor won't have any trouble getting someone to take my place."

As the other members of the family voiced their approval, Martha remembered, "Isn't that the same afternoon the women are going to pack and deliver Christmas baskets to needy families? I've already promised to help."

"Aw, Mom, you do that every year, and we've never had a chance to cut our own tree," Lois said. "Couldn't you find someone to take your place... just this once?"

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Prelude

In pondering over days gone by—
Slouched here in an easy chair—
My memory makes many a trip
over the seas of air.

* * * * *

Oh the fall, fall, fall of the snow-
flakes white,

The fall, fall, fall of the snow.
The sting of the air from the north-
ern wind,

As o'er the white fields I go,
For it's Christmas night,
And the candle's bright,
And the Christmas tree's aglow.
The children are playing,
The grown-ups are sleighing,
There's a biting wind, and snow.

Oh the rattle, rattle, rattle of the
Christmas toys,

The loud, loud rattle of the toys;
They flood me with the Christmas
days

When I lived as a boy,
Looking forward to Christmas-
time,

To the gifts that would be mine,
Oh, everything was gay!
The bells would ring,
And the vespers sing
When I was a little boy.

Postlude

My memory ship has struck a calm
And stops for still repose—
So let it float, an idle boat,
In the memory joys it knows.

—A. L. Hokonson

(Published first in *The Marquette University Journal* in 1924.)

"Well, perhaps I could try, although I do feel this is a necessary mission." Mother looked at Timmy, still sprawled on the floor. "Timmy, will you please go get your clothes changed so you are ready for church. Our women's group has worked very hard on this Advent service and they want a good response from the congregation."

Timmy rolled over on his back and looked around the room. "How about our own Advent service? We fixed the Advent wreath and everything, but we still haven't had devotions. And I get to light the first candle."

"Devotions? We were all in church this morning... we're going back tonight... can't that candle wait until tomorrow?" Lois looked at her younger brother with an expression that plainly wished he would keep quiet.

"Tim is right," John Larson said as he folded his newspaper. "The Advent wreath is not merely a Christmas decoration. Let's use it right now."

The older children knew better than to argue with the definite tone in their father's voice and resigned themselves to listen.

"Can we read the Christmas story, please, Dad?" Timmy begged.

"It's *may* we read the Christmas story," Lois corrected. "I know every word of that story by heart. Let's read something more adult for the rest of the family."

"At least it's short," Peter said; then noticing the expression on his father's face, he added, "Well, Mother does want to finish those Christmas cards before we leave."

Father opened his Bible and the family bowed their heads as he prayed that God would give each of them something from His Word. As Timmy lit the first candle, Father began to read the old familiar story.

"In those day a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up

from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child, And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

Timmy had been listening as if it were the first time he had heard the Christmas message. "I feel sorry for Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus. If I had lived in Bethlehem, they could have had my room."

A strange expression crossed Father's face. He looked at Timmy thoughtfully for a moment, then turned the pages of his Bible before he resumed his reading.

"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'"

The room was very silent as each member of the family remembered the opportunities he had forfeited that very afternoon. Their own selfishness and concern for trifles overwhelmed them. With one accord they bowed their heads to confess sin and plead for the love and willingness and strength they would need to serve the Savior by ministering to the least of those He loves.



CHRISTMAS

hustle
bustle
tussle
rush
lush
cuss
STOP
what confusion
no more please
ring
sing
a star
afar,
whiteness
brightness
peace
release
love
above
no fear
here
why confusion?
with all that
He is?

—Karen Oftedahl



OF CHRISTMAS TREES AND STARS

The branches hang low with silver balls
and pink angels. The blue fluffy snow
says THE season is here.
The green smell of pine says THE tree has
its place in the corner again—gifts,
fallen tinsel,
pine needles strewn underneath.
Just outside the window shines a star—
much brighter than ever seen here.
(Even the one on top of the tree is not that sparkly.)
Close the curtain—it makes OUR
decorations look cheap. (They aren't, of course.
They cost \$19.97. We put them up ourselves.)
Pass out the packages
Tear off the wrapping
Say thank you
Look at OUR star mechanically winking
Say good night. It's been so meaningful,
hasn't it?

Jane Thompson
Fertile, Minn.

WALTER'S DREAM

"It is more blessed to give than
receive,"
These were the words Jesus said.
But Walter didn't know what they
meant
Until one night in bed.

It was Christmas Eve that night,
And Walter's mother had said
That he could open his presents to-
morrow
As soon as he hopped out of bed.

Walter had a dream that night.
He dreamt that two ragged boys
Had come into the living room
And were playing with his toys.

"How dare you touch my toys?"
Walter did angrily say.
The boys just looked at him sadly
And softly crept away.

Then Walter stood there ashamed.
"Wait!" he called. "You can play
with my toys."
But they neither turned nor came
back,
Those two little ragged boys.

