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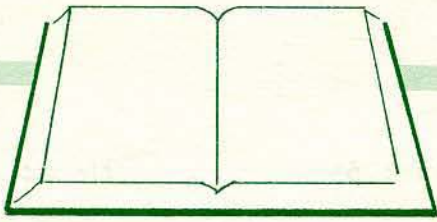
No. 24

LUTHERAN

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—Religious News Service Photo



According to the Word

A REMARKABLE CONVERSION

Read Acts 9:1-30

Awakening and conversion is the resounding theme throughout the book of Acts. Vast numbers are converted in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. A great awakening comes to Samaria under the ministry of Philip. An Ethiopian traveler is converted while reading the words of the prophet concerning Christ. Perhaps the highlight of the entire account is the dramatic conversion along the Damascus road, when Saul of Tarsus met the Lord.

The determined persecutor was on his way to Damascus. His mission: to capture and imprison as many disciples of Jesus as he might find in Damascus. Before he reached his destination, however, the Lord himself intercepted. There, in a blinding light which eclipsed the noonday sun and blotted out his vision, Saul fell to the ground as one stunned and heard a voice saying to him. . . "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" Despite all his religious knowledge and zeal, Saul was a complete stranger to Jesus, and could only reply by asking, "Who art thou, Lord?" The voice from heaven spoke again: "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." In that moment, on his face, trembling before the Lord, Saul had his awakening. Suddenly his entire life, marked by hatred and violence against the disciples of Jesus, became a serious matter.

A consciousness of sin against the very Son of God overwhelmed him. The words from heaven kept hammering at his conscience, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." His vicious attacks upon the Christians had actually been attacks upon Christ. His former life which he considered honorable in the sight of God had actually been a life of rebellion.

Not all conversions come as a sudden, brilliant flash of soul illumination. The outward manifestations often differ, yet always there is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The call of the Lord becomes unmistakably real and personal. There is a confrontation with the fact of sin. One's own righteousness is exposed for what it is, only filthy rags. The sinner stands stripped in the sight of God.

While Saul may not have realized all that was happening in that moment outside Damascus, a monumental change was taking place in his life. The aggressive man-hunter of the past is now praying. In trembling tone he cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" What a marvelous change!

Conversion is essentially a change of heart, a spiritual rebirth. We recall these words recorded in Ezekiel 11:19, "I will put a new spirit within you; I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh." A leaflet by Concordia, "What Lutherans Teach," explains this very well. "Conversion is not a mere reformation of habits, but a

change of heart. It is brought about by the power of God working through the Word; and takes place in and through the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

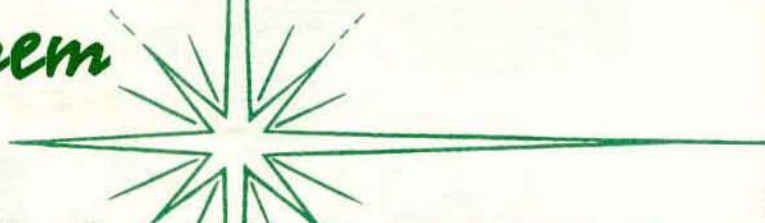
It is possible to be awakened, yet not converted. Not a few awakened souls have pursued the course of reformation, attempting to please God and gain salvation by improved behavior. Such persons may attempt to pray, read the Word regularly, become more faithful in church work, etc. While these things are in themselves commendable, they are not the same as conversion. Indeed, they may even lead one further into a life of self-righteousness. Conversion is a turning, not only from sin, but from one's own works as well, to embrace the merits of Christ alone for salvation.

The converted person will love what he once hated, and hate what he once loved. The disciples of the Lord, whom Saul once hated and persecuted, became his closest friends. One of these, a man in Damascus named Ananias, was the human instrument used of God to help him. Ananias had certain reservations about this man, but the Lord said to Ananias, "Arise, go into the street called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth." No longer is he the dreaded persecutor. He's a changed man. Behold, he prayeth!

—Jay G. Erickson

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A Visit to Bethlehem



**PASTOR EDWARD A. JOHNSON
HAY SPRINGS, NEB.**

What is it like to visit our Savior's birthplace today? Early in October we were privileged to have that experience.

Our automobiles rolled into Bethlehem from Hebron on that bright, warm Friday forenoon, headed for the Manger Square. We were 29 Americans on the Bible Lands Tour led by Dr. August W. Brustat, a pastor from Scarsdale, New York, and a noted scholar and writer on archaeology and Bible history.

We already had stopped at the edge of Bethlehem that morning to visit Rachel's tomb. Then we had left for nearby Hebron to see the 2,900-year-old Oak of Mamre under which Abraham often had camped. Here he had entertained angels unawares; here he and his wife Sarah learned that they were to have a son named Isaac. We had hoped to see Abraham's tomb inside the Mosque of Abraham in Hebron, but Friday is the Mohammedan Sabbath and no unbelievers were allowed inside. The glares which the Arab mosque-bound worshippers cast at our party of white Christian Americans told us that we were unwanted intruders. John, our guide, a 24-year-old refugee Arab Lutheran born in Nazareth, said: "They hate us here."

After this negative experience we drove back to Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity on the Manger Square. This church stands over the stable where Jesus was born. Bethlehem, a town of 6,000 in Jesus' time, claims 41,000 residents now. John said that of the approximately 2,000,000 inhabitants

of modern Jordan, 13 percent (260,000) are Christians and of this number nearly 215,000 are said to reside in the Bethlehem area. It is to their credit that the modern city looks neat and clean to the incoming traveler—unlike Jesus' home town, Nazareth in Israel, which still looks as old and dilapidated as it must have in Jesus' day.

We entered the church through a door so narrow that we had to stoop. John told us that the door had been built that way to keep animals from desecrating the sanctuary. The church, built by the Emperor Constantine in 327 A.D., is now the home of six faiths. Each Christmas Eve the six congregations hold their individual services here, and the famed bells in the tower peal out the glad tidings of the Savior's birth. Outside in the square the giant Christmas tree is decorated and lighted. This is not an evergreen brought in for the occasion, but another kind of tree which stands in the square the year around.

