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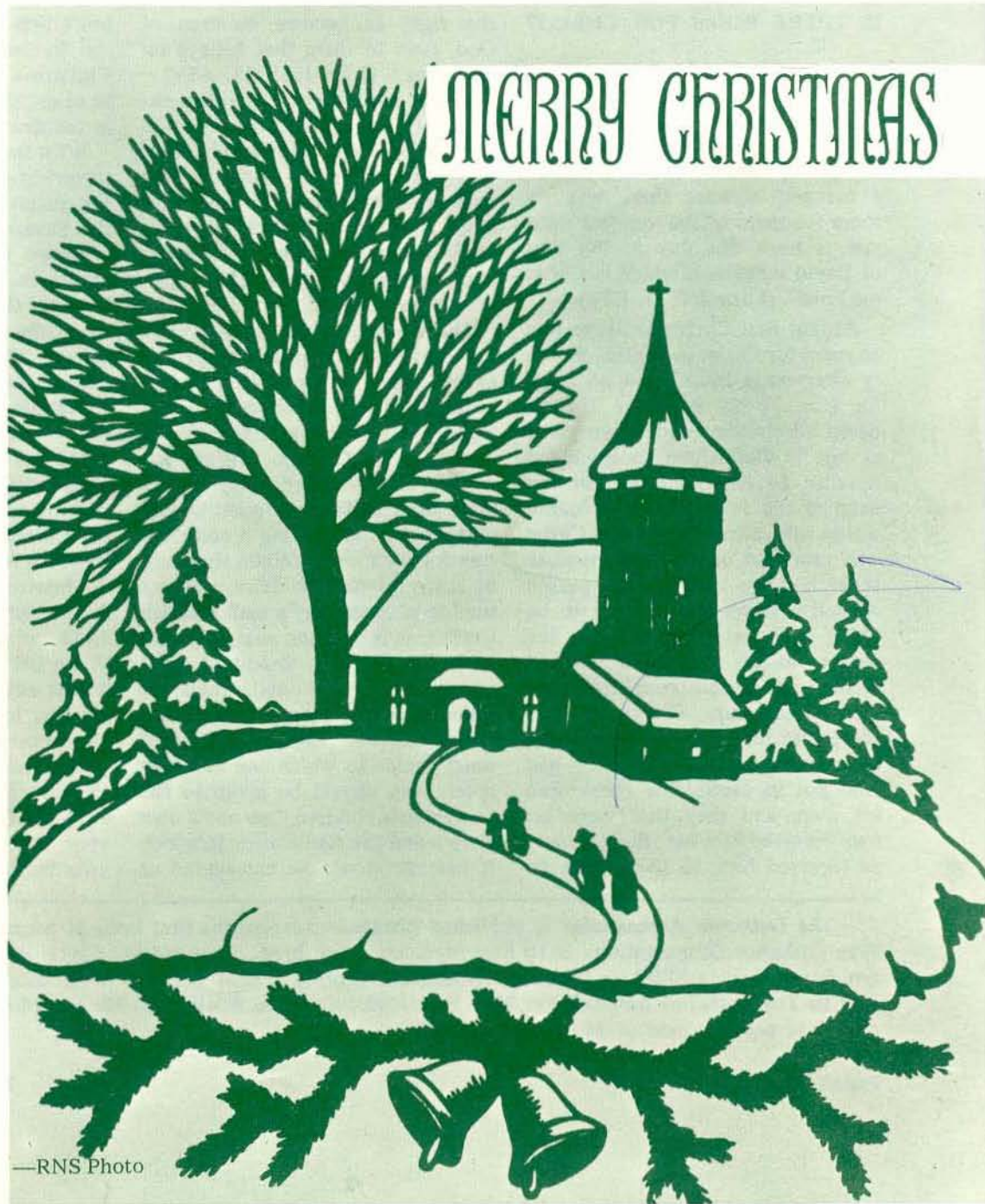
December 13, 1966

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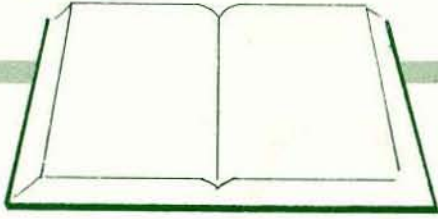
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MERRY CHRISTMAS



—RNS Photo



According to the Word

IS THERE ROOM FOR CHRIST?

Pastor Harold Schafer

"And she brought forth her firstborn son; and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2: 7, 11, KJV).

At that first Christmas there was no room for Christ in the inn. Shortly afterwards Herod had no room for Him in his kingdom. He ordered all children under two years of age in Bethlehem to be killed because he had no room for the King of the Jews whom he feared would take away his throne. Christ was crucified on Calvary because there was no room for a person with His views and actions to be living in the same province as the Jewish leaders. They felt He was turning the people from following their leadership. They believed there was no place for Him in the situation of that day so they had Him put to death. "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he

the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1: 11, 12, ASV).

Today, also, there is many a situation in which there is no room for Christ. With the busyness of this season there are many who are neglecting a daily quiet time with God. They are too much taken up with the external things of Christmas to meditate upon the object of the holiday—Christ Himself.

The business world has been busy for several months informing people of the opportunities of shopping at each particular establishment. Catalogues for Christmas have caused mail jams in Chicago. During the month of November many letters were received from different benevolent groups requesting a contribution for their work. When there are as many as four or more requests for funds in one day's mail because Christmas is drawing near, together with the pressing needs of local opportunities and obligations, it takes grace not to become calloused to all appeals. Yet the individual must decide to which one and how much help should be given to the "neighbor's children," as one's own church and the Association to which it belongs would be considered as

one's first and primary responsibility. In the use of our means this Christmas season, it should never be said, "There is no room for Christ in our distribution of funds."

With the emphasis on buying and receiving gifts there is a danger of not receiving God's gift, which is the Savior Jesus Christ. He comes wrapped in many Christmas card messages. The message of Christ is heralded through the words and music of the Christmas programs. Although the person of Christ is present in many activities of the Christmas season, yet He is often missed. He is cast aside because many are taken up with the wrappings of Christmas, gifts, and get-togethers, and they miss Christ in the Christmas celebration. There is no room for Him in their hearts.

Christmas means salvation, for it is the entrance into the world of Jesus, whose name means Savior. When the Savior enters a heart He brings salvation from eternal death. Do you have this salvation? Have you received Jesus Christ, God's gift to you? This Christmas do not treasure the wrappings and throw away the Gift. Make the Savior your very own by receiving Him into your heart.

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Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory

Mrs. Harold Kilness
Faith, S. Dak.

J-O-Y. As I look at this small, three-lettered word JOY, I am amazed at the bigness of it. Joy can be a state of happiness, pleasure, gaiety, delight and gladness. Generally we associate joy with happiness and never do we expect to find happiness and unhappiness existing

together. Yet as we look at JOY, the expectation of gladness and happiness, we can see sorrow standing right beside it. There can be joy in sorrow as there can be joy in happiness.

Paul and Silas, when imprisoned, were by no means in an exhilarating state of happiness; but they sang songs of praise to God so joyfully that God released them from prison, and the jailor and his family "rejoiced, believing in God" (Acts 16: 34). This is an example of JOY embracing sorrow, sorrow embracing JOY. Again we look to Hebrews 12: 2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Looking at Christ's life we see it encompassing joy, sorrow, happiness.

At Christmastime we ponder anew the JOY-filled Christmas gospel. Mary, the mother of our Lord, sang a glorious song of rejoicing after the Savior's coming was announced to her by the angel. The JOY Mary felt about God's mercy was shared first with Elizabeth and has been passed on from one generation to another through the Scriptures so we might share the JOY of the Savior's coming.

God had promised the Savior to His people many years before Christ's actual arrival and they looked forward with JOY in their hearts at His coming soon. There must have been true exhilarating happiness when, at last, Jesus was born that wonderful night so long ago.

Yes, JOY was given us. Why do we have the feeling of JOY at a small child's birth in a humble stable in Bethlehem? Just an ordinary birth, you say. Was it ordinary? This child was God's Son, our Gift from God. The Gift given to us to show God's deep love and concern for our JOY and happiness. The joyous birth of our Savior ensures us of love, of everlasting peace, of JOY, and of salvation.

The angels, that first Christmas Eve, knew a most wonderful thing had happened when they announced



to the shepherds: "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great JOY, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. . . . Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:10-14).

The star in the heavens shone brightly to lead the Wise Men to Jesus. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great JOY" (Matthew 2:10).

Church bells peal forth their JOY to the World! Unto YOU a Savior is born! Our Savior, your Savior, my Savior—the Savior of ALL who in childlike faith believe and trust in Him as their Savior from sin, death and the power of the devil.

The disciples of Jesus felt the great JOY of Christ's immediate presence with them, but what sorrow crept in beside the JOY in their hearts at the cry of the people, "Crucify him"—and then Christ's painful death on the cross. Those friends of Jesus must have asked themselves at that moment, "Can there be JOY and happiness in suffering and death?" Certainly there could not be happiness. JOY? Yes, there could be JOY in Christ's death on the cross. The disciples soon discovered that JOY on Easter morning when they found the grave empty except for the angel who said, "He is risen!" Christ was risen and He was alive! He had fulfilled God's plan to be born as a child and to die and to be alive again so that all might have forgiveness of sins and life everlasting if they would but receive Him as Savior. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).