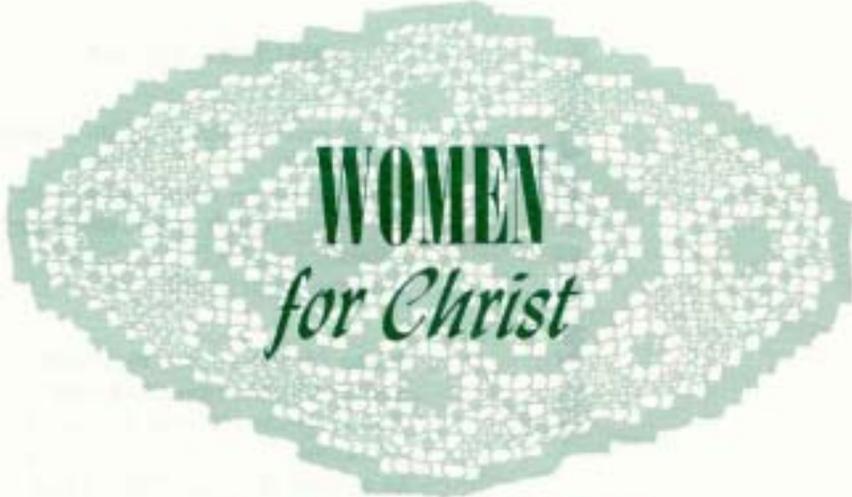
That morning when Walter awoke,
He ran to the Christmas tree
And opened his presents one by one.
"Ten nice presents," he thought,
"and they're all for me."

A truck, a train, an archery set—
He looked at his presents a while.
Then he took out three of the nicest
And put them in a pile.

"Those three presents aren't for
me,"
He said as he went out to play.
"They're for the little ragged boys,
Who won't get any presents today."

—Kathryn Waterworth
Age 13
Newfolden, Minnesota

L U T H E R L E A G U E



WOMEN for Christ

A Christmas Greeting

THE FIRST AND SECOND COMING

In the past three weeks in the letters from our son, Allan, who is stationed in Germany, he repeatedly stated, "Christmas is coming soon," and "Christmas is sneaking up on us," as if to say, "I cannot be home for Christmas this year, but I am with you in my thoughts." As he left on the plane last summer, I could not help but wonder if Jesus would come before we would meet again.

Christmas is a very special and wonderful time of the year and I am sure we all have many fond memories. We have always sat around in our living room looking at our tree loaded with trimmings and gifts. We have a program, planned by the children, of singing, sharing, reading the Good News and praying together. I would always ask God to show us the true meaning of Christmas and help us not to get lost in material things.

In Haggai 2:6 we read, "For yet a little while," and "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37). As we look at the time line of the Bible, it does not seem so long from the Creation to the Flood, and from the Flood to Christ. The little while has not ended, for we haven't seen His second coming. When we are with Him in eternity, we will see that our time on earth was a very, very little while. Let us fix our eyes upon

Jesus and watch and wait for our King.

As we look back in history we see the most wonderful fact: that Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, was here on earth. He came from God the Father to put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. Before He left this earth, He promised "another comforter" (John 14:16). It was not God the Son, for He is back in heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us (Heb. 9:24). It is true that the Spirit of Christ is and always has been with the believer (Matt. 28:20); but now we have another person and He is God the Holy Spirit, a divine presence within the believer. Christ never went away spiritually but He did go bodily and visibly and in like manner shall He return (Acts 1:11). This is the greatest future event, that Jesus is coming again.

We should joyfully make plans to celebrate the birthday of Christ and at the same time make sure our house is in order by being willing to repent of all sin each day. His coming again should be a motive to invite us to brotherly love and to watchfulness because of its suddenness (Luke 17:24-30).

If we know anything about the fellowship of His suffering, then we too will be "waiting for the morning," as the poet writes,

—Mrs. Herbert Presteng,
President, Women's
Missionary Federation

WHY CHRIST CAME

by Mrs. Gerald Mundfrom
Pukwana, South Dakota

"Only six weeks until Christmas!" someone remarked the other day. Even as this is written we see signs of Christmas all around us. The stores have had their wares displayed for some time already, and gift suggestions are thrust at us as we page through the daily mail. We even hear a radio voice proclaim, "Only 37 shopping days left until Christmas!" As if we could forget that Christmas is coming!

Christmas is coming because Christ came. Why did Christ come? Why would He who shared all the glory and joy of God in heaven, leave it all behind and come down to this earth to live the life of a man, to take a place beside the lowly, wretched men of earth?

The world was a dark and hopeless place, filled with people who were lonely and discouraged, brokenhearted and without hope. Some did indeed await the promised Messiah, expecting God to fulfill His promise made many centuries before. But for the vast majority—the countless poor and downtrodden people of the world—there was no hope, only an existence to be endured the few short years of life, which seemed rather long because of the trials and bitterness that plagued their lives. The beggar sitting in the street, the hopelessly sick turned out of his home and city in fear, the captives of Satan bound by demons—to such, life was unbearable. And to every soul dead in sin there was no hope even beyond this miserable life.