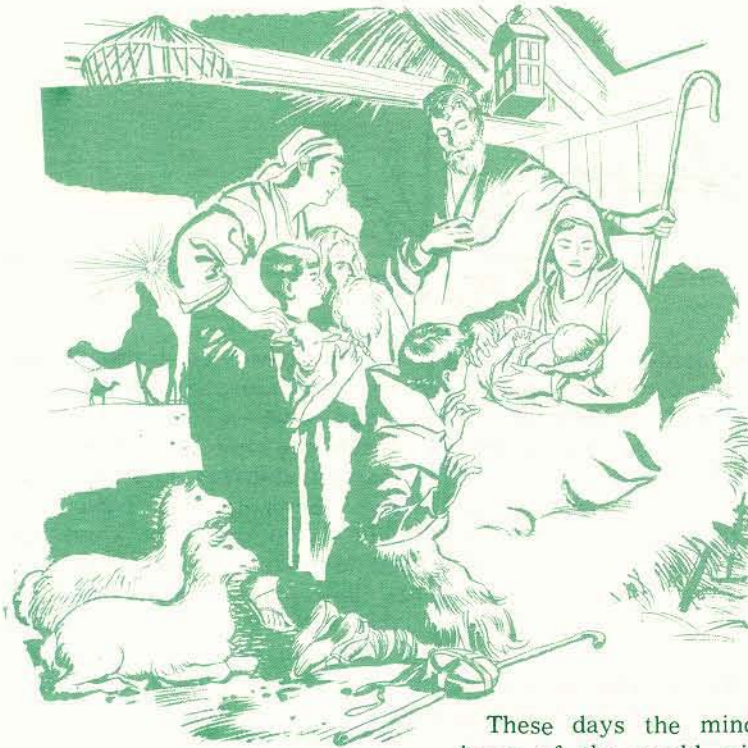
But the Church of the Nativity has known desecration. In 521 it was burned during a Samaritan rebellion. Restored ten years later by the Emperor Justinian, it escaped a second burning at the hand of Persian invaders in 614 only because its large ikon depicting the three Wise Men (one of whom was a Persian) and its floor mosaics reminded the Persians of similar art back home. Many streams of history have flowed by here and have been joined here just as at all of the holy places in Palestine. In a nearby cave, on the present site of the famed 12th Century Crusaders' Cloister, St. Jerome labored

for many years to translate the Scriptures into the Latin of the Vulgate Bible.

Inside the church we descended a narrow stairway into the cave where the Lord was born. The stable was a cave, not a manger shed "out back" of the inn (which has long since disappeared). A stable actually consisted of three or four caves, each one hewn from the rock to house a different kind of animal. The cave in which Jesus was born still looks much as it did then except for the low ceiling, now blackened by smoke from generations of oil lamps. A large, ornate star with a Latin inscription—the gift of the French government in 1717—marks the exact site of our Lord's birth. One turns around from this star to the narrow space, only a few feet away, where Mary laid her firstborn son. The manger site is known to be exact because, as John said, it was the only "head part" of the cave where the baby could have been laid. We sang "Silent Night" in this dimly lit cave where the Light of the World was born. Christmas in October! This carol will always bear a special memory for me.

Just outside Bethlehem, only a mile and a half from Manger Square, is the cave where the shepherds heard the announcement of the angels. Our tour leader, Dr. Brustat, read the Christmas story from Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1-20. Outside the cave we walked about fifty feet to a wall overlooking the rocky pastures and barren brown hillsides where even now an occasional shepherd watches over his sheep. One could almost hear the angel choir again, bringing to

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PASTOR ELIAS NEWMAN

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us" (Luke 2:15).

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel" (Mic. 5:2).

Under the charm of the Christmas season, it is a delight to take up the call of those shepherds of old and sound it anew, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see. . . ." For there is an ancient town still to be seen among the Judean hills which does much to make real this Bethlehem of old—the Bethlehem so often dimmed in the tumult of life though it is ever clear to the eyes of children. The modern spirit of Christmas is new and transitory; the message of Bethlehem is old and eternal.

These days the mind and the heart of the world will be centered on Bethlehem, that little village in an obscure part of the world, into which a little life entered two millenniums ago. There is something approaching a miracle in that very fact. Other men have come, played their part, moved across the stage of existence, risen to fame, and been forgotten, but Jesus Christ today compels the thoughts of men, and commands and receives their homage, at least nominally, perhaps more than in any other era of the world's history.

It is worth while to ask ourselves why "this thing is come to pass," why Bethlehem and Jesus Christ should become something more than the focal points of world-wide interest. The answer—if we wait for it—may assume a fourfold aspect.

I

Bethlehem Supplied a New Marvel

The infant that lay cradled in His mother's arms had come from afar because He willed to come, because there was an "eternal purpose" to be realized by His coming, and by laying aside that glory which was His before the world

was.

George Herbert expresses the truth in his quaint, yet striking way, thus:

The God of Power, as He did ride
In His majestick robes of glorie,
Resolv'd to 'light; and so one day

He did descend, undressing all
the way,

The starres His tire of light and
rings obtain'd,

The cloud His bow, the fire His
spear,

The sky His azure mantel gain'd;
And when they asked what He
would wear,

He smil'd and said as He did go,
He had new clothes a-making
here below.

One can scarcely think of Bethlehem without thinking at the same moment of the opening words of John's Gospel, and the beginning of the Bible. Where the author of Genesis puts God, John puts Jesus Christ. He was God; He was in the beginning with God; He was the channel of creative power, the Light of all human life. He is, in Paul's arrestive phrases, "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible; all things

were created by Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." As one thinks of all that, and then recalls the infant helplessness of the Savior, the marvel becomes apparent. All the qualities of the divine character, all the powers of the divine person, dwelt within the limits of that little life for the redemption of the race.

The marvel is heightened if we consider another feature of the incarnation. The *Word* who was "in the beginning with God and was God" was made *flesh*. The incarnation neither diluted deity, nor deified humanity, but it brought to the whole race a new dignity, a new nobility, a new exaltation. It held before all men the possibility of a new solidarity, a new unity with God. Just as a plant, or tree, drives its roots down into the soil, and transmutes dead matter into life and beauty and fruitfulness, so the Godhead in Jesus Christ became planted in "the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin," in order that He might exalt humanity into partnership with himself by making His redeemed "partakers of the divine nature." This is a marvel as great as the Incarnation itself; in fact, it is the goal of Christ's coming into the world.

That fact explains Whittier's prayer to Jesus Christ:

Deep strike thy roots, O heavenly
Vine,
Within our earthly sod;
Most human and yet most divine,
The flower of man and God!

II

Bethlehem Furnished a New Manifestation

The marvel of the Incarnation was not unthinkable to the men who lived in the years 4 or 6 B.C. Nor does it seem to be a stumbling block to a great many scientific minds of the present age. Your Puritan and Pilgrim forefathers held it tenaciously, your Scandinavian and German parents believed it. There is nothing improbable in the narrative *when all the factors are taken into account*. He

who could create man independently of woman, could create the God-man independently of man. He who could create the primal man out of dead material, and endow him with a living soul, could robe Himself with living tissues woven within the loom of virginity. Given the overshadowing of the *all-creative Spirit*, there is nothing improbable in the fact of the Virgin Birth.