Christmas of 1966 is soon here. There is much happiness derived from choosing just the right gift for Aunt Mary, receiving cards from dear friends, attending school programs, guessing what's in this pretty package, baking special delicacies and planning the Christmas dinner menu. To the unbeliever, happiness at Christmas is sought in

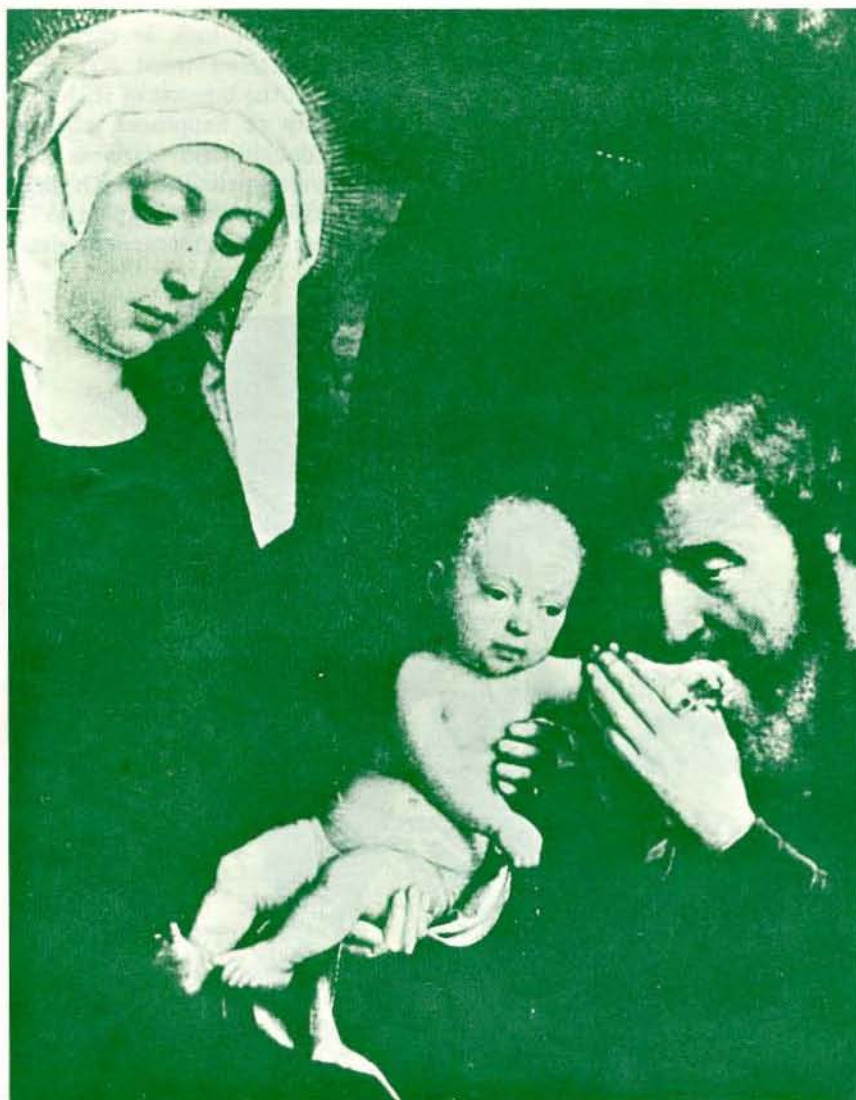
these earthly things because happiness to them is dependent upon these happenings. On the other hand, true JOY can be present without these happenings. There is the inward JOY present in our hearts. There is JOY as we gaze at the Christmas tree.

The tree stands straight and tall pointing directly to heaven, the place Jesus came from and the place where we who trust in Him will someday be. The color of the tree is green. It is alive just as Christ is alive. Look at the bright shining lights which seem to say along with the angels, "For unto YOU is born a Savior." The star on

the tree-top, so sparkling and bright, reminds us of Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born. As I look further at the Christmas tree, I can't help seeing the cross on which our Savior died. Is there sadness and gloom in the cross I see there? Not any more! The Christmas bells ring forth the glad, joyous news—JESUS IS ALIVE!

Now we can listen to the carolers sing and truly rejoice in their hymns of praise and adoration—

JOY to the world!
The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room.



ADORATION
by Garard David (1450-1523)—RNS

IT NEVER STOPS!

YOU may ask, "What never stops?" God's giving to you and to me! Surely at Christmas we are most conscious of what God has given to us. The whole of a Christian Christmas is centered on the fact that God's Son was given that mankind might be saved. The gifts that you and I might share with each other pale into insignificance in the thought of that Gift. Yet many try to have a Christmas without thinking of Christ!

When Christ was given, grace was given. We need forgiveness and mercy because of our sins. In Christ there is redemption, pardon, and justification. Though sin abounds, grace does much more abound, because of Jesus. His grace is sufficient for us, thank God!

When Christ was given, guidance and help to live meaningful and abundant lives on earth were given. "I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly," He said. Ours is a messy and complicated world. Jesus would shepherd us that we might have confidence and never fear.

When Christ was given, hope and assurance for an eternal life for God's children were given. Christ has gone to prepare a place for God's children. What a place that will be!

As a result of this great Gift, many other wonderful experiences are ours.

Surely we cannot forget our Association of Free Lutheran Congregations with our mission program, our schools, our Bible camps, our auxiliaries, our paper, our congregations, our pastors, and many, many things more. How God has blessed and guided the work. Who dreamed in 1962 that by Christmas 1966 so much would be given? We are about 100 congregations where God's Word is taught, where the authority of the Scriptures is recognized. More are joining our fellowship. The future of the Association looks bright. We have a great God!

Surely we cannot forget the blessing of home and health, community and friends. These are so much a part of every Christian Christmas. Yes, God has given so much.

Will we all experience the blessedness of these gifts to us this Christmas? We know that some cannot. Some are on battlefields, separated from home, family, and church, but not, we trust, separated from the Lord. Let us remember them as we pray. But for the majority of us, all of these great gifts can be ours for Christmas.

There was no room for Jesus in the inn at Bethlehem. There is still no room for Jesus in many a heart and home. Make room for Him by putting away things of this earth that the glory of Christ may shine forth into your life. He wants to give you His rich grace and fellowship. Without this there is no real Christmas.

I wish for each of you the joy of receiving all the rich gifts your God would give you this Christmas. I wish to thank each of you for your fellowship in the work of the Association. May God bless you all.

Pastor John P. Strand, President
Association of Free Lutheran Congregations



Edited by Mrs. David C. Hanson

WHICH OF THEM WILL LOVE HIM MORE?

Luke 7:42

Angie sat in one corner watching the visitors who bustled about the kitchen and day room. Some were burdened with cake pans and unopened boxes, others pushed tables out of the way or rearranged chairs. Most of them were freindly; one or two seemed a little uneasy, as if they weren't quite certain what they should do or say.

Without enthusiasm she joined the group that had gathered around a table where inmates and visitors were signing their names (first names only, please) on red construction paper bells that were tied with green satin ribbon. It was evident that this was to

be a Christmas party. But it wouldn't hurt to play games and listen to these people. At least the rule for silence was lifted while they were here, and, if the girls were lucky, they would be allowed to smoke during coffeetime.

By now the women were seated in two rows of chairs facing each other, ready for a relay race that would include carrying a balloon between their knees. Well, she could carry the balloon too, though it wouldn't be easy. The baby was due in six weeks and her weight was beginning to make her clumsy. The rest of the girls hooted and hollered as she struggled with the balloon, "Come on, little mother, you can do it." There was compassion in the eyes of some of the visitors as Angie returned to her chair. "They don't understand us at all," Angie thought. "They think the girls are being mean. A lot they know about our ways."

And then the games were over, and one of the visitors was encouraging everyone to move the chairs into a semicircle around the piano. Worn hymnals were distributed and the girls began to choose carols that were familiar.

Angie sat with her hands folded where her lap used to be, and, as the others sang, she thought of past Christmases. How long ago was it that she had climbed on the awkward orange bus that carried her to the Sunday school Christmas program in North Minneapolis? She must have been about seven or eight years old, and the story of Christmas had been fresh and beautiful as the children presented it. There was a manger scene, and it hadn't mattered a bit that the shepherds were wearing old bathrobes and carrying bamboo fishing poles. And no one laughed when one



of the kings lost his crown as he knelt. Somehow it had seemed proper that the crown should fall at the foot of the manger.

She had returned home with a box of sticky candy and a heart that was filled with the wonder of the Christmas story. In succeeding weeks Angie had met the orange bus quite often on Sunday mornings until she decided that a younger brother should also share this treat. She remembered the hard voices of the older boys, "He can't be your brother . . . you're white, and he's a nigger." Angie had already learned to ignore the taunts of some of the neighbor kids, "Where's your old man? where's your old man?"; but she hadn't expected such a response from the people who talked so much about the love of God. Why even the teachers had whispered behind their hands! After that there had been no more happy hours in Sunday school, and Angie had received all of her training from the mother who was an adulteress in the eyes of God and the community, but who loved her children in a way that attested to the fact that they were all she had in the world.

The carols filled the day room as Angie remembered the Christmas when she was sixteen. That was the year that little John was born. He was almost a Christmas present, and Angie ached to see the son who would be four years old very soon. Just last week the matron had permitted her mother to bring him to a window where she could see him for a few moments, though children were not allowed to visit. Next year she would be home for Christmas, and she would have a decent job to support her children.

Or would she?

One of the visitors was telling the story of the

birth of Jesus Christ, but Angie was reliving the hope of a Christmas of two years ago. The setting was the same—she was serving ninety days—and another group had come to bring the message of Christmas to the inmates. But this time it had been different, for Angie had found a friend in one of the visitors. When she was released she had visited in the home of this strange woman and learned to be at ease with her family. But, though she yearned for their way of life, she could not accept their Savior.