Why would Christ come here to this kind of a world? Did Christ come for people of today, for we still have this kind of a world? We who live in health and plenty know little of the sufferings of the vast majority of today's world. We hear the facts of their woeful state; we pray for them; we bring our offerings to help. But still we know little. How can we know? If only

(Continued on page 16)

The Lutheran Ambassador



Our Brazilian Christmases

by Mrs. John Abel,
Campo Mourao, Brazil

When Pastor Huglen wrote asking us to write an article on Christmas in Brazil, I began to think about past Christmases that we have spent in this country. Many memories came back to me and so today I have the opportunity to share some of them with you.

Ever since I can remember, Christmas was a big event in our home in the States. Putting up the Christmas tree, decorating the house, making all sorts of Norwegian cookies, preparing packages for the poor, were all climaxed by the gathering of all the aunts, uncles and cousins at my grandfather's home, and in later years at my own home on Christmas Eve. There was the reading of the Christmas story, the reciting of Christmas pieces which would later be given at the Sunday school program and the singing of the carols before opening the packages which revealed wonderful secrets. It was a wonderful time, something to really look forward to.

In Brazil we have continued some of these traditional practices, but depending upon the situation, they have had to be modified or exchanged for other things.

Our first Christmas in Brazil found us still in language school. We had the privilege of having Marguerite Loftus with us in Campinas, Brazil. She helped us pick out the Christmas tree and bake some Christmas cookies, but since we were cooking at that time on two alcohol burners and a portable oven, baking and cooking were rather limited.

We had fun decorating the tree and she taught us some Norwegian customs like giving small gifts to everyone at the supper table each night of the week before Christmas.

Our other guests on Christmas Eve were the Bill Morris family. They were from England and were employed by the Singer Sewing Machine Company. They accepted the Lord as their Savior and were baptized in our home. They were having a real financial struggle at that time. We have now lost track of them as we moved into the interior and after some time they went back to England.

Our next Christmas was spent in Cianorte. We arrived there the 15th of November on a hot summer day to find that the carpenter had only gotten flooring put in in one room and there were as yet no ceilings in the house. This building had been rented for a chapel and our home. By putting on an extra man and with John helping, in a few days all the floors and ceilings were in.

The first Sunday we were there we held Sunday school and invited the town to attend. Cianorte was only a year old at the time and little more than a clearing in the jungle. Ours was the first church in town. Huge burned tree trunks and stumps were to be seen everywhere. All the houses were built of new lumber and were unpainted. We opened our Sunday school and with the children we worked out

a dramatization of the Christmas story. Digging in our barrels we found suitable robes, sheets and table cloths which would serve for shepherds and kings.

Yes, we had a tree also. John met a German engineer whose uncle is a well-known theologian in the States, Dr. Piper. John had read books written by him. This common ground helped to build a friendship and the engineer took him along to find pine trees. They cut their way through the jungle with machetes, finally reaching suitable trees. After cutting them down they had the tricky job of dragging them out of the jungle. There is no pine tree that has as prickly, sharp needles as the Parana pine. We had brought along a couple of strings of lights and so had the only lighted Christmas tree in town.

It was decided that the program would be on the 24th of December. I rebelled at this somewhat since this night had always been for the family, but decided that I might as well learn early that Christmas doesn't depend on tradition or days. The church was packed. A truckload of people came from a nearby ranch.

That was the Christmas I made fruitcake for all who attended the Christmas program. Why I chose to make fruitcake, I don't know. John had bought the fruit and nuts in Sao Paulo. It was one of my first attempts and I remember that it didn't hold together too well, but not a crumb was left after being served. We also gave out candy and small cups of coffee. This was our first social event and we made the discovery that in Brazil they are not accustomed to being lined up for serving. Either they sit and expect to be served or they all come up to the table, everyone crowding in on all sides and helping themselves until they are satisfied. We ended up serving them one by one.

That night the mail came in and what a joy it was to sit down before

going to bed and reading letters and cards from home. Christmas Day we opened our packages. Paul was a little over two months, so didn't get excited about Christmas. David was almost four and Joni almost two.

The following year we had just moved into our own church and school building. A great effort was made to get the floor covered with colored cement, walls painted and a curtain made for the stage. This building was two stories with the upstairs used as a school.

We now had a number of adults who had been converted, so we decided to include them in the dramatization of the Christmas story. The weeks before Christmas were busy ones, sewing costumes, making a backdrop curtain for the stage, etc. The people had been good about helping in the construction and we had given all that we could.