Then the Spirit of the Highest
On a virgin meek came down,
And He burdened her with blessing,
And He pained her with renown;
For she bare the Lord's Anointed,
For His Cross and for His
Crown.

God had been known before, but in different ways and under changing forms. To the Patriarchs He was *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, the God who was enough for all pilgrims and strangers. His protection and providence were sure to those who followed and obeyed Him. To Moses and Israel, centuries later, He was *Jehovah*. Changing times made necessary the unveiling of a new content in the divine name.

The family in covenant with God had become first a tribe, and then a nation, with a "mixed multitude" as a following. The name *Jehovah* deepened the self-revelation of God. *He had been enough; He was what He had been; He would never be less than He was!* Past, present, and future lay enshrined within the compass of the new name.

Later still, upon the lips of seer and prophet, He becomes the *Shepherd of Israel*, the nation forming the flock under His care—a nearer and more comforting content as Psalm 23 reveals. Yet, withal, God is still remote, shadowy, intangible, in some respects terrible and oppressive, as the history of men like Elijah in the cave and Isaiah in the temple reveals. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubim; let the earth be moved" (Ps. 97:99).

Bethlehem changed all that by the declaration of a new manifestation. Henceforth He was to be known as "Immanuel" (God with us). With us, that is, not in a merely localized presence, but in a new, near, vital and blessed union. From the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ, God becomes revealed to the people of the Covenant by one of the tenderest and nearest human relationships. He is "our Father." For all future days, men's highest and most satisfying conception of God was to be found in a human personality and in a family bond. Bethlehem, therefore, is a thrilling advance in the self-revelation of God to the race.

III

Bethlehem Provided a New Mission

As the human life of Jesus of Nazareth unfolded, and He left the obscurity of village surroundings for the publicity of the city and countryside, two outstanding features of His procedure appear. He did not act the royal person demanding homage and service from men. He was not too dignified either to help Himself or to stoop to help others. He was not so exalted that He must be waited upon hand and foot. He came to serve, to minister to others, to seek "the outcasts of Israel," to gather the lapsed and lost into the Kingdom of God. And when He saw that the path from carpentry sloped steadily, but surely, up to Calvary, He crowned His flawless life with a perfect atoning sacrifice on the top of the "green hill," without a city wall.

The second feature of His mission appears in His demands upon His followers. He called men from different quarters, and fired them with His own purpose. His claims were such that they could only be met by a heart prepared for endurance to the uttermost. He stressed repeatedly the necessity for surrender, service, sacrifice. His mission, at last, comes to be theirs, and they must carry it on until all the world, and every creature in it, learns the meaning of Bethlehem

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The background of the page is a textured green. At the top, three lit candles are depicted in white, with their flames glowing. Below the candles, a pine branch with needles is visible. The text is printed in white and green colors.

OUR PRESIDENT WRITES

CHRISTMAS GREETING

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

It seems so hard to believe that Christmas is here. Time flies so rapidly. It seems but yesterday that we attended Christmas programs and services, and put up and took down the Christmas tree at home. But we need Christmas again, need it because of its message.

Christmas is a time of joy. We need joy in this world of tragedy and sorrow. The writer of the 84th Psalm in verses 4 through 9 expresses God's command to rejoice.

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth;
Break forth and sing for joy, yea, sing praises.
Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof:
The world, and they that dwell therein:
Let the floods clap their hands;
Let the hills sing for joy together
Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth:
He will judge the world with righteousness,
And the people with equity."

Isaac Watts paraphrases this picture of Scripture in the lovely Christmas hymn, "Joy to the World." We are commanded to rejoice because the Lord has come and we ought to rejoice in Him.

We need Christmas to remind us that Christ's coming is a fact of history. Christ is the Son of God, born of a virgin, given that man might be saved. He came to bear our griefs and sorrows and He is ever the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

You are busy this Christmas. Remember, Christ must be the center of Christmas or there is no Christmas. Christ must be the center of your joy, or there can be no real joy, just sham. Christ must be the reason for your hope, or there is no hope.

I wish for you a joyous Christmas. May Christ become ever more real to you.

Thank you for the "fellowship in the Gospel." We have been busy this fall traveling, visiting where invited, presenting the purposes and program of the Association. We have been much encouraged. Wherever we go we see signs of real spiritual life. Wherever we go we find real concern for free and living congregations.

It is never easy to have convictions on behalf of free and living congregations. It is doubly hard in our day. But the Association has much to be thankful for. We have been given an opportunity that is unique in our day to struggle and sacrifice for free and living congregations. We have many "tools" to work with. We have our missions, our seminary, our boards, committees, congregations, and pastors. We must rededicate ourselves to the Christ who came to save us and who in the Word has given us a vision of the congregation. May that happen this Christmas.



STEWARDSHIP

ALL THAT I HAVE
IS THINE ALONE

GOD'S STEWARDSHIP AT CHRISTMAS

A decree went out from Caesar Augustus.

Actually, his name was Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus. His grandfather's brother was the famed Julius Caesar. While Gaius was still a young boy his grand-uncle took the lad into his own home and became a father to him.

In due time Julius Caesar died, and the Romans decided to change the name of his birth-month from "Quintilis" to July. Thus they honored their great statesman. His grand-nephew then became the emperor, and this Gaius Octavianus became a magnanimous ruler; his fame spread far and wide. Even while he was still living the government of Rome honored him by appending to his already long name the adjective "Augustus"—meaning "great."

Eventually he died, too. This happened in the sixth month of the year—according to the Roman calendar. It was then decided to change the name of the month in which he died from "Sextilis" to August. In this manner the leaders sought perpetuity for their great man. At least once a year his name was to be on the lips of everyone; he should never be forgotten.

Today his name is known all over the civilized world; yet few know that one of the months of our year is named after him. His fame now rests upon the fact that at one time he issued a decree which made it possible for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem—according to the Scriptures. God simply made use of Caesar's office to accomplish His purpose.

Caesar Augustus had issued several similar decrees in his day. People who have been charged with the responsibility of studying the records and diaries of this man are not certain which of Caesar's census decrees is the one Luke refers to—if indeed it is any of them. It is possible that this was a minor decree, applicable to Palestine only, and that the Emperor had not even bothered to record it. Yet this is the one upon which his fame rests today.

God is a great steward of the events of history. Nothing passes His attention. He has full knowledge of and control over everything that takes place. He guides the destinies of nations, and still has time left over to pay close attention to every minor detail. Benedetto Croce, Italy's great philosopher and recent ruler, has put it this way: "The events of history are but the footfalls of God as He marches down the corridor of time." Kings and councillors are made to serve His purposes.