During the next few months her friends had searched for legitimate employment for Angie, but even their Christian friends were afraid to risk hiring an eighteen-year-old with such a record. It was the same old story she had experienced as a child, and even though Angie kept in contact with her new friends, she soon returned to the people who accepted her.

And now it was Christmastime again, and Angie was listening to another Christian woman say, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to *all* the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The speaker was praying now—an honest, heartfelt prayer for those who were without the hope of the Christmas message, and one or two of the girls were crying. The child stirred under Angie's folded hands as she struggled for hope, "Oh God, if only it were true that He came for me."

But it was only for a moment, for the memories of past experience brought Angie back to reality. It was with some relief that she moved clumsily to the coffee table and lit her cigarette.





Luther League Activities

Edited by Jane Thompson

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

"We no sooner get done with Thanksgiving dinner than we have to start on Christmas cookies."

"I get indigestion just thinking about all the food I'll eat between now and New Year's Day."

"I've got my list made out for everyone except Grandma. I wonder how much she can afford to give me?"

"I'm sick and tired of you kids telling me how much you want for Christmas. I've got a good mind to forget about all of it."

"We've got room for only two more at the table. Whom can we invite without making someone angry?"

"Does anyone know where last year's decorations are in all that junk? I just hate dragging out everything for those few days."

"Whom are we going to get to play Santa Claus this year? It's the same headache every time."

"The Christmas program seems to take more and more time every year."

"We can't find enough drivers for the carolers. We'll have to cancel it."

"I don't really feel like giving her a gift, but I s'pose I'll look cheap if I don't."

"I wish they'd get some new Christmas numbers. They sing the same ones every year."

"I suppose we'll have to send them a card even though we didn't get one from them last year."

"Who has time to decorate the church tree? Couldn't we just leave that out this year?"

"My feet are killing me! I'm glad Christmas comes only once a year."

"I had to miss another TV program last night because of those choir concerts."

"If anyone asks me to bake one more cookie for one more party, I'll scream."

"Here, read the Christmas story quick so we can open the gifts. I think it's somewhere in Luke."

"I could have sung that solo in the cantata just as easily as Sue."

So you're sick and tired of those who materialize Christmas for you?

If any of these comments sound like something you have said in the past or that you can expect to hear soon, think twice about condemning merchants who decorate early and who put emphasis on the dollar.

Whether we are young or older, we find ourselves putting the emphasis of Christmas on the "busyness" of the season. No one has time for meditation. Very few take time to give of themselves willingly. Private plans take precedence over those that interrupt one's schedule.

If we are to catch the full spirit of the blessed Christmas season, we must do some honest meditating and deep thinking. Take time out to visit old people's homes, share with neighbors, and actually give of yourself as Christ did. You can then start out the new year with a better perspective on life and on what it cost Christ to come to earth as a man.

WITHIN THE STABLE COLD

At dusk they reached the crowded inn,

"No room," the keeper said;
"But there's a stable 'cross the way
With hay to make a bed."

"But, sir! my wife is ill, you see,
And needs a special place."
"I'm sorry, sir; it's all I have.
There is no other space."

They to the lowly stable went,
Then stopped and looked within.
The sheep and cattle lay about
As dim, the light shone in.

So carefully he made a bed
For her upon the hay.
Then tenderly he held her close
As they knelt down to pray.

The time was long—and weary, too,
That cold December night;
There was no pillow for her head,
No sheets of gleaming white.

No doctor there to care for her,
No nurses where she lay.
'Twas in a stable cold and dark
Where sheep and cattle stay.

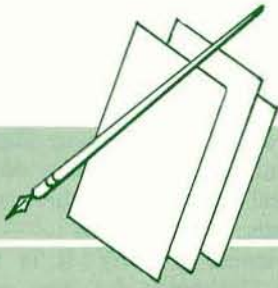
Alone they waited, oft they prayed;
At times she softly cried,
Then tenderly he'd comfort her,
There—kneeling at her side.

At last, a baby's cry was heard,
Within the stable cold;
'Twas Joseph cared for both of
them,
That night there in the fold.

The Baby? Yes, 'twas Christ the
Lord,
Born there upon the hay;
The Savior of the world is He,
Yet in a manger lay.

The King of kings—and Lord of
lords,
The Shepherd of His fold;
This Baby—born in Bethlehem
Within the stable cold.

Erma Lea Hakes
Buffalo Lake, Minn.



EDITORIALS



GOOD NEWS

A radio station we listen to boasts that it has some "good news" in every newscast. This is accomplished by quoting a Bible verse—one for each day—at the close of the reading of the news.

And that's good because many of the newscasts don't carry a lot of really hopeful news. Maybe that's partly due to the fact that evil happenings, tragedies, problems, misfortunes, blunders and accidents are considered more newsworthy than a recital of events that have occurred without a hitch. As a result, any recitation of "happenings" in any news media today can get to be a pretty dreary affair. There are plenty of things going wrong.

The world of two thousand years ago could stand some good news, too. The world of that day had its share of heartaches and human tragedy. The descendants of Abraham according to the flesh were having a hard time keeping their spirits up. Sure, they were people with a promise, but their chances didn't look too bright as the Romans coolly and efficiently ordered their lives.

And then it happened! Birth was given to a man-child by a God-fearing virgin in a humble stable (any stable is humble) at Bethlehem. An angel brought the news to devout shepherds on the Judaeen hillside. The angel called the birth announcement "good news." It was good news because a "Savior" had been born. All of us who write for this Christmas *Ambassador* have caught sight of the import of this event and want to share that with every reader.

The Good News is a message of love, joy and hope. The coming of Jesus, God's Son, tells us that we are loved. The desire to be loved is basic and God gave His Son because He loved us. That's the kind of God there is, One who wants to have fellowship with us and does not want anyone to be lost, to be outside His presence. In Bethlehem we see the love of God.

The Good News is a message of joy. A simple description of joy is "having a good feeling inside." Spiritually, joy comes in being at peace with God. It is the result of being reconciled to the Lord. Reconciliation is possible because of Christ's atonement for sin and it occurs individually when the sinner cries out to the Savior in faith. Christmas tells us that the Reconciler has come.

The Good News is a message of hope. Christmas not only speaks to this life, it speaks for eternity. Christ was born, and He died and arose, not just to salvage some respectability for man's life span of a few score years. He came to open the doors to eternity with God the Father. "This world will pass, and with it common trifles, but God and I will go unendingly."

The Good News is for *all* people. It is not restricted to the middle-class American. Many of us fit into that category and the Gospel has come to us. But it is equally for the wealthy and the poor.

It knows no educational barriers. The Good News was announced first to the uneducated, proof for all time that much learning is not necessary for the reception of God's message. But we must not forget that Paul was a learned man who, consecrated in the dust of the Damascus road, performed a dedicated service to the Master which has perhaps not yet been equalled.

Racial, ethnic and nationalistic differences comprise no boundary to the Good News. Salvation came through the Jews, whom the centuries have wrongly despised. Let us not forget that we are debtors both to the Jew and the Greek, and many more.

There is no distinction as to geographical location. Our missionaries in Brazil will celebrate Christmas in the midst of summer weather, but they will herald the Good News with no less fervency than we do far to the north.

Finally, the Good News is not limited to the "respectable sinner," to the one we may consider not so bad. And God will judge that. But it is also for the greatest, most wicked transgressor. The Gospel is for "upstanding" Dakotans and Washingtonians and it is for the wanderers of State Street in Chicago, whoever has not taken the Good News for his very own.

There is Good News in the world. Do you believe that, reader? Believe it to the extent that you receive it, live by it, let it mold the course of your life?

A great need exists to get the Good News out in this generation. Never before has the Gospel been flooded over the world as today—Bible portions in hundreds of tongues, newspapers, tracts, magazines, radio, television, mass evangelism. But there are those who believe that all of these alone, together, or what have you, will not do the job, and not even begin to do the job. What other way is there? Personal evangelism. One Christian, first of all living the faith, but also *sharing* the Good News with his personal acquaintances and associates. This is what is needed,

they say. And who is to argue with that?

There is Good News in the world. God has given it. He has given His Son. Thank God for Christmas. "Then they said one to another, 'We do not well; this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace'" (II Kings 7:9a, ASV).

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

It is with pleasure that we send this second enlarged Christmas issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* to you. Perhaps it is the forerunner of more ambitious ventures in the future. May God lead and guide.

We have enjoyed reading over the material going into this Christmas number. It has blessed our hearts and we think it will yours, too. Few, if any, who write, are professional writers, but the meaning will come to you if you will let it, sometimes in a very

striking way.

You may find some things disturbing. If that happens, remember that everyday life is pretty disturbing, too. And it is only the presence of the Good News of Christmas that gives any real hope of rising above the unpleasantness of life. Not rising above in the sense of wanting only to escape with one's own skin, but rising in a real concern for others and reaching out, if by any means, to save some.

We give you our Christmas greeting. It is for a most blessed and happy Christmas for you and yours. Whether you are a member of the Association, or one who shares in our work while a member of another communion, or are just an interested friend, we greet you in this glad season in the name of Christ and extend our best wishes for God's best in the coming year.

Merry Christmas!

THE UNEXPECTED

Mrs Arnold McCarlson
Webster, S. Dak.

JANET was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the mailman. Christmas was just a week away and still no letter had been received from Aunt Sally. Ever since her marriage to Bob she had received a check from her for fifty dollars. Had the letter gone astray? Aunt Sue, so prompt, had never failed her before. Presently the mail was delivered and Janet received a small package. She was mystified to find it was from Aunt Sue.