It was now the 24th, nearing Christmas Eve. The young people had just been at our house filling bags of candy. I had just sat down to decide what I would make for our Christmas Eve supper as there was no money left to buy meat. As I was beginning to feel sorry for

myself and thinking about our families gathering about a delicious lutefisk and lefse supper, there was a clap outside our kitchen window. It was Francisco, the first one to accept the Lord in Cianorte, with a package. He said that that afternoon he had killed a goat and was wondering if we would like to have a piece to roast. Suckling pig and goat meat are traditional here. How living the words became, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." I don't know what else we had to eat but it was one of the most wonderful Christmases we have ever had.

The 25th we had our program in church. The following day we did something which I don't think we'd have the courage or energy to do today. We loaded all the young people who took part in the Christmas drama, costumes and properties into a truck and went to a fazenda (large farm) where we had been conducting services once a month. It was a long trip on a jungle road that was not too good. All went well and by 3:00 a.m. we were home again.

The next Christmas the (Robert B.) Kaspersons were with us. Due to the fact that the one who was

to cash our checks in Sao Paulo was traveling, we had another financial crisis at Christmas time. We pooled resources with Kaspersons and Viola Rud so we had Christmas dinner together. Our outdoor kitchen became a workshop as Bob undertook the job of making toys, as there wasn't money to buy any.

Though we have lacked some of the traditional trimmings of Christmas, every Christmas here has seen an outreach with the Gospel and an opportunity to sow the Word and get down to the basic meaning of Christmas as we read in John 3:16.

We want to thank you for your prayers, letters and support this past year. The year has gone by quickly, but as we look back we can see that the Lord has answered many prayers. We want to wish you all a blessed Christmas season.

(Editor's Note: The John Abels were first in Brazil under the World Mission Prayer League, then the American Lutheran Church, before beginning the mission work in Brazil for the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations.)



Women for Christ

[Continued from page 14]

we could see their misery, perhaps we would be more touched, more burdened, more willing to sacrifice our means, more zealous to share our Christ with them.

Today's world is still without hope wherever it is without Christ. But Christ came! He came to these very souls, all of earth's desperate men, simply because of love. He knew them from heaven, yes, even knew all about the burdens and trials in their lives, the sorrow and fear in their hearts. But knowing it could not help. He came to them; He came to us, to bear the bur-

dens, "to preach good tidings unto the meek, . . . to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn" (Isa. 61: 1, 2).

What a joy that Christ came for me! He saw my needs, my sin that condemned me, my life of worldly, sinful pleasures, the guilt I could not live with. He came to me and forgave me all my sins. He lifted me out of shame and misery and gave me a new life, a changed heart, the sweet knowledge of complete forgiveness. How can I thank Him for His mercy and love! But

thanks is not enough. I must live for Him and work for Him that others, too, may come to Him and find salvation.

Has Christ come for you? Do you know the Savior who came to live and die for you that your sins could be washed away? He loves you; He wants you to come and know the glorious forgiveness of sins confessed and forsaken. He will receive you. Today is "the year of the Lord's favor," the day when He is seeking and waiting for you. Tomorrow may be "the day of vengeance of our God," the day of judgment when it will be too late. Come today, while Christ is calling you. That first Christmas Day, He came for you!



Let Us NOW Go

by Pastor Karl G. Berg
Salem, Oregon

Luke 2:8-20

It's Christmas Eve in Palestine—the first Christmas Eve in history. There is no scheduled Christmas program, no stately church to have had it in out there on the hills of Judea, even if there had been one. But a meeting takes place under a canopy of stars that night—a meeting that is to become the focal point of generations and nations to follow because of its significance to all men. Not many are there to listen but God is there.

Crowds do not mean as much to Him as to us. Crowds would come to Him in their enthusiasm but the individual came to Him with his need and He had a chance to listen and help.

God was there that first Christmas Eve. That's important, God and His angels, God and "a multitude of the heavenly host." God and a few seeking souls—that was the audience—a few shepherds tending their sheep. In the scales of men they didn't weigh heavily; they didn't count for much. But God's scale weighs differently. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is

the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

The minority has a chance with Him. Have you thought of that? You who feel so lonesome and left out, God doesn't leave you out. He comes to give and, as such, all He requires is empty, receptive hearts. The religious and commercial-minded crowds in Jerusalem were too busy to listen, but here in the stillness of the hills of Judea were open ears and open hearts. A Savior was born that very day and He was *for them*. The proclamation was clear and personal: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior." In the city of Bethlehem was born a Savior! And He was born *for them*.

Shall we try again this year, when the world is noisier than ever, to become still enough so that we can take our place beside this little group as we recall their experience that night? The world is in turmoil. Hearts are disturbed, restless and fearful. How we need to hear these reassuring words today: "To you is born a Savior." If we ever need One, it is just now. And only One can claim that title for all nations and all ages; namely,

Christ the Lord.