God keeps watch over His own. Here were Joseph and Mary who had to find a good reason for a trip to Bethlehem at this particular time. Neighbors would most certainly have objected if Joseph and Mary were to travel any great distance just now—especially if they had no compelling reason to travel; they would have argued that Mary had so recently visited her relative, Elizabeth, in the South, that a trip just now would be out of the question. As Joseph and Mary pondered the possibilities, a decree from Caesar Augustus came and settled the problem for them. No one disobeys the command of an emperor.

God made the shepherds keep watch over their flocks by night. Brigands roamed the countryside to steal sheep; so the owners had to be on guard. Thus God provided an audience for His angel choir which in its itinerary made a one-night appearance on earth. God needed informed messengers, and here they were.

God cared for His own. Joseph and Mary found shelter in a stable. Who are we to say that this hostel was less desirable than the inn? They had a roof over their heads here—which was not the case at the place from which they were turned away; and privacy was a thing to be desired just now. The presence of animals in the stable—if such there were—simply added to the homey atmosphere of the place, as every farmer knows. God makes everything serve for good to them that love Him.

God is a careful economist. Anything and everything which His children do to further His work will be rewarded. God keeps it all in His books, and makes no mistakes. Nothing is lost. There is a day of reward coming. Whatever you as His child have done in preparation for observing His coming to earth is recorded and will be rewarded. That is one additional reason for rejoicing this Christmas.

—Dr. Iver Olson

WHY AT CHRISTMAS?

Why do you sing at Christmas;
Why do you shout for joy?
Why are the sad made happy;
Why do you buy all the toys?

Is it glitter and bells and laughter
That make glad your weary hearts?
Do you find real peace and joy
In the things that shall soon depart?

Oh, my friends, lift your eyes up
to heaven
As the shepherds did long ago,
And let that one star so guide you
To the Christ who loves you so.

Take your eyes from this earth for
a moment,
Let your thoughts drift back to that
night

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Edited by Mrs. David C. Hanson

"O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM"

"O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars
go by;
Yet in thy darkness shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee
tonight."

"It has begun. Already man is honoring my name in song and pageant; and pilgrims will soon make holy journeys through my narrow streets. As in another day, the inns will all be full. For I am Bethlehem, little among the clans of Judah, yet chosen by God to be the birthplace of His ancient and everlasting Son.

"My place is on a limestone ridge in the Judaeen highlands overlooking the highway to Egypt. To the south lies Hebron, the home of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sarah is buried there. Five miles to the north is Jerusalem, the Holy City. Somehow it has always seemed appropriate that I, who held the cradle of Christ, should lie almost in the shadow of the city of the Cross, for one is meaningless without the other.

"In earlier days men called me Ephrath or Ephratah, a name that means "fruitful." In those times, Jacob traveled from a meeting with God at Bethel to a place within a mile of my refuge. There his beloved wife Rachel died as she gave birth to Benjamin, the last of his twelve sons, Jacob, renamed 'Israel' by God, buried Rachel there beneath a pillar of stones. Today that pillar is covered by a Mohammedan tomb.

"I was so insignificant during the conquest of Canaan that Bible historians didn't even bother to list my name with the other cities of Judah. Perhaps my life began to be of consequence when Ruth and Naomi returned to me. Do you remember the story? Famine drove Elimelech and Naomi and their two sons from my shelter to the land of the Moabites. In spite of all God's warnings about heathen alliances the two boys married Moabite women. After the death of Elimelech and his sons, Naomi decided to return to me; and Ruth, with a great show of love and devotion, came with her. Surely it was the hand of God that led Ruth to glean in the field of Boaz where he would notice her; for from their union came the child, Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of King David. How can man doubt that the Messiah was to be Savior for all men, when God saw fit to choose a Moabite woman as a member of His early family?

"King David was born within my confines . . . it was here he was anointed future king of Israel by Samuel. Not too far away at Socoh the Lord gave him victory over Goliath. The ties between us were very strong, for when King David knew troublesome times, he longed for water from the 'well at Bethlehem.' Is it any wonder that I have become known as 'the city of David'?

"Yes, I have known wondrous days . . . my stones



are steeped in history and tradition. Within my borders is the Church of the Nativity. Beneath it lies a room that resembles a cave. Man's tradition says this is the stable where the infant Christ rested, and that it was also a part of the ancient home of Ruth and Boaz and their descendant, King David. To the east of my borders lies the Field of Boaz. It is here that Ruth is said to have gleaned. Adjoining it is 'Shepherd's Field,' the place where man believes that angels sang the good tidings of the birth of Christ. '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. And this will be a sign for you: you will find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

"It was a glorious and mysterious time...that time when 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' There has been no other like it in my history. My streets were filled with people returning to their ancestral home for the enrollment. Unnoticed among them were Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth, and his young wife, Mary, who were descendants of King David. At least they were unnoticed until some shepherds began to make known all that angels had told them concerning the Child who had been born during the night and was resting in a manger.

"There was no doubt in my mind...prophecies of God had been fulfilled in the birth of this Infant. Through the ages they echoed:

'There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.'

'I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.'