Her fingers nervously tore open the package even if the seal said, "Do not open until Christmas." Had Aunt Sue lost her money? All sorts of ideas raced through her mind—until at last she held it in her hand—a wall plaque! A hysterical giggle escaped from Janet's lips; was this a joke? Had Aunt Sue spent fifty dollars for this? And the inscription... "Only one life, t'will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." Oh, had Aunt Sue gone senile? Where could she hang a motto like this? Where was the check?

Searching in vain through the wrappings, she found a hastily scribbled note. "Jan, I'm so happy. I've finally found real joy; the only thing in life that counts... will write later." Aunt Sue.

Janet sat down with a heavy heart. No Christmas check from Aunt Sue! Why, only yesterday she had selected a beautiful dress for that check. They were going to deliver it today!

In her haste, Janet had forgotten the rest of the mail. Now she spied a letter from Aunt Sue. Eagerly she opened it; maybe it was just a joke. But no—Aunt Sue was serious. She had met the missionaries at Nogales and had become interested in their work. After attending special evangelistic meetings she had rededicated her life to Christian service for the Lord. "I am so happy, Jan," she wrote. "So I know you won't mind not having my check—you have such a good home and husband. Please put this plaque where you can see it daily—and live for Christ as it says. I've already wasted too many years. Merry Christmas and may God bless you."

Jan was furious—how could she pay for her new dress? She needed it for the Christmas party her social club was having, although deep in her heart she knew her closet was full of clothes. Looking down she saw the plaque and picked it up with the intention of hiding it so no one would see it. For certainly it didn't fit in her modern house. Hadn't she already decorated with tinsel, holly, and expensive ever-

green tree? Why, her Christmas would have been perfect with that check from Aunt Sue! Now everything was spoiled! How could she explain to her friends?

Her thoughts went back to several weeks ago. Her pastor had called and asked if she were ill. He had missed her at church lately and would she sing in the choir again. Half-heartedly she wanted to say yes, but when he said that practice was on Tuesday evening, she refused. That was her bowling night. The chairman of the Ladies Aid called and asked if she'd be with their circle this year. She again said no. That afternoon her social club always met. She was too busy to help with the Sunday school, Young People's League, or mission work. Busy, busy with what? Only fulfilling her own selfish desires. Aunt Sue sounded real happy—"Only one life, it'll soon be past"—how could she have slipped into such a rut! No wonder Bob spent so little time at home any more. How selfish could she get?

She picked up her telephone and called the dress shop. "Cancel the order." The she dialed again, "Pastor, I would like to see you, yes, in a half hour would be fine." She picked up the plaque and clutched it tightly to her bosom. Thank you, Aunt Sue, for helping me find myself again. Then she hung it where everyone could see—especially Bob!



As Seeing the Invisible

(A Farmer's Psalm)

I

With splendor you deck the springtime, O Lord;
she is the most beautiful maiden of the year.
I see Your fingers creating anew,
bringing life out of death.

The lark is singing in the meadow,
singing of her Creator.
Buds on the trees are opening,
the pussy willow is soft like a kitten.
Grass is coming alive,
the aroma of flowers seems to fill the earth.

Fields are dry and ready for planting;
soon they will nourish oats and corn.
The farmer is rising early, sowing with joy,
working late into the night.
He sees visions of abundant yields,
a bountiful harvest is the joy of his dreams.
He sees the Creator at work,
providing food for children and flocks.

Though you are invisible, O Lord, yet I see Your
fingers giving splendor to the springtime.

II

I see Your power at work in summer,
Your hand gives growth to fields and flocks.
The farmer gathers fodder in summer,
and enjoys the aroma of new-mown hay.

Sun and rain are a delight to the corn,
moisture and warmth cause it to grow.
Flocks and herds increase by Your power,
calves and colts look to You for breath.

On the Sabbath we worship in Your temple,
we sing praises with men whom You have chosen.
The Church is near our fields,
our flocks pass under its shadow and rejoice.
We praise You with loved ones gone home,
with little sister folded close under the sod,
with angels, archangels, and the hosts of heaven!

Though You are invisible, O Lord, yet I see Your hand
molding men and fields in summer.

III

All creation sings for joy in autumn;
Your arm gives a bountiful harvest.
Waving fields of wheat delight the farmer's eye,
and rows of corn thrill his heart.

A year ago You sent no rain, O Lord;
no moisture came for oats and corn.
The farmer waited for night, longed for morning,
and prayed for rain.
You sent no rain, but the farmer
learned lessons in drought.
Unless You give Your blessing on the land,
the farmer toils in vain.

But now all is changed,
granaries are overflowing with wheat and corn,
Your arm is painting pictures,
changing leaves to amber, gold, and red.
Fields and trees are aglow with a splendor
unknown to kings of earth.
The autumn sunset speaks of evening and of rest,
the horizon gives a benediction to the day.

Though You are invisible, O Lord, yet I see
Your arm providing an abundant harvest.

IV

You crown the year with a blanket of snow, O Lord;
winter is secure in her covering of white.

Cattle and sheep are now in barns,
the noise of flocks is silent in the fields.
In the snow I see Your mighty shoulders
sustaining all the earth.

Except the trees and fields find rest,
they shall not waken in the springtime.

You speak to me in winter;
snowflakes tell of Your love.

In the moonlight I can see for miles and miles.
I see fields all covered with snow.

I see lights in a neighbor's windows,
a soft, warm glow comes from his house and barn.

Though You are invisible, O Lord, yet I see Your shoulders
sustaining all the earth under a blanket of snow.

Roger Ose, Minneapolis, Minn.



WORLD MISSIONS

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE UNTO HARVEST

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM BRAZIL

Greetings in Jesus' Name:

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47, 48).

From Santo Reis, Brazil, to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and from Hong Kong to Sydney culture changes, living standards change, the color of people changes, and climate changes, but, praise God, the old, old story of Christmas, the gospel message, the story of Jesus Christ, never changes, regardless of how man might attempt to do so. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. And once again this Christmas season also we wish to send, in His precious name, greetings homeward-bound to all

readers of *The Lutheran Ambassador*, our Association leaders, pastors, each congregation and Sunday school, the seminary, Bible school and respective staffs.

We join you in praising our Lord and Savior for giving Himself to be born of men and completing His work of redemption that we might be His and that we have this wonderful story to tell to the nations. "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy!" Isn't it wonderful that we, unworthy servants saved by grace, even though as a speck engulfed in an ocean of God's love, can be a part of His marvelous plan which He conceived before the world was formed?

It is our prayer that as the bells toll once again this season, and this message of the birth of our Lord is proclaimed from pulpits, hilltops, street corners, in the great metropolis or the jungle village, that it might as a mighty bolt of thunder penetrate the very hearts and souls of thousands throughout the world. By the grace of God, may it break

asunder the bondage of men who are bent on a self-made Christmas of merrymaking, and may it lighten the darkest corners of heathendom. As the wise men of old were led to the Christ-child by the star of Bethlehem, may many this season be led to Christ by the preaching of His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

This Christmas will be much more meaningful to us than the last, as far as location is concerned, now that we are at our mission post here in Campo Mourao and can help with the work. At the time of this writing we have begun preparations for the Christmas program in the midst of summer weather. We covet your prayers for the work here that the real Christmas message may find room in the hearts of many, that lives may be transformed by the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit. We ask special prayer for little Nida also this Christmas that God will touch her body and make her strong and happy. Nida is the two-year-old daughter of one of our fine believers and is suffering from malnutrition, cannot walk alone yet, and has a large draining sore in her side that has been very persistent. Her parents are very poor and we are keeping her for some time. It would be a wonderful gift if she could be happy and be able to run and play this Christmas. Boys and girls, please pray for Nida.

A special thank you to each and every one at this time for your faithfulness at home. Thank you for support in prayer and with your means that we may be here telling the Good News to this nation. May your Christmas be a blessed occasion and the Lord prosper you in the year to come according to His riches in glory.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58).

Sincerely in Christ,
Your missionaries to Brazil,
Alvin and Frances Grothe
and family



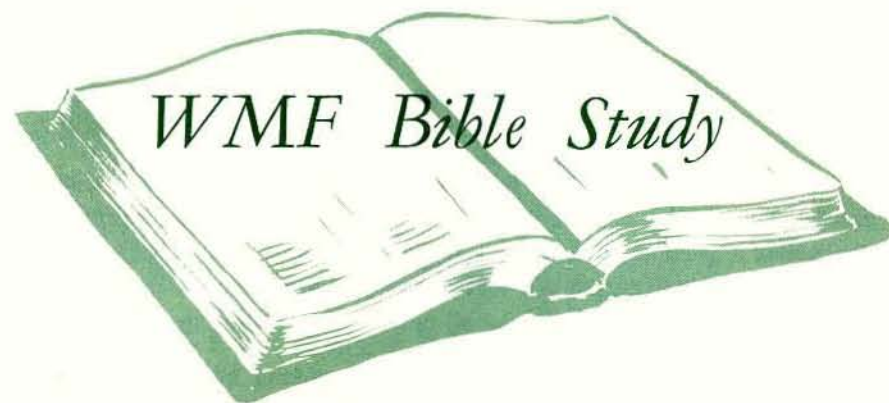
A street scene in a Brazilian frontier town.

From whom did Paul's, yes, even Christ's, greatest opposition come? The religious leaders or the Gentiles?
From whom can true witnesses expect the greatest opposition today? Now the Apostle was forced to leave the synagogue, and a private home became his meeting place. It was a Christian Gentile by the name of Justus who opened his home for Paul's services. What a blessing he must have received. He lived next to the synagogue. When Paul was driven out of the church he started to hold house meetings. If we are driven out of a church because we have told people the truth, there is nothing wrong in having services in a home next to the church, if we do it in love. Paul did not do this in spite, but in love. If any of the Jews still would wake up and repent of their sins, they wouldn't need to go very far to find out that there is redemption and forgiveness in the blood of the Lamb.