That meeting under the stars was not a lengthy one. It couldn't have lasted more than a few moments. But that short interval with God left a tremendous change in the hearts of the few men who were involved. The reverberations of that experience are still heard where hearts are quiet enough to listen. They came to the Christ Child and they left again different men because of a meeting with Him.

They came with fear they left with joy. They had made a wonderful discovery and that discovery was to color all their future contacts. They returned to their neighbors, their friends, their tasks—"with joy." Weary hearts along the way found their burdens lighter as these passed by. It was the "lift" they needed. We meet much complaining but little joy among men. And joy is what we all need and only One can give it. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart" (Ps. 4:7).

I returned to speak at a church in northern Minnesota after an interval of about ten years. A member of the congregation asked if I remembered what my former message had been. I didn't, but he did. I had spoken on joy and somehow the message left a permanent impression. It was just what he needed.

The shepherds came to the manger with silent lips until they saw the Child in the manger; they returned to their flocks and to their friends "glorifying and praising God." The silence was broken. They had learned the "song of the redeemed." Their experience had been unique, but they weren't telling this primarily. They were thrilled with God and what He had done for them. Here was a new sense of urgency, of freshness.

That is what we need today—a new sense of urgency in the pulpit. So much is at stake. Souls are on a one-way track heading for eternity and God's "watchmen" are asleep too often. The religious "mill" is busy grinding out its established religious formula but it

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CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Our hearts go out today to those theologians and theologically-oriented laymen, and all those people influenced by them, who have so humanized and desupernaturalized the Bible that they have no incarnate God to honor at this Christmas time. They may speak of the "good" Jesus and of Christian impact, but of God in human form in the unique Jesus, no. And they are much the poorer for these views.

They, like the multitude of heathen in the world, must content themselves with mutual exhortations toward self-betterment after the example of the historical Jesus. All this is a religion without surety, without confidence.

How much better it is to celebrate at this season of the year the birthday of the Christ Child, the Word made flesh (John 1:14). To announce tidings of joy, for the Lord has come! This good news (the Gospel) gives hope. It promises life that can rise above the

troubles of this world while being lived very much in the midst of them. This message offers hope in a life beyond this one for all eternity, in a new world free from the imperfections found here.

The key to such confidences is found in accepting the Child of Bethlehem, and He is also the Man of Calvary, in our hearts so that He becomes Savior and Lord in a very personal sense. It is a Christmas like this, of such acceptance, and surrender, which we wish for all our readers.

It has been a pleasure and joy to serve you, every one, during the past year. And so today, whoever you are and wherever you may be, *The Lutheran Ambassador* extends warm and cordial greetings at this blessed Christmas season. May you and yours note a particularly satisfying and Christ-honoring holiday, strongly assured that God has visited our earth through His Son and that the Christ who came then is able to perform miracles now as He was beside Galilee's shores.

A blessed Christmas to all!

Brothers in the Snow



Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.



The white cliffs of Dover

by Raynard Huglen

PART VI

Across the Channel

On the way to the Victoria station in London the next morning, the taxi driver stopped by the old Scotland Yard building so that I could snap a picture of it. It was one of the places which had been missed the day before even though I had been near it without being aware of the fact.

At Dover we passengers boarded a ship for the ride across the English Channel. As we pulled away from the English side we had a good look at the white cliffs of Dover. And they really are white. The passage took about an hour and we docked at Calais, France.

Realizing that I was now in a country where the language was largely unknown to me, I gathered together a few French words from a fellow train passenger who was French. The train arrived at Gare du Nord (North Station) in Paris in late afternoon. Now there were two concerns: locate a place to stay and find out whether any mail was awaiting me at an address which had been given me in the States.

A Subway Ride

I shall always be grateful to several men in the railroad station, none of whom spoke English, who helped me. One man helped me get some money changed into the slotted coins used in Parisian telephones. Another translated the English address into French. But I shall always remember with special gratitude the young man who

stood by me as I made the telephone call, handing me additional coins as the operator twice broke into the conversation to declare in French that the time limit was up, showed me where to catch the subway to Massy Verrieres and set me off in the right direction to Hotel des Flandres. He remains nameless to me, but he was a real friend in need.

The trip to the distant suburb to pick up my mail was accomplished by means of my first subway ride ever and in the very fine and new Paris system. I made one wrong connection but eventually arrived at the proper station. The problem now was to find the correct street address, a situation complicated by having left the instructions I had received over the telephone back in Paris. It was easy enough to state what I was looking for to several persons, "rue de Paris," but quite another thing to understand their French directions about how to get there.

I finally did come to the correct street just as it was getting quite dark and having walked past those French houses and apartments where the shutters are actually closed for the night, giving the streets a very deserted-looking appearance. Two men on rue de Paris (actually "Pari") confirmed that I was near my destination and one guided me to an international student center where an Australian lady gave me the mail waiting for me. The trip back was uneventful except for missing one train due to wrong information.