'O Bethlehem, Ephratah, from you shall come

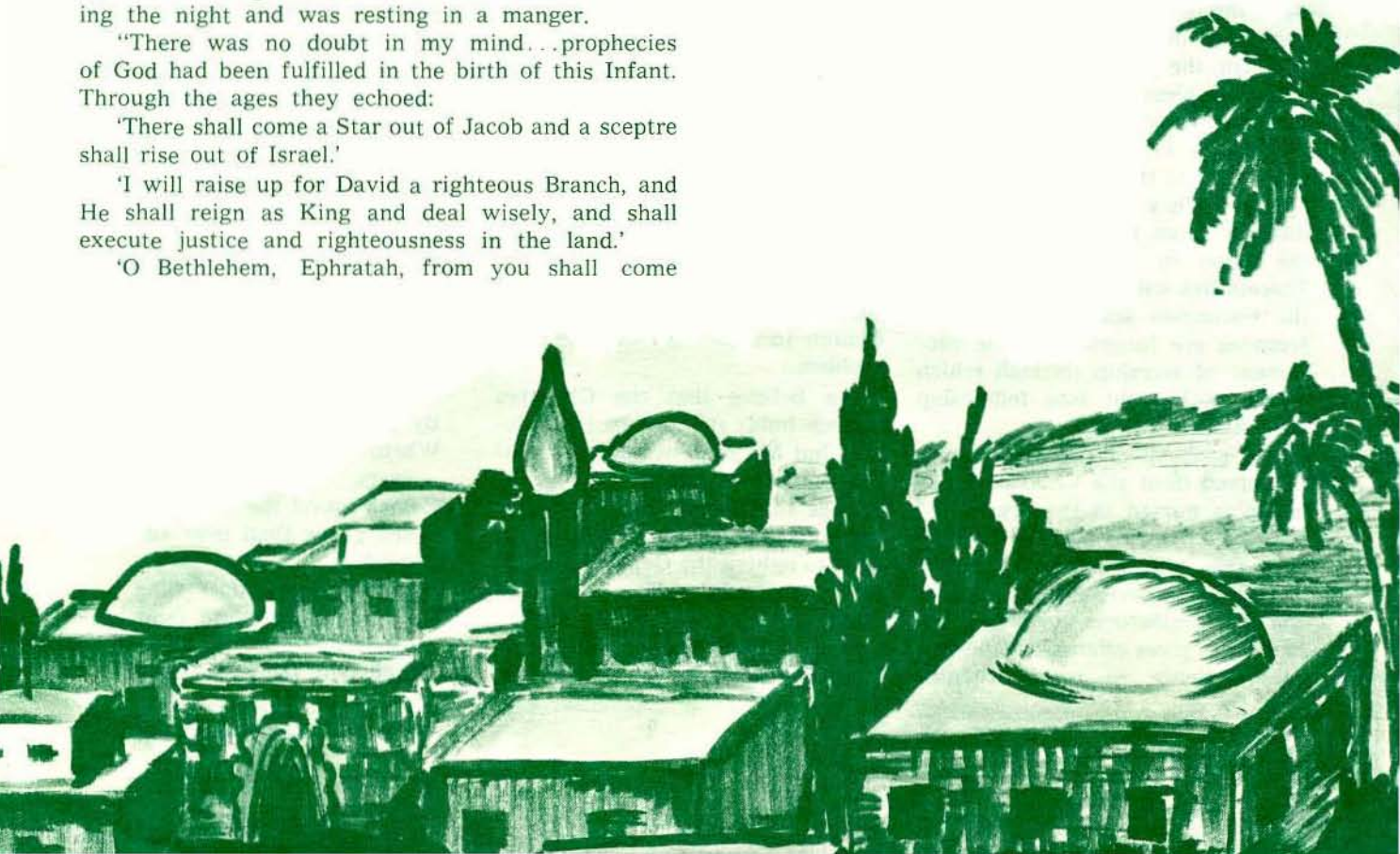
forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.'

'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'

"The Christ who had fashioned men, now had become man, and lived among His sinful creatures. Yet even in those days men were divided by their reaction to Him. The shepherds received Him, the Magi worshipped Him, and Herod slaughtered infants and children as he sought to destroy Him. The people who played major roles in that first Christmas have long ago departed from this city, but their counterparts still live within my dwellings. The heart of man has not changed. Today, as in all the years of my remembrance, man is in need of the Savior who was born to conquer death in order that he might offer an abundant and eternal life to all."

"O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in. Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell:

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel."



Bethlehem

[Continued from page 5]
and the Cross.

He calls men yet, and holds them by the winsomeness of His personality, the magnetism of His love, and the divineness of His purpose. They bow at His feet and, taught by His Spirit, they reproduce this triple blend of surrender, service and sacrifice. They dare not ask for less; more they cannot seek. Like their Lord and Master, they are in the world for its uplifting.

IV

Bethlehem Proclaimed a New Message

The song started by the angels over the dales of Bethlehem, steals down the ages in ripples of sweetest music: "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; good will to men." It was a prophecy in song of what was yet to be in the divine order. It was a God-sent message of peace to the individual soul. It was the declaration from God that all barriers between himself and men were at last gone from the Godward side. Bethlehem bridged the gulf—or filled it—and levelled the mountains which divided God from man.

The Christmas spirit furnishes light for the solution of the twentieth century's most perplexing problem, the problem of race.

It is wholesome to reflect on the fact that the wise men who brought their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Christ Child were Gentiles. They belonged to a race different from that represented by the Babe in swaddling clothes. Therein lies still another miracle of the Christmas season. Racial differences are forgotten in the sacrament of worship through which Christ is brought into fellowship with humankind.

The problem of race will never be solved until the Child of Bethlehem is nursed in the cradles of the world. All this political foolishness that would solve the riddle of race by the erection of artificial and discriminatory barriers is a sham that gives offence to God and does violence to the Christmas

spirit. Good will toward men precludes the possibility of racial misunderstanding.

We must put an end to the political philosophy that conceives equality in terms of a Nordic theory or an "Aryan" myth. We must preach a Christmas Gospel of racial tolerance and Samaritan friendship. We cannot ratify the covenant of the Golden Rule "with reservations." There are no special privileges, no exemptions to God's mandate of brotherhood.

Bethlehem makes for peace between man and man. God would have all men to realize the love revealed in the Savior and to claim their birthright in Him. The love that sought all men in Jesus, sought to make them at one with each other through Him. There are many matters which create antagonism, and not one of them is worth starting a quarrel, or maintaining one. Animosities divide men simply because they have not stood in thought before the cradle of the Christ. Just as the grave of Jesus became the tomb of sin and death, so the cradle should be the sepulchre of all strife. The love that unites to Him should be strong enough to draw together all His lovers in a unity which nothing can disturb.

What a strange and awkward problem has been presented to the world by the existence and persistence of the Jews! Today again there has been a sad recrudescence of anti-Semitism.

As usual in times of stress and national stirring, there comes a mental and spiritual upheaval, and that brings with it a time of special opportunity for the Christian Church to deal with this age-long problem.

We believe that the Christian Church holds the key to the solution, but has hitherto most lamentably failed to use it. Is it not strange that while the Church has been aroused to see in Christ "a light to lighten the Gentiles," it has hardly realized that He is also to be "the glory of his people Israel"?

Shall we not pray for the spirit of wisdom to guide us to the right

way of approach to the Jews; for the spirit of love to win these, our Lord's kinsmen according to the flesh; for the spirit of power to roll back the reproach of centuries of ill-treatment by the Church, and present Jesus Christ to them in winsome and attractive form as the fulfillment of all their hopes.

Bethlehem makes for peace in the earth, peace beyond—and on both sides of—national frontiers. If the rippling music of the angel-choir seems a mockery today, that is not God's fault. It is because men have not sung from the heart, "Glory to God in the highest."

There will never be "peace on earth, good will to men" while men have no room for God, no regard for His will, and no place in their plans for His laws. So long as they sow God-forgetfulness, and racial and class hatred, they must inevitably reap the harvest of unrest and ultimately of war.