How did it turn out with the house meetings? Things really started to happen now. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized, vs. 8. Hearing—believed. That's the divine order. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Now the church was growing by leaps and bounds, and so was the opposition. The Jews really became furious now. Yes, they were even figuring on doing away with him. Did Paul get afraid? Yes, he did. He was an apostle, but he was also a human like you and me. When God works mightily, then Satan works overtime to hinder the work of the Lord by making his servant discouraged.

(Looking up the scripture references is optional. It takes too much time to do it at the meetings. It would perhaps be preferable to do that at home. This would enable each one to take part in the discussion of the lesson more freely.)

(Edited by Pastor and Mrs. Lars Stalsbrotten, Rt. 3, Box 446, Eugene, Oregon 97401. We covet your prayers, and any suggestions or remarks in regard to this Bible study will be most welcome.)



JANUARY 1967

We will be studying Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Lesson I

For INTRODUCTION read Acts 18:1-11.

When we start to study an epistle to a church we think it is very profitable to find out how the church was started. Acts 18 tells us how Paul was led to come and establish a church at Corinth. We in the Association are having varied experiences, too, in organizing new congregations here and there, and it might be well to make comparisons.

The City of Corinth

Corinth was at this time the political capital of southern Greece. Because of its geographical location it was a great commercial center and also a great center for sport. The famous Isthmian games were played

there every other year. They could be compared to the Olympic games of today. In chapter 9 Paul is referring to these athletic games and he is making a spiritual application of them.

What is the apostle comparing the Christian life to in I Corinthians 9:24?

Corinth was also a very wicked city, extremely debauched and degraded. The sin against the 6th commandment was especially prevalent. There was a great heathen temple there with about 1000 priestesses and they were all prostitutes. We will also add, Corinth was a great center for learning. Corinthian schools of philosophies were known all over.

Paul was led by the Holy Spirit on his second missionary journey to visit this city with the Gospel, and he stayed there 18 months, vs. 11. As far as we know, he found only one Christian family there, Aquila and Priscilla. Where had they come from?
Why had they left Italy?

Paul came from Athens and Aquila and Priscilla from Italy, and there they met at Corinth. How wonderfully God leads His people. This did not happen accidentally, but it was planned by the Lord that this couple should become co-workers with Paul. Do you think the Lord had anything to do with the edict of Claudius? Definitely. This reminds us of a similar decree. Luke 2:1
Why was this decree so important?

Aquila and Priscilla were tent makers, and so was Paul by trade. They became partners in a double sense—in tentmaking and in spreading the Gospel. Paul stayed at their home helping to make tents during the week days, and then preached the Gospel at the synagogue every sabbath, vs. 3–4. I wonder how many of us would have faith and courage enough to start a work where we had just one contact?

Paul was an apostle by calling, and a tentmaker by trade. Ludvig Hope says: "Every pastor and every missionary should know a trade." We agree one hundred percent. The last thing that Paul wrote to his son Timothy was this: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lust shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from

the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3 ,4). That time has come now. We are right in it. Everyone who is preaching the real truth will soon find out he is in a tight spot, and then it is a mighty good thing to know a trade.

In his preaching and teaching here at Corinth the apostle used the question and answer method. He was reasoning and arguing. They had open discussion—pro and con—questions and answers. And what was the purpose of this? To persuade both Jews and Greeks that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

Then two more workers came and joined the ranks—Silas and Timothy. They came from Macedonia. As they arrived, Paul was more than ever pressed in the spirit—that is, he was constrained by the love of Christ to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah. My, how the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit can put pressure on His witnesses. Then it is mighty dangerous for the unsaved to listen to their message if they do not want to get saved. Then a sinner will either surrender or become hopelessly hardened. "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3:15).

How does a person become Gospel hardened?

The Corinthian Jews heard God's voice through the preaching of Paul, but they hardened their hearts. They were determined not to believe the Gospel. Not only that, but they resolved to keep others from believing it. They went so far that they even blasphemed the very Christ Paul preached.

Then Paul gave them an object lesson. He shook his raiment. What did that signify?
Matt. 10:14, 15; Luke 9:5; Acts 13:51; 20:26, 27.

He declared unto them, "I am free from all responsibility for your souls. I have sounded out the warning, but you did not heed. Your blood be upon your own head; I am clean, from now on I will go to the Gentiles." He had, like a faithful watchman, given them warning, and thereby had delivered his soul from the responsibility of their eternal fate. He is no doubt referring to Ezekiel 33:8, 9. Do we feel so concerned about the unsaved that we have to warn them from God?

A Catechism for Christmas

Ella Rasmussen
Phoenix, Ariz.

MOTHER, Mother," called Mark, "Uncle Walter is here, and he says he can't stay very long. He says he is in a hurry."

"I'll be right down," answered Mrs. Marshman from upstairs. And a couple of minutes later she greeted her brother warmly. "What a wonderful surprise, Walter! Sit down, and let me bring you a cup of coffee and some cookies I made this morning."

He sat down and enjoyed the "coffee break," as he called it, but hastened to explain that he had made the 40-mile trip to see one of his parishioners who was in the hospital here in very serious condition. "I found him to be slightly improved physically; and I believe this experience has brought to his mind some serious thoughts about life, death, and eternity," said Pastor Lawton. "I must leave now in order to be back to my 'flock' for a special meeting this evening. I'll be coming again in a few days, and will bring some gifts for the children. That will be as near Christmas as

I can make it." With these words he hurried away.

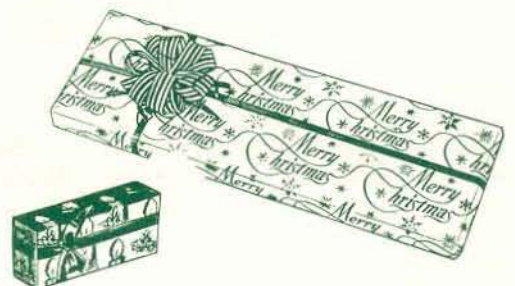
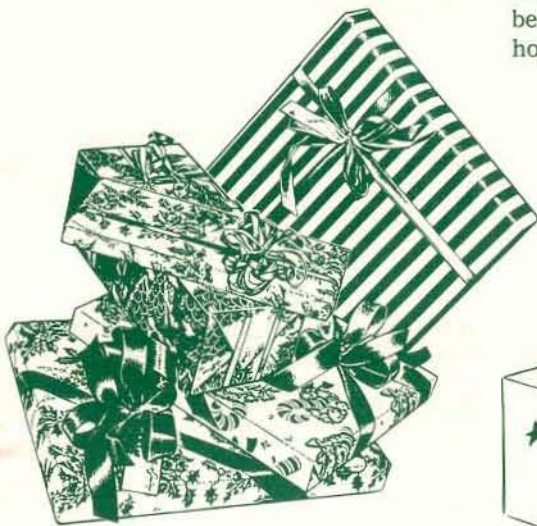
Next time it was 15-year-old Timothy who saw Uncle Walter as he stopped in front of their house. He called out, "Uncle Walter is here now," and dashed out to greet him. A shopping bag full of packages came into the house with them. The children begged to be allowed to open the packages, since it was only four days until Christmas. About this time their father arrived home from work, and he added his approval to that of Pastor Lawton's. "After all, Uncle Walter can't be here to see you open them on Christmas Day, and I think he deserves this pleasure."

Mother and father, as well as Pastor Lawton, found it indeed a pleasure to watch the youngsters open their packages and express their delight. There was a doll, dressed like a deaconess, for seven-year-old Cathy, and a big teddy bear for little two-year-old brother Jesse. Timothy, who loved geology, received a book *The Deluge Story in Stone*. Elaine was thrilled beyond words when she saw her gift was a magnifying glass. This may seem like an unusual gift for an 11-year-old girl, but Elaine had an unusual interest in getting a better look at beautiful things. Her father said he hoped she would always keep this

trait, especially when looking for the good in people. Don, who was 13 just five days before, was happy to find two gifts in his package instead of one gift for both birthday and Christmas. His birthday present was a compass, which brought a very pleased expression to his face. His Christmas gift was a Bible geography, which any boy his age would be apt to enjoy.

There were so many exclamations of pleasure that nobody noticed when Mark opened his package and found a copy of Luther's Large Catechism. "I didn't know there was more than one Catechism," said Mark. "A Catechism for Christmas!" exclaimed Don. "I thought a Catechism was only to study in Vacation Bible School, confirmation class, and maybe Sunday school!" Mark looked puzzled, so Mother suggested that Uncle Walter be given a chance to tell them about this unusual Christmas gift of Mark's while they had some hot chocolate and sandwiches.

"Mark," said Pastor Lawton, "I have noticed that you like to read, have an interest in people who do not know much about the Bible and God, and that you seemed to enjoy the Martin Luther film. Luther was a scholar, and it was because of his interest in people who did not know much about the Bible that he wrote the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism. The Small Catechism was written mainly for children to read and memorize, and



the Large Catechism was meant for adults. You are only 17, but I'm sure you will enjoy it. Luther wrote many other books, too.

"Luther also wrote a number of songs, two of which are 'Away in a Manger' and 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.' These two songs are sung in many parts of the world, and other denominations as well Lutherans recognize him as one of the great 'defenders of the faith' whom God has used to point out errors and to call people to a closer walk with Him through Bible-reading and prayer fellowship.