A Morning in Paris

Having "seen" London in one day, I next endeavored to see Paris in one morning, an impossible task.

MY TRIP TO NORWAY AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The two "musts" on my list were the Eiffel Tower and the Arch of Triumph. Again by foot, I set out for the Place of Concord. We are told that blood literally flowed there during the French Revolution. Among those beheaded in the square by the guillotine were Mary Antoinette and Louis XVI.

Running between Place de la Concorde and the Arc de Triomphe is Paris' most famous avenue, Champs de Elysees. It is a broad, tree-lined street until one comes to a section bordered by various business establishments and the popular sidewalk cafes. The Arch is impressive, being over 300 feet high. Its construction was begun by Napoleon. From the Arch twelve avenues radiate.

Next, to the Eiffel Tower. Being over a thousand feet high, it is easy to pick out and find. Here again was something I had seen so many times in pictures. Crossing over the River Seine, which has cottonwoods growing beside it, I figuratively pinched myself to test whether this was actually the Eiffel Tower reaching above me. From the second tourist level there was a



The Arch of Triumph

grand view over the city and particularly the gardens lying on two sides of it.

Now there was a race against the clock to reach the hotel, grab my luggage and get to the station before train time. To my chagrin I learned that the train to Geneva was to depart from Gare Lyon rather than Gare du Nord. But a faithful cabbie got me to that station in time, with five minutes to spare. Thus I left another of the world's great cities, a charming city where one could spend so much time with profit.

Geneva

Aboard the Trans European Express, the finest railroad train I have ever traveled on, I also had a delicious meal, a five-course culinary delight.

Arriving in Geneva I once again enjoyed the benefits of a tourist service for visiting strangers. A man who did not speak English picked up my suitcase and led me to a number of hotels until he found accommodations suitable for me. It seemed to me that he went far beyond the call of duty, but I was grateful.

My stop in the international peace city was only overnight, but I did meet Pastor and Mrs. Clarence Nelson (LCA) who serve one of the English-language churches in the city. Mrs. Nelson is a sister of Reuben and Luther Youngdahl and bears a striking resemblance to the latter brother. She wrote the very fine devotional book, *God's Song in My Heart*, and I had the opportunity to express my appreciation for it.

That evening before retiring I had some refreshments at an outdoor table down by Lake Geneva. An American boy and a Canadian boy and girl occupied the same table.

The following day, rather than repeating the train ride from Geneva to Lausanne, I took the boat trip on Lake Geneva between the two cities. The day was beautiful and the temperature comfortable. From the boat we had a good view,

although at a distance, of the old League of Nations building. We called at towns and villages on both the Swiss and French sides of the lake.

Zurich

If Geneva is the city of John Calvin, Zurich is that of Ulrich Zwingli. They, together with Martin Luther, make up the great Reformation triumvirate. I saw the church, Grossmunster, in which Zwingli used to preach, but was unable to enter it.

But I was in the nearby Wasserkirche, behind which his statue stands. They were going to have a devotional service in the Wasserkirche at 6 o'clock and that time being at hand, I joined the handful of weekday worshippers. The service was in German, for Zurich is as German as Geneva is French. I don't understand German but I sensed a sincere reverence on the part of pastor and people in the 15-minute service. The church was starkly bare of decoration or appointments.

Due to my faulty understanding of geography, I had supposed that Zurich is nestled in the heart of the Alps. This did not prove true and was a source of disappointment to me. It is a fine city but in my estimation did not live up to its billing as "one of the most beautiful cities of Europe."

But it is a city of church bells. The bells of at least two churches near my hotel sounded regularly. Since I was arising at 6 o'clock in the morning, the lengthy pealing of the bells in one church did not bother me, but I wondered how much it was appreciated by others still trying to get some sleep at that hour.

And it was in Zurich that I saw what came closest to being a "hippie" community, by the Limmat River. Throughout the trip, in general, I sensed a lostness among the young people of Europe. This feeling cannot always be explained, but it was there nonetheless.

[To be continued]



A CHRISTMAS LEGEND

This poem is based on an ancient Christmas legend that the Christ Child wanders the earth on Christmas Eve seeking shelter and food. Any mercy shown to a beggar or other person was thought to be a symbol of the love of Jesus and also that as we do unto others so we do to Him. A lighted candle in the window was to guide the steps of the Child to a house where He was welcome.

Light the candle, Maggie,
An' the curtain fling wide.
Bar not the door, Maggie,
That He may come inside.
For they say He comes tonight,
Mayhap He will see our light,
Shining like the star so bright
In Bethlehem.