Bethlehem declares in the person of "the Prince of Peace" that His will for the earth is peace. The hymns which will be sung by you at this Christmas season are so many attempts to re-express the angels' melody when they first came:

"bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold.

"Yet with the woes of sin and
strife,

The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have
rolled

Two thousand years of wrong:
And man, at war with man, hears
not

The love-song which they bring:
Oh hush the noise, ye men of
strife,
And hear the angels sing!

"For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When, with the ever-circling
years,
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the
earth

Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world send back
the song
Which now the angels sing."

III.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
 Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,
 Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,
 Perfect in power, in love and purity.

Perhaps at this point some individual member (or your entire group) might enjoy singing a verse of our theme song.

In 1965 believers young and old, from many lands, joined the ranks of the ransomed and blest—some after much suffering and pain, difficult trials of their faith, or as martyrs. This stanza suggests that darkness may hide God, and we know that sinners *are* in deep darkness of soul which only the light of Jesus Christ and His forgiving love can dispel. However, the Psalmist has another view. Psalm 139:11, 12
 and John, in I John 1:5, 6

There are trials in the life of a Christian and the church which *might* be called trials of darkness. Matthew 27:45
 And there is supernatural darkness. Luke 23:44, 45
 Acts 7:59, 60 Acts 12:1-5 (Our missionaries today in the world face this.)

Sharing Time: How has God sustained you through some hour of severe testing? By His Word and prayer? hymns? help from Christian friends and loved ones? the sacraments? by His Spirit?

Our Triune God (and His grace) is greater than distress, doubt, darkness, sin, and all the power of the enemy, isn't He? Shall we sing unto Him in 1966 with deeper devotion, love and serve Him more gladly, share Him and His blessings more widely and wisely as women of His Church? May God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

WMF Bible Study

DECEMBER



“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY! LORD GOD ALMIGHTY”

Greetings in Jesus' Holy Name as we begin our WMF Bible Studies for 1966—combined Word and Hymn studies. We pray that the Holy Spirit will use them to His glory, and our good. All of the Bible portions need not be read aloud or used each time except as aids in discussion, if so desired.

The author of “Holy, Holy, Holy,” Reginald Heber, wrote hymns to

enrich the song service of the church in the early 1800's. He was a minister in England before going to India as a missionary. He also wrote "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," and many other hymns. The hymn tune for our study, known as "Nicaea," was chosen because in that town in Asia Minor a great Church Council in AD 325 decreed that the Trinity was one of the essentials of Christian faith, and should be retained. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are our hope and confidence in 1966, and through all eternity. Praise His Holy Name.

I.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee!
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Please read Mark 9:2, 3; Psalm 99:1-3; Exodus 34:4-7a.

Discussion: What do the above passages tell us about the holiness, might and mercy of our Triune God?

In some of our congregations the above stanza is sung each Sunday as we lift our hearts and voices to Him. Oh, that He would also receive praise and worship from us during the week, in the "church which is in thy house"—our homes. Early in the morning, do our songs arise to Him? (How sad if we sing but words.)

Let us look at some early Christian homes. Romans 16:3-5a
..... I Corinthians 16:19 and Philemon 2-5

Can our homes truly be called "the church that is in thy house"? (A ladies aid meeting there, a prayer meeting, mission society or Luther League might be called such, too.) Shall we pray for grace and resolve in our hearts that His Word, sacred songs and prayer shall come *before*

TV or radio, the newspaper and secular reading, for ourselves and our children? What do these passages tell us? Daniel 6:10
Colossians 3:16, 17 Psalm 55:16, 17

II.

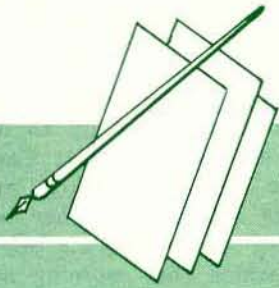
Holy, holy, holy, All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

In the turbulent days in which we live, isn't it comforting to know that God has hosts of angels to do His bidding in war-torn lands, heathen countries, in our homes and congregations? We are apt to forget this precious truth.

The first two stanzas direct our hearts to eternity where God the Father, God the Son (our Savior) and God the Holy Ghost reign as One from everlasting to everlasting. But they are not alone. With them are the saved of all generations and the holy angels (Rev. 5:11-14; 7:9-17). Let us note the message of their song
What did God teach Isaiah about Himself? Isaiah 43:10-13, 15
..... Isaiah 44:6 Isaiah 45:18

Discussion: How would you explain the Trinity to a child? The nature and work of Cherubim and Seraphim? Would these Scriptures help? Genesis 3:23, 24; Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 1:1-6; Exodus 25:32

In nature we find the idea of "three in one" in a tree (above ground) in trunk, branches and leaves; in an egg—shell, yolk and white; in a triangle, etc. Even a young child could be taught to understand our above hymn, couldn't he?



EDITORIALS



CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN

Homer, in his masterpiece of Greek mythology, tells of Hector parting from his family. As he set forth on what was to be his last campaign, he gathered with his wife and son outside the city walls. The father put out his arms to the little lad but the boy was afraid as he saw the warrior's great helmet flashing in the sun. Realizing the problem, Hector removed the helmet and the boy at once recognized his father and sprang into his arms.

God without Christmas would have remained an austere and aloof Being. But in the incarnation (the Word became flesh) we see His love and mercy. Now it is possible to say, "Oh, take my hand, dear Father, and lead Thou me."

Christmas is for children. This old saying doubtless means that they get more out of it, they enjoy it so much. A child anticipates Christmas in such a different way than an adult. If he is old enough to remember a past Christmas, he can hardly wait for the coming one as it approaches. "How many days are left now?" is a common question where there are children when Christmas is near. We recall how appetite for Christmas was whetted by the display of toys for Christmas in the small town hardware stores. Many a grown man could wish that he could turn time back in its flight to the magic spell of childhood's fascinations.

A child has so much wonder at the pageantry of Christmas. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, King Herod, the Wise Men, are living, enchanting figures. The godly child clothes them with the reality which is rightfully theirs.

And what of the joy of children when Christmas has come? When anticipation has been fulfilled, a child's eyes light up. Many a parent has had more enjoyment in the delight of his little boy or girl than in his own gifts. Children, too, have the capacity to express their joy and thanks unashamedly.

Christmas is for children. They enjoy it so much. Without having to worry much about preparation, they just take Christmas in and revel in each moment.

Christmas is for children. We are reminded of the Savior's words, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Can we not change the words to read, "You cannot truly observe Christmas...?"