"God wants young men, and women, to be 'defenders of the faith' today, too. There is a great need for Spirit-filled Christians in every community, to bring the lost to Christ and to teach both children and adults about God and His will. As you read Luther's Large Catechism you might have a few questions, but not many. Actually, it explains things better than the Small Catechism. Look at the first paragraph about the commandment 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' See how well he explains what this commandment means. It is such an interesting and helpful book that I highly recommend it as a Christmas or birthday gift, especially where there is not a copy in the home yet. Well, I must go now. Mary and the children were disappointed that they couldn't come along; but we'll be looking for you to come to the Christmas program at our church if you can possibly make it."

"Thanks so much for the Christmas gifts," said Mrs. Marshman, "This has been like Christmas already! Greet Mary and the children and tell them we are planning on being there for the program." Her husband saw Pastor Lawton to the door and thanked him for the happiness he had brought. "Well, George," said Pastor Lawton, "I like to see my sister when I can, and you and the children, too. You and Dorothy have the kind of home one loves to visit." By this time the whole family was at the doorway and waved good-by as he drove off.

POEM FOR CHRISTMAS

The noisy blue-flies shared the
cave's dim light
With cautious shadows human
movements etched
On rough-hewn walls. The damp-
ness of the night
Clung, heavy, to the earth floor
where they stepped.
From hungry cattle greedy sounds
broke out
And shattered the devotion silence
meant.
But after hunger had been put to
rout
All within lapsed into deep content.
Half-hidden by the shadows in the
cave
Two sat speaking softly of the One
Inside the cattle-trough, asleep:
"God gave
In love this newborn child, His
only Son."
Eternal plans of God with man then
meshed;
The Son of God was wrapped in
human flesh.

Mrs. Avis Hoel Dyrud
Newfolden, Minn.

"CHRISTMAS JOY"

Christmas comes again this year;
Throughout the land is joy and
cheer.
Winter winds howl and blow;
From the sky comes falling snow.

In a town not far away
People travel in a sleigh.
With joy and singing along the
way,
To church they go, it's Christmas
Day.

The Christmas story told again,
Of Him who came to love all men.
'Hark! the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn King.'

May all who love the Savior dear,
Fill their hearts with Christmas
cheer.
Rejoice and know that He is near;
His peace be with you through the
year.

Dale R. Battleson
Champlin, Minn.

THOUGHTS OF A MOTHER

Mary sat on her stool and thought:
What was this news which the
angel brought?
I am only a poor young maid.
How can I be a King's mother?—
I am afraid.

The angel told me not to fear.
I have found favor—He is near.
God will be with me in my strife.
I am to give birth to a holy Life.

A Life who will be the Lord
And lead the nation with a mighty
sword.

A Life who will be a Savior of men
By dying for them, but living again.

Oh, how can such honor be given
me?

But I am a servant for Thee.
I will gladly bear that Child,
Thought Mary as she smiled.

Doris L. Johnson
Carlos, Minn.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

A little donkey, old and gray,
Full weary trudged the long high-
way,

His tiny hoofs a rhythm slow—
How many miles were left to go?

Then through the curtain of the
night
Shone the bright points of welcome
light,

As if the stars had fallen down
On Bethlehem, Judea's town.

"Dear Mary, look, down there be-
low.

See the warm and friendly glow.
Now you can rest your weary head,
For there we will find food and
bread."

Alas, but how full was the inn—
There was no room in Bethlehem.
None but a cave where cattle lay
Upon the straw, upon the hay.

And there God's only Son was born.
Good Joseph lit a fire warm.
Then Mary, His mother, arose
And wrapped the babe in swaddling
clothes.

Marlene Moline, Lansing, Iowa



WOMEN for Christ

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS!

John 9:5, Matt. 5:14

We are not thinking in terms of the bright Christmas tree lights, as pretty as they are, nor of the beautiful lights in an uptown shopping center at this happy time of the year; but we rather think of people—men, women, or children—who believe that Jesus meant it when He said, "You are the light of the world."

This bit of rhyme expresses in part the true Christmas light which is so needed in our world today:

"It is that blessed time of the year again,
When the message resounds, Peace—good will to men,
As it did long ago on that Holy night
When a star in the heavens shone so bright.
The angels announced our dear Savior's birth,
The gift of God's love come down to earth.
Do you know the wonder of Christmas, the Light of the world?
God taking the form of man, His love to unfold?
Have you received Him to be cleansed from all sin?
Are you forgiven, restored and walking with Him?
Then you are the Light of this world, Jesus said,
As He went back to the Father's right hand.

Pray much and abide in Him, the heavenly vine,
And your Christmas light will shine in this land."

At this glad Christmastime it is my prayer that all the saints of God will think of the amazing grace of God and His holiness and spend more time in prayer. How we need to thank God that our life is hid with the Christ of Christmas, in God, and that each day by faith we receive it anew through the working of the Holy Spirit.

How sincerely we should love each other and pray for each other. Then the deadly sin of pride and jealousy which seems to plague us so often would soon disappear. God invites us to draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace through the blood of the Lamb who is our Intercessor. This Lamb of God will make our feeble, defective prayers heard by God the Father and in His time He will answer them.

May our hearts be filled with love for the Lamb upon the throne and then we shall have joy and faith and we will be true Christmas lights.

On this Christmas Eve, as we gather in our living rooms for our Christmas service, let us all vow to pray for the children of God all over the world and pray for our loved ones who are not able to be with us. We talk about prayer but often do not engage in it.

Let us not be like the tree lights or store lights which must be tucked away until next Christmas, but let us shine so God will be glorified through us.

A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Mrs. Herbert Presteng, President
Women's Missionary Federation

WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO YOU?

Kim Jones was slowly walking home from church on Christmas Day. The sermon had somewhat disturbed her.

The pastor had asked the question, "Do you have room in your heart for Jesus or will you turn Him away like the inn-keeper did? Can you give Him a better home than a stable?"

Kim really pondered over these questions. She had always liked Christmas but not for what it really means. She liked all the presents she received and she received them all joyously. All except one, that is, that one was Christ. She had never really accepted Him. Sure she went to church and Luther League, but she didn't really know Christ.

This bothered her all day. She read many verses in the Bible that day but the one that really stuck with her was, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Before she went to bed that night she asked Christ to come into her heart. Then she was able to honestly sing the words the angels sang the night Jesus was born, "Glory to God in the highest."

Are you able to say this? If not, come to Jesus right where you are and just as you are. Do it right now before it is forever too late! Then Christmas will really mean something to you.

Joann Ness (age 15)
Wilton, Minn.

ON the barren and rockbound western coast of Norway in a fishing village between Egersund and Flekkefjord I was born and grew to young manhood before setting sail for that wonderful land we as children had heard so much about. We heard about the opportunities awaiting any young man who was willing to work, so I accepted that challenge. I landed in Boston in 1905 after a twelve-day journey across the North Sea, then across England by train to Liverpool where we boarded a steamer named *Ivernia*. We encountered some rough weather crossing the Atlantic, but to me it did not seem so bad.

My thoughts often go back to Christmas at home with parents and brothers and sisters in Norway, remembering how the Lord answered the prayers and supplied the needs for our family of eight. My dear parents were devoted Christians who took God at His Word and His promises at face value. I am thinking especially of one incident which made a deep impression on my young heart. I would like to share it with you.

Times had been hard that fall and winter with much storm and rough weather so the fishermen who depended on the ocean for their livelihood were unable to venture out on the stormy sea to provide for their families. It was nearing Christmas-time and I can recall how some of the men would go out on an observation point. With their faces toward that stormy ocean, I am sure that many of the men, including my father, sent a prayer up to the Lord they loved. They did this not for selfish gain, but that the Master who stilled the storm on Galilee would hear their prayer and calm the raging sea so they could go out and pull in their nets and get a catch for their families' needs.

The following day, which was just two days before Christmas, it began to clear and the winds moderated so that toward noon the hustle and

bustle began over at the village as the fishing gear was put in order. There were no power motors in those days, so boat propulsion was by sail or good oars and strong arms. As the oldest child in the family, Father took me and my younger brother along.

The weather was just right for fishing, with a little wind so we could use our sail. We did not have time to go out to the best fishing place, which was about two miles from shore, so we began trolling closer to shore and a prayer went up to God for a catch of fish.

Thinking of this now I am reminded of what Jesus said to Peter in John 21:5-6: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat." I remember that our lines were heavy with large lead sinkers, as my brother and I each held a line also because Father had to handle the sail and oars. What a happy boy I was when I caught the first large fish and I had to hand the line over to Dad, for as a ten-year-old boy I could not handle the 6 to 10 pound fighter. We kept on until we had a large catch and Father said, "Boys, we better start for shore before it gets dark."

About one mile from home, there was an inland store where farmers brought their products to sell or trade for fish which the fishermen brought in, so as soon as the boat was secured, we started out to sell our fresh fish. Father had only one worry and that was that he was afraid that the farmers had all left for home since the day was far spent; but all the way he was singing praises to God for His goodness to us and, no doubt, praying at the same time. Again God heard the cry of His children and somehow kept some farmers there waiting for fish to be brought to the store, for they must have some for Christmas Eve, which was the custom in that area. They bought our whole catch and what joy we, as boys, experienced in our hearts to know that we had such a great



Answered Prayer at Christmas

T. L. Sand, Spicer, Minn.

God who was able to send the fish toward our lines and also to put it in the hearts of those farmers to wait long enough at the country store for us to get there.

I am now reminded of what the Psalmist says in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

The Antiphonies of Christmas



Pastor A. L. Hokonson
Faith, S. Dak.

The proximity of Christmas is usually signaled through advertising. Buying and selling have become the index of nearness of the Savior's birthday. And so a challenge is presented to the Christian, how best to prepare for Christmas.