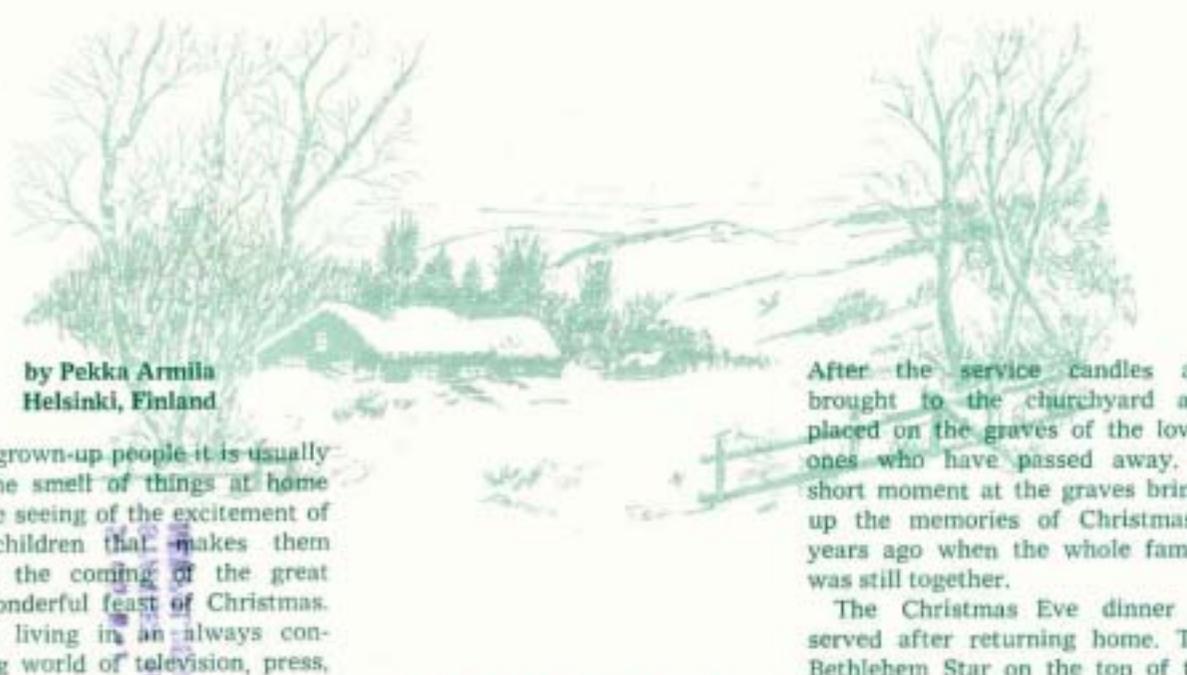
Stir up the fire, Maggie,
Set aflame the glow'n coal.
Warm up the stew, Maggie,
Lay out the Canton bowl.
Just a bowl of broth an' bread,
Just a cot to lay His head,
'Member now there was no bed
In Bethlehem.

Get the pillow, Maggie,
An' the quilt of eiderdown,
The best sheets too, Maggie,
An' the linen white gown.
By this hearthside He will stay,
On a feather bed He'll lay;
There was but the manger hay
In Bethlehem.

You hear a knock, Maggie?
Quick an' lift the latch.
Here's a welcome, Maggie,
The Child has come at last.
Whether woman, child or man,
'Tis the Christ who before us
stands,
Love was born and love began
In Bethlehem.

—Marlene Moline,
Lansing, Iowa

The Lutheran Ambassador



by Pekka Armila
Helsinki, Finland

For grown-up people it is usually only the smell of things at home and the seeing of the excitement of their children that makes them realize the coming of the great and wonderful feast of Christmas. Today, living in an always contracting world of television, press, and other means of communication, our habits and customs are becoming so much alike, no matter where on the globe we may live, that the national traditions get fewer and fewer in the run of the years. So it is also in regard to the Christmas observance in any part of the world.

What used to be a typical Finnish observance of Christmas is at present only in the memories of adults. However, still today one can trace some features of this in the celebration of the birthday of our Lord and Savior, especially in a home where Jesus Christ has His place among the members of the family.

To give an adequate description of the Yuletide in Finland, one has to go back to the first Advent when the time of expecting the coming of Jesus is begun in schools and churches with the singing of that wonderful Hosanna hymn by Volger which tunes the minds to receive the King of Kings on His coming. The closer the Great Day gets the more work is done: cleaning, cooking, baking, preparing gifts, decorating, etc., and the brighter the eyes shine with excitement.

On the morning of Christmas Eve no one stays in bed too long; much is still to be done. The Christmas tree, a spruce cut a few days earlier in the woods or bought at the mar-

CHRISTMAS

IN

FINLAND

ket, is brought in for the children to decorate later at noon. In the afternoon when most of the housework is finished, sauna gives its share to the preparations for the feast. It's there where the last drops of worry and pressure sweat out with the dust of the preceding workdays.

After the sauna everyone in the family gets ready to leave for the Christmas Eve service in the church. On the way out the children put up the oats for little birds, for no one must be forgotten on Christmas. The service is a short one with much singing and a final word for preparation to receive the Lord of Christmas in one's heart.