Christmas is for the child-like. It is for those who live in anticipation of the event. They not only shop and bake and clean. But they believe in what Christmas means and want to rightly observe the holy season.

Christmas is for *children* who never lose their wonder at the mystery of God coming in human form, whether they be 70 or 10 or 20.

*"A great and mighty wonder
Our Christmas festal brings;
On earth, a lowly Infant,
Behold the King of kings."*

Christmas is for those who, having received God's great gift for themselves, have great joy, unashamed,

exuberant, heart-felt, as that of a child with some treasured present.

Unless we turn and become like children, we cannot know what Christmas really is. We may go through the motions, give and get gifts, even sing a few carols, and yet miss what it is all about. To those who consign the Christmas message to mythology or vague mystery it is a natural step to hand it over to the young in years.

But for the children of God, whether they be wee toddlers, strong young men and maidens, mature fathers and mothers, or whatever, Christmas, for all its mystery, is the supreme revelation of God's love, the act which removes the great shining helmet and reveals Him as *Father*. They share its anticipation, wonder and joy.

Even as the Salvation Army and various social agencies seek children to whom they might bring joy at Christmas, so the Lord Jesus seeks the child-like of the world, hearts where He may enter and abide forever.

The Lutheran Ambassador covets for all its readers the child-likeness of faith which will mean a real Christmas for each one.

THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS CAROL

It is an old, old story, this one by Kate Douglas Wiggin, but we read it for the first time not long ago.

It is the story of a little girl who was born on a Christmas Day. The Birds had really meant to call the baby Lucy if it was a girl, but since she was born on Christmas and the mother heard the boy choir in the church nearby singing the song "Carol, Brothers, Carol," that night, the baby was given the name Carol—for she was mother's Christmas Carol.

But alas, the little girl was never a strong child and after her fifth year she became noticeably weak and tired. Her family loved her and gave tender care. And by nature she was a sweet child.

The story centers around Carol's eleventh Christmas, her birthday and the Christ-Child's. Back across the alley from the Birds' fine home was a small, poor home occupied by the Ruggles family. On this particular Christmas, Carol desired to invite all the Ruggles children over for a great dinner, such as they could never afford for themselves, and a happy time around the Christmas tree. And so it was arranged.

In the great house elaborate preparations were made. And in the small house on Christmas Day there was a great commotion as Mrs. Ruggles saw that all her nine children were washed and dressed in as fine clothes as she could manage. She also coached them carefully in their manners so that they would not be a disgrace in such fine company.

At last, in due time, the Ruggles children went over to the great house. All nine of them—Sarah Maud, Peter, Kitty, Larry, Peoria, Susan, Clement, Eily and Cornelius. They didn't remember all their

manners but they had a wonderful time. And there was a gift for each of them! It was much better than they could ever have hoped for.

After the Ruggleses had gone home it was a tired but happy Carol who thought of the evening's events as she lay in her bed and said good night to her mother. The window was left open so that Carol could hear the choir sing in the church nearby and she asked that the shutters be open and her bed turned so that in the morning she could see a bright beautiful star in the east which that morning had reminded her of the one which the Wise Men had seen as they searched for the baby Jesus.

Sometime that Christmas evening as the boy choir sang "Carol, Brothers, Carol" and another of her favorites, "My Ain Countree," the little heart stopped beating. Oh, there was sadness, to be sure, in many hearts, but all who were wise knew that it had been a marvel that she had lived to see that one more Christmas. And how happy she had made it for others!

This is the last verse of one of the songs the boy choir sang that Christmas night when the Birds' Christmas Carol slipped away.

"Like a bairn to its mither,
A wee birdie to its nest,
I fain would be gangin' noo
Unto my Faether's breast;
For He gathers in His arms
Helpless, worthless lambs like me,
An' carries them Himsel'
To His ain countree."

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

It is with great pleasure that we greet you at this Christmas, 1965. Christmas is one of the most lustrous jewels in the crown of the year. It is as fair and dazzling as the Resurrection. And if we should seem sometimes to give it primacy, it is because there would be no resurrection without the incarnation.

"Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth,
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new-born King."

Your Christmas issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* is an enlarged one. This has been made possible by those of you who have shared your talents with us all. Today's special edition could be the forerunner of a more ambitious venture in the future, if God wills. All of us who have had a part in preparing this issue hope and pray that it will help to make Christmas a little more meaningful to you, somehow, in some way.

And now, we wish a very joyous and blessed Christmas to some of the nicest people on earth, our readers.

A Visit to Bethlehem

[Continued from page 3]

this sacred spot their glad tidings of joy for all mankind. The Shepherds' Field is also known as the Field of Ruth and Boaz, for it was here that these two met and married. We recalled how their son, Obed, had become the grandfather of the great King David, ancestor of the promised Messiah.

The modern highway from Bethlehem back up to Jerusalem winds its tortuous way through fifteen miles of rocky hillsides and deep valleys. In Jesus' day the journey was only six miles along the numerous footpaths and trails which still intersect in this region.

We left Bethlehem at twilight to drive back to the Holy City. Far off to our right, just over the hills on the near horizon, the full moon was rising above the placid, shimmering Dead Sea.

"Do you see those lights on top of that hill to our left?" our driver asked. They were the evening lights of the Holy City—but not the Jerusalem we were going to. "Those lights," the driver said, "are in Israel."

His words jerked us back from our reveries into the grim world of 20th-century realities. Our road skirted the edges of No Man's Land, the line of partition which divides the Holy Land into Arab Jordan and, to the west, modern Israel. Somewhere up on the steep, boulder-strewn hillside Jordanian territory ended and enemy territory began. For Jordan and Israel are locked in mortal combat: not the combat of armed aggression, although that specter is never far from people's thoughts, but the implacable, unending hostility of silent fear and distrust. None dare cross the 100 yards of No Man's Land, a neutral zone established by the armistice agreement of 1948. Anyone who did would be shot at from both sides, and only the nearby United Nations patrol could pick up the corpse.

"Isn't there any traffic between Arab Jerusalem and Israel?" we asked our driver, a young Bethlehem Arab.

"No," he replied with a sad yet bitter smile. "Nothing, sir."

"No communication at all? Not even telephone calls, mail service, radio reception?"

"Nothing, sir. We get each other's radio and television programs, but only because the jamming equipment is too expensive for such a short distance."

"Can't the Arab refugees here in Jordan go home to Israel? Can they maintain contact with their relatives?" Our driver replied that on Christmas Day those Jews who want to visit the holy places in Jordan may come over for 24 hours. Many are reunited with their relatives for that brief time, and Bethlehem and the other holy places are crowded at Christmas-time just as they were at the birth of Christ—but for a sadder, more tragic reason. The crossing is one-way. No Arabs may cross into Israel.