There is no better way than to follow the example of Luke. No sooner have we passed through the vestibule of his Gospel than we find ourselves within a circle of harmonies. The perfect joy of the message of Christmas is the salient feature of the Holy Spirit's presentation. We cannot improve on that portrait. Four pious men and women who have led quiet, prosaic lives break into song, and then lapse into complete silence like the century plant which throws out a solitary blossom in the course of a hundred years.

In this circle of harmonies, we see on the one hand, Zacharias and Simeon, the one chanting his Benedictus, and the other his Nunc

Dimittis. Facing them, as if in antiphon, are Elizabeth and Mary, the one singing her Beatitude, and the other, her Magnificat, while high overhead come the sheltered strains of the heavenly hosts enriching the Advent music with the Gloria in Excelsis.

Only the Holy Spirit of God could bring to mankind such a rich plenum of spiritual concentration as that pictured by Saint Luke in his Gospel of harmonies. It seems that the rich potential of the music of the Old Testament dispensation, latent for so many centuries, now bursts forth in an angelic chorale, the Gloria in Excelsis. "That which angels desire to look into" (I Pet. 1:12) has burst forth in an ecstasy of glory which only the "Word of God" could reveal. The Gospel-power of angelic rapture is thus revealed in song with all the resources of heaven back of its proclamation. When the angels sing, who are we to be silent? Heaven's revelations come to lofty minds. Just as the loftiest peaks are the first to greet the dawn, so the

humble shepherds of Bethlehem's field were readied to view the eternal landscapes. Their minds and hearts were not controlled by flocks and markets, but sensitized to eternal expectations. So when the light burst, they were there and ready. Though their hearts were stilled with the plenitude of the heavenly chorus, yet the filtered character of these shepherds acquiesced and became quiescent both to the truth of the heavenly communique, and to its source, and thus led them to Bethlehem's manger.

Thus we see the influence of the Holy Spirit in the birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ. The Word says, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit," "Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit." Simeon "came in the spirit into the temple," and Mary says, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." These sacred hymns are not the product of unaided intellect. They are the work of the Holy Spirit, and show the gradations of yielding to the power of the Comforter. The hymns of the church are, in essence, comforting, and this is also true of these sacred songs of joy in rapture.

Elizabeth's introit was uttered under intense feelings. It is the music of the storm, "for she lifted up her voice with a loud cry" (Luke 1:42). Mary's song, on the other hand, is calm, the hymn of "the quiet resting place." She spoke as if the spell of divine peace were upon her soul. When Elizabeth finished, Mary simply continued. Though her voice was lower, the thought was higher and more majestic in its sweep. Elizabeth's loftiest reach is Mary's starting point. She hastens to gather all the eulo-

gies bestowed upon herself to Him who merits all praise. Her heart is turned to the experience of the past. With the exception of the statement, "that all shall call her blessed," she is concerned with the overwhelming deeds of God in relation to the momentous event of the present.

The benedictus of Zacharias follows the Magnificat of Mary, not only in time, but also in sequence of thought. It retains the form and language of the Old, but breathes the spirit of the New Dispensation. It is unique that our first three Christian hymns should have their birth in the same unknown city of Judah, in the same house, and possibly in the same room. It

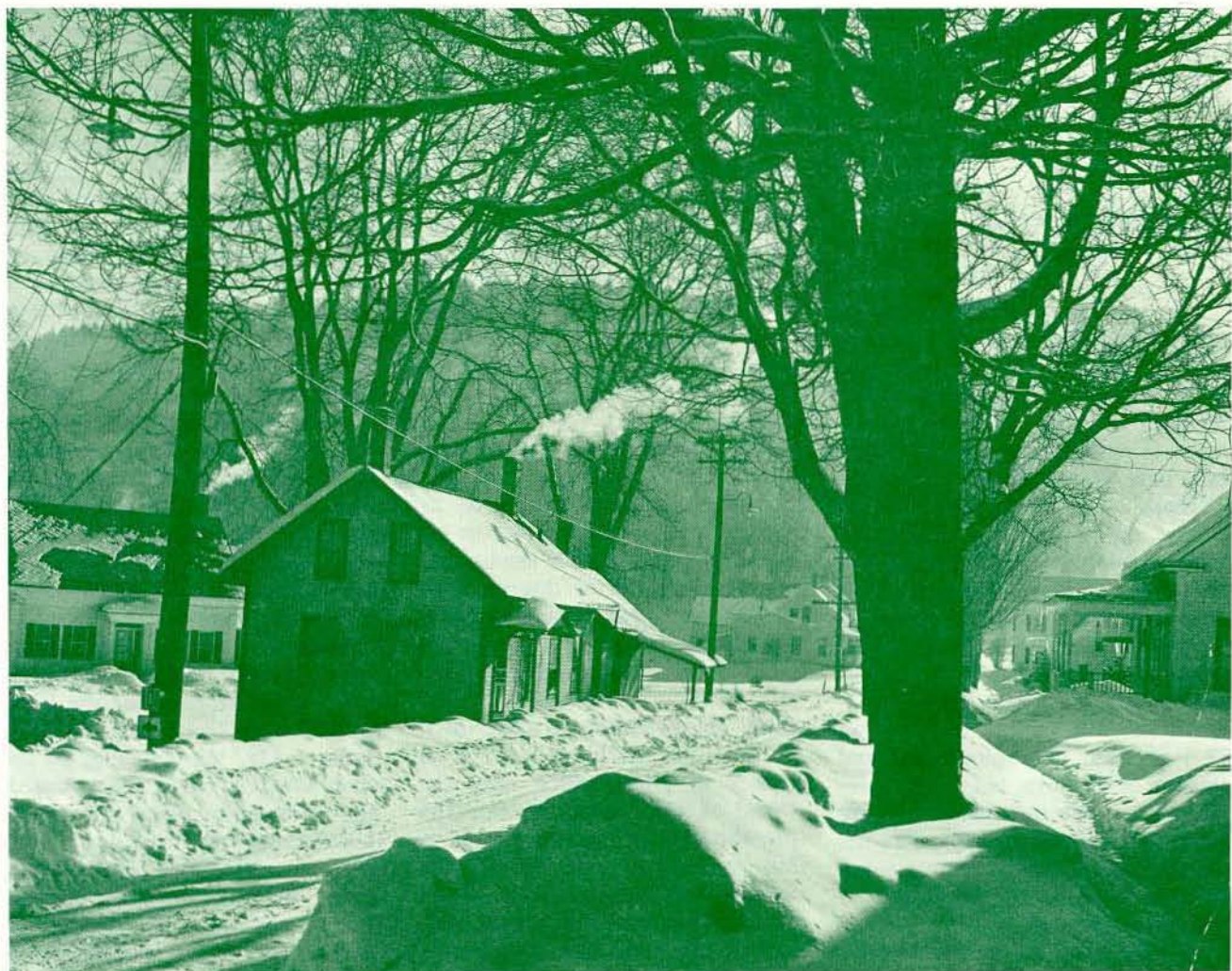
is as Cowper sings in one of his hymns, "He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will."

Zacharias gives us a wider outlook into the divine purposes. He sings of the "salvation of the Lord. The Lord has visited his people and wrought for them redemption." This Savior, whose advent the inspired priest proclaims, is no mere national deliverer. He is the Redeemer, leading to salvation, to righteousness and holiness, and to a service that is without fear.

The fourth singer is the aged Simeon with his Nunc Dimittis. Zacharias has seen the spiritual nature of this near-salvation, but only as from the God of Israel. The

aged Simeon stands on a higher Pisgah. From the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple, he proclaims Christ, the Savior of humanity, "a light for the unveiling of the Gentiles," "prepared for the face of all people."

Just as the Ark of Israel was borne by four of the sons of Kohath, so here the ark of song and prophecy is borne by four sweet singers, following each other in regular, rhythmic succession, the thought moving forward and outward in ever-widening circles. Thus also, may God's holy Word, through these messengers of song, lead us into a fuller appreciation and preparation for the advent of our Savior Jesus Christ in this year of 1966.



WINTER IN VERMONT
—Standard Oil Co., by RNS; photo by Bubley

Another Mary

Eula Mae Swenson
Fargo, N. Dak.

THE twilight had melted into the darkness of Christmas Eve. Mary carefully stirred the fading embers in the rusty drum stove. She pulled a multi-colored blanket carefully across her slender shoulders as the wind clapped against the door of the adobe hogan. Methodically she prepared a supper of fry bread and coffee as the family, including Grandmother, sat on the earthen floor around the fire absorbing all the heat they could. This was the time of day she enjoyed so much, but tonight she did not hear the children chatter, nor did she listen to the Navajo legends her husband retold. She did notice, however, Grandmother deftly fold a worn blanket to fit the cradleboard. Soon, perhaps tonight, they would need it to cradle Mary's expected newborn child.

A bleating lamb's cry brought Mary out of her reverie. Gently she folded him under her blanket as her thoughts went back to a visitor who had come just before the sun slipped behind Big Pointed Rock. This very night, the missionary had told her, was Christmas Eve.

She had heard a story about a Mary of long ago as the man read from a Book: "Do not be afraid, Mary... and while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn... For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord... And lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them till it came to rest over the place where the child was... For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life!"

Then the man had prayed: "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

There is room in my heart for Thee."

The darkness absorbed the messenger as he left the door, but pictures kept tumbling through Mary's mind: a manger of straw, a gentle lamb, lowing cattle, an earthen floor, a Mary and her Babe, ... all so familiar to her own humble home. Over and over she could hear the words: "God so loved that he gave his only Son... there was no room... a star led them... not perish... have everlasting life..." No room? She wondered why. Always in her crowded home there was room for one more! It was all beyond her understanding, for she had never heard, but a voice within seemed to whisper that these words were Truth. And she longed to hear more.