After the service candles are brought to the churchyard and placed on the graves of the loved ones who have passed away. A short moment at the graves brings up the memories of Christmases years ago when the whole family was still together.

The Christmas Eve dinner is served after returning home. The Bethlehem Star on the top of the tree and the numerous candles underneath spread out warm light in the room. Everybody having gathered around the table, Father, sitting at the end, begins the reading of the familiar Christmas Gospel: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed . . ." After the prayer, Mother brings in the dishes: ham, lutefisk, baked potatoes, carrots, rice-meal with cinnamon and sugar, etc. All these are traditional dishes and practically every table in Finland is set with them. The Lord is then thanked for all the gifts of the table, and the hour of singing Christmas carols and songs follows.

For the small children the culminating point of the day is the visit of "Joulupukki," the old Santa Claus, with his gift bag. Although he is not much emphasized in a Christian family, his visit has always been part of the tradition, Lapland being the home of this old fellow. The gifts are handed out, packages are opened, and the joy of giving and receiving shines brightly. By this time it is almost midnight, and life calms down again, ready for some sleep before the early Christmas morning service.

When entering the packed church one cannot help feeling a little bit sorrowful for the fact that for

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STANLEY HOLMAAS
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most of these people this is the only day of the year which is begun in church. But soon the wonderful message of the Christmas Gospel fills the mind and heart, and the organ lets the joyful hymns of Christmas sound all around the temple. The Savior of mankind is born. He is come to give new life and make us free from sin and death, so that we may live eternally. This is the same message this morning all over the world.

On the way back home in the dawn of the morning you can see the candles lighting the windows all over. Snow is falling softly down to the white earth and the little birds are visiting their oat bunches. At home the family prepares to spend the Christmas Day in peaceful quietness reading, singing, and praising the new-born Child Jesus.

The quiet life of Christmas Day turns into a joyful day of games and sleigh riding on the next day, St. Stephen's Day. And this is also the day of visitation, when the relatives and friends visit each other.

All in all, Christmas in Finland is still a feast of the family more than a great carnival-like day of merry-making with much people around. Nevertheless, the materializing world spreads its ideas here, too, and omits the true spirit of Christmas. In many cases we forget that the greatest gift of Christmas is Jesus Himself, and when we receive Him we have all we need. We thank God for the Christian people in Finland who realize this and keep on testifying for their belief. To them Christ is the main figure of Christmas, to others it is Santa Claus. We pray that this coming Christmas the Lord's Gift may be received in many new homes where He hasn't had room before, whether in Finland or the U.S.A. May we go out, like the wise men of the East on the first Christmas, looking for the newborn King. And when we find Him, let us not throw Him out after Christmas, like we do with the Christmas tree after Epiphany, but let us ask Him to stay in our hearts until we meet Him one day in person.

takes more than that to change lives. It takes a meeting with Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life." It takes a fresh approach which can come only from continually being in His presence where one may taste and see that "the Lord is good." When the message becomes humdrum and routine—whether in pulpit or pew—it is time to take inventory. The "flame" is dying or dead from lack of a daily interview with God.

These men came with doubt and misgivings. They left with triumphant assurance. The story was told them; they followed, and they found the Word to be true. The Word comes to us as it did to the shepherds long ago. It comes with its invitation. God's Book is one continuous "come" from cover to cover. And to those who come, there is forgiveness, there are lifted burdens, there is Life. God's Book is also one continuous challenge to faith. Too often we settle for the minimum and drag our weary steps through the desert when God's intention was that we inherit the land of promise.

Men—and the world—stood at the crossroad that eventful night on Judea's hills. God's message of hope had been delivered. The fate of the whole world, one may say, now rested with those who had heard. Would the message die with them or would it be delivered that others might get to know it too? We may draw a great sigh of relief when the shepherds spoke to one another, saying, "Let us even now go . . . and see . . ." That simple decision led to the reassuring fact that the Word was true. That "now" is the turning point in their experience as it can be in ours. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow may never come. But now is ours to use.

As a young man I dreamed about my native land and looked forward to the day when I could stand where my crib had once stood. I looked forward to seeing faces of loved ones that I used to know and love as a little child over in "the old country." But time has a way

of eluding us. Years upon years have gone by and the dream is still merely a dream. And why? Many things enter in but one thing is certain. It takes more than dreaming and longing to get there. It takes a definite act of the will. It takes a definite decision, as that of the shepherds. Then a "dream" or longing may become an experience never to be forgotten. Too many are just here. They have heard the challenge of the Word. They have felt the call of the "homeland" with God. But—unlike the shepherds—their response did not include the important word "now."

May the response of the shepherds that day long ago become a challenge to us all to come now, and to come, and to come. And to those who come in simple faith, as the shepherds did, you will find the needs of your heart met. May that be our decision and our experience, too, in the year to come.