No one seemed to hear the door unlatch as Mary stepped out under the Christmas sky. The heavenly lights seemed to cast a holy beam on the sand and rocks of Navajoland. As she gazed upward she wondered about the other Mary and the other Babe. Perplexed and eager to know more, she wondered how soon more knowledge and understanding of these words would come to her. She fervently hoped it would be soon. Until someone came to tell more, she must wait. An audible sigh escaped her lips as she softly whispered; "Maybe, maybe by next Christmas."

ONE WINTER DAY

Near Bethlehem, one winter day,
Some shepherds left their flocks to pray.

They did not stop to question why
Celestial choirs sang in the sky,
Or why the Son of God was born
Within a lowly stable warm.

They did not ask, "How can we go?
We're busy with our sheep, you know;

There're lambs to raise and wool to shear—

So could we wait another year?"

They did not say, "How can we stop

Before we've had a chance to shop
For quite the proper gift to bring
To gain the favor of our King?"

They did not ask, instead they came—

Oh, would that we could do the same,

That we who deem ourselves so wise

Could see the world through simple eyes.

Near Bethlehem, one winter day,
Some shepherds left their flocks to pray.

Marlene Moline, Lansing, Iowa

ONE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

The night is crisp, not cold; the pale moon

Beams light down from its blue-black canopy.

It is the Sunday night before the day

Of Christ the King whose birth we celebrate.

Our town is quiet now as street lamps shine

As if to rival Heaven's galaxies.
I climb a nearby hill and cross the bridge

To look out on the slumbering countryside.

I think how once a greater light broke in

Upon another sleeping hillside town,

Announcing One who as a Stranger came

Bearing the message that would shake the world.

His star long since has gone from Bethlehem's sky

But other stars are there to shed its glow.

Those lonely sentinels of hope above

Tell me that Christ has come again tonight.

Pastor Edward A. Johnson
Hay Springs, Nebraska



Are You Ready for Christmas?

Many times during the last few weeks you have heard that question. Radio and television ads keep reminding us of an endless variety of merchandise that we must select now in order that we might be ready for Christmas; items that are necessary to make us happy. The housewife should have that certain platter for serving her Christmas turkey more graciously. The husband must have a good supply of certain brands of liquors in order to be a gracious host, the liquor ads tell us.

Soon after the first of September a local department store displayed a decorated Christmas tree, complete with gayly wrapped parcels under it. They were reminding every customer to get his Christmas shopping done: Be ready for Christmas.

Is this what getting ready for Christmas should mean? It would indeed be a very empty Christmas if commercialism were the center of it. Are we so busy with activities during the weeks preceding Christmas that we forget its real meaning? True, getting ready for Christmas—the real meaning of Christmas—should not be left to just a few weeks before December 25. Throughout the twelve months of our year we should remember that but for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we would be lost and without hope. Life without our Savior's coming would be meaningless.

Life is uncertain and unpredictable at best. Our faith in Jesus Christ is the only sure and dependable source of joy and peace in our lives.

Are you ready? Not just to celebrate the birth of our Savior, but also for His second coming? When

should we get ready? Matthew 24:44 says, "Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." Matthew 25:10b tells us, "And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." Isaiah 28:20 says, "The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." I Peter 3:15b says, "And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

It is the all-important thing in our lives to be ready now. If Christ should return this Christmas Day for His own, would you be left sitting amidst gaily colored wrappings? Much time had been spent getting temporal things ready for Christmas. How much time was spent with God preparing for His return?

How can we be ready? Let us turn to God's Word for the answer. John 3:3 says, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 14:5b, 6 relates, "How can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Then our familiar John 3:16, 17, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

we shall be saved" (Acts 15:11). And finally, Acts 16:31, "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

My prayer is that all the commercialism we see all around us will not crowd out the real meaning of Christmas. That the glitter of the gayly lighted trees and streets in our towns will not dim our hearts and souls to the glory of God that outshines any colored lights man can devise. May the glory of that first Christmas Eve shine on us today and draw us closer to our Savior and bring others into the fellowship of believers. We wish all a blessed Christmas.

Mrs. Russell Duncan
Fargo, N. Dak.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas comes around each year,
Bringing peace, and joy and cheer
To members of the fallen race,
Who accept God's Gift of grace.

"God so loved the world, He gave"
His Son, the human race to save.
Jesus came, He lived, He died;
God's law completely satisfied.

Unto us a child was born,
On that early Christmas morn.
Unto us a Son was giv'n,
God, Himself, came down from
heav'n.

We thank Thee, Lord, again today,
For Christ, who is the Truth, the
Way.

May we daily live with Thee,
Till Thy face in heav'n we see.

Trygve F. Dahle, Sr.

The Lutheran Ambassador

IF I COULD BECOME LIKE ONE OF THEM

Members of the Johnson family were busily preparing to attend the annual Christmas program.

This year, as in past years, the mother and children urged the father to attend. Again he refused, saying, "What's the use? I do not believe in the Christmas story."

Mr. Johnson, who prided himself on looking at things realistically, had often told his wife, "Now if God *did* send His Son to earth, do you suppose He would send Him as an infant and in such poor surroundings? No, if God *is* God, He would surely not send His Son in the form of an ordinary man."

The family left to attend the evening service and Mr. Johnson settled down with his newspaper.

Later in the evening he became startled when he heard sounds of something hitting against the window. Putting on his parka, for it was bitterly cold, he stepped outside.

He discovered a flock of birds had been attracted by the lighted window and were flying against it.

The farmer's heart was touched by the plight of the freezing birds, and he went to open the barn door so that they might fly inside.

The birds, however, did not notice the open door, and continued to cluster around the house.

The farmer then went and turned on the lights in the barn and spread some feed on the floor, thinking that that might attract the birds. Still the flock would not venture in.

In desperation, the farmer tried to chase the birds inside, but they

scattered in every direction.

"Foolish birds," thought Mr. Johnson. "I want to help you and yet you are afraid. There you would have light, warmth and food, and yet you will not go in."

Reflectively, he thought, "The only way I could bring them in, so that they would no longer be afraid, would be if I could become like one of them and lead them in."

Just then, upon the chill air, came the peal of church bells in the village. Suddenly the pieces fell in place and Mr. Johnson did believe that God sent His Son to earth as a babe in the manger!

Submitted by Doris Overby,
McLeod, N: Dak.

CHRISTMAS AGAIN

It is Christmas again, and I am reminded of a little story I would like to share with you.

Ronnie could hardly wait for the sharing period at kindergarten. He had brought his much prized manger scene to show to the others. As he put each piece in place, he would comment, "This is a wise man; this is a shepherd." But the children kept asking, "Where is the baby Jesus?" He set the last piece in place — it was a sheep. Tearfully, he said to the teacher, "I've lost the Baby Jesus."

We have been preparing for Christmas. We have shopped for gifts, decorated the house, sent cards, and the many duties have taken from some of us the last reserve of energy and patience.

How tragic it is for us if we discover at the close of our preparations for Christmas that we, too, have lost Christ from the scene. Christmas is the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, and in our hearts and homes we should make Him central in our celebration.

And now, when old, sweet carols bring to mind,

Our holy Savior's birth,
Within your heart may there be
all

The joy He brought to earth.

Dagny B. Berg
Seattle, Wash.

TO THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM

O Thou Son of God and Son of Man. Glorious everlasting Gift from heaven. In swaddling clothes and manger bed. Shepherd of Israel's flock and Saviour of all mankind. Denied and despised, maligned and neglected. Born in humility, and suffering death in shame. Oppressed with hunger, we come to Thee for Living Bread. Parched with thirst, Thou hast the Water of Life. Tired and weary, Thou art Abiding Rest. Risen in Power and clothed in Majesty. Head of the Church and King of the Jews. Dear Friend of children and Guardian of the weak. Our Hope, our Teacher and Exemplar. Regenerator of fallen man. Bearer of burdens and Sharer of joys. Possessor of infinite Strength and Author of divine Wisdom. Thrill of childhood's wonder. Sweetness of Advent reality and Revealer of joyful mystery. Thou blessed Redeemer of God's elect. Light, Life and eternal Power. Incarnate Love of God in man. At Whose birth the heavens rejoiced. The whole universe lay wrapped in mysterious wonder. The pilgrimage of loving women and kind men bends its way to Bethlehem. Hail, O Christ, Thou Bread of Life. Almighty God and Everlasting Father. Great Prince of Peace eternal and Hope of all Thine own. On bended knee we raise our cry. Return again we pray Thee. Amidst the tumult, noise and strife, our hearts call out to Thee. Return, Lord Jesus. Cause the heavens to flash, with supernal radiance, Thy Dignity and Might. In gladness Thy Church longs to meet Thee in the Rapture of delight.

Rev. Elias Newman
Minneapolis, Minn.

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HIS NAME IS AT THE TOP
JESUS SAID,
"Seek ye FIRST the kingdom of
God..."

Matthew 6:33

I had the nicest Christmas list,
The longest one in town,
'Til Daddy looked at it and said,
"You'll have to cut it down."

I knew that what he said was true
Beyond the faintest doubt,
But was amazed to hear him say,
"You've left your best Friend
out!"

And so I scanned my list again,
And said, "Oh, that's not true!"
But Daddy said, "His name's not
there,
That Friend who died for you."

And then I clearly understood,
'Twas Jesus that he meant;
For Him Who should come first of
all
I hadn't planned a cent!

I'd made a Christmas birthday list,
And left the Saviour out!
But, oh, it didn't take me long
To change the list about.

And tho' I've had to drop some
names
Of folk I like a lot,
My Lord will be the FIRST now,
because
HIS NAME IS AT THE TOP!

—Baptist Bible Tribune

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