"If we want to write to our relatives on the other side," the driver said, "we have to send the letter to a contact outside the Arab world—in America or in Germany, maybe—and have him readdress and forward it. If our government found out, there would be trouble."

"Are there any Jews in Jordan?"

"No Jews, sir."

"But there are still Arabs in Israel?"

After a momentary pause the answer came: "Too many Arabs in Israel, sir!"

Such deep, centuries-old enmity was hard for us to comprehend. The hillside above us spelled death; the lights on top of the hill marked the grim demarcation line of no return, of an alien and forbidding way of life. Never have I felt more in the presence of death than I did that evening on the road from Bethlehem. When our tour group crossed through the Mandelbaum Gate in Jerusalem on the following Tuesday and entered Israel, we knew we could not return to Jordan again. No Arab country recognizes the existence of Israel. The Arab-Israeli "cold war" reminds one of the Axis-Allied state of war of the early 1940s.

Nearly 2,000 years after Christ's birth His homeland is still torn by factional strife and bitter hatred. Why? What did His coming accomplish?

"Nothing," sneers the cynic. "The Gospel has failed." One thinks of a little known verse from the Christmas carol that Edmund Hamilton Sears wrote after his visit to the little town of Bethlehem one Christmas Eve:

Yet with the noise of sin and strife

The world has suffered long,
Beneath the angel strains have rolled

Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hear not

The love song which they bring:

O hush the noise, ye men of strife,

And hear the angels sing.

At the Shepherds' Field I had asked myself the cynic's question. But then, in the quiet of the sunshiny autumn noon, I heard a quieter and still small voice:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. . . . Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 10:34; 11:28).

The two statements are not contradictory. Discord and strife prevail so long as man follows his own willful way and not Christ's. But to those who have surrendered their lives to him, there comes that peace which surpasses human understanding, together with a sense of purpose and dedication to those spiritual values which have outlasted all the materialistic clamor and glittering rivalries of the ages. "Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in."

Two thousand years after the birth of Christ, man has not found peace. But a visit to Bethlehem declares what immeasurable good the Gospel has done through "two thousand years of wrong," and of the actually better world we have because Christ came. His star has disappeared from Bethlehem's sky, but its glow is still seen and felt everywhere.



Luther League Activities

THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel!" (Isa. 7:14).

When a person first reads these verses, the temptation is to think that they are found in the New Testament some place, probably included in one of the Christmas stories in the Gospels. But they're not, you know. Actually, they were written many, many years before Mary gave birth to the Baby Jesus. There are more verses in the Old Testament like these, too. This is one of the wonderful things about our Bible—we can find the Good News of Jesus Christ from Genesis to Revelation.

Don't these verses seem terrifically clear? Surely the Jewish people should have recognized Jesus as their promised Messiah right from the very beginning. But that's not the way it happened, is it? When Jesus was born, the only ones aware of His Sonship were His parents and three foreigners. Oh, let's not forget the shepherds—but they had to have an angel to tell them! Just think, the Jews had been waiting all those years for

their Savior to come, and then, when He came, they didn't recognize Him.

Even though they didn't accept Jesus at His birth, they surely should have been convinced by His death on the cross. This was another fulfillment of prophecy, you know, for we read in Isaiah 53:4, 5, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." We can even read of Christ's dying words on the cross in Psalm 22:1. Yet even these things failed to remove the unbelief from the hearts of men in that day—and in our day, too.

Jesus Christ is coming again. These verses are terrifically clear too, and the Bible is full of them. These prophecies are going to be fulfilled someday—maybe in your lifetime. Sin is a fact (Rom. 3:23) and each one of us must deal with it before we can be ready to meet Christ, whether at His Coming or at our death. In a very real sense Romans 6:23 is a prophecy that applies to each one of us—which half of the verse applies to you? If the Lord should return now, during this holiday season, would you be ready to meet Him, or would your eyes, like those of the Jews when He came the first time, be blinded by unbelief?

To receive the gift of God by faith you must believe that Christ actually was born to be YOUR Savior. You should trust Him because He died for your sins. You should trust Him because He lives, having risen from the dead.

Has Jesus Christ been born in you?

Robert Lee
Escanaba, Mich.

May the Savior whose birthday we celebrate be real in the life of each one of you. We wish you a blessed and Christ-filled holiday season.

The Executive Committee
AFLC Luther League Federation
Youth Board

"Out of the darkness shone the star,
Jesus, the Light had been born,
Heralded even by wise men from far,
Light of the world all forlorn.

"Yet once again the Light will descend
Down from the clouds in clear sight;
Sinners consigned to night without end,
Saints to the city of light."
(from a tract)

Why at Christmas

[Continued from page 7]

When a babe was born in a manger,
Who was sent to bring peace and light.

Do you remember the Christ of Christmas,
The One who gave all for you?
Or are the things of this world causing shadows
To hide His face from view?

May this Christmas bring Him very near you;
May you give Him room in your heart,
For the "real" joy that came at Christmas
Is a joy that will not soon depart.

Mrs. Elva Grothe Seidel
Badger, Minnesota



Jane Thompson

THEN PEALED THE BELLS

A short story
for Christmas

Distant strains of "Silent Night" faintly filled the crisp December air as I carefully chose my steps to the old familiar church on the corner. I had belonged there for years, and I felt strangely warmed inside as I reflected on the blessed times my praying friends and I had enjoyed there. The pews may have been worn, but they were overlooked by visitors when the warmth of a spontaneous welcome overshadowed any of the well-used furnishings.

I felt the air tingle on my face as I quickened my pace. It was soon time for the Christmas pageant to begin, and I had no time for lingering along the way. Perhaps on my way home I would stop, gaze into the sky, and praise the Lord for His blessings, but now I was anxious to get to the specialty of Christmas for me—children reenacting the Christmas scene. It seemed to bring me right upon Bethlehem and I cherished the thought of it every year.

The air, which had been crisp and still, wrapped itself around me in a sudden gust of anger, and I felt a chill go through my body. My feet reached the icy steps of the church, and I hastened to the door before it closed at the heels of another member, one who did not turn around and give her usual friendly greeting.

As I entered the sanctuary, the

bright lights twinkled on the fragrant tree, and the precious cherubs in the manger scene brought back many pleasant memories. Always it was a little different, but year after year the same message warmed and thrilled my grateful heart. Tonight, for some strange reason, I felt compelled to take a seat in the very last row. In past years I had always marched as far front as possible to get a good view of the children I had often longed to see grow up in the Lord.

The program did not begin for a few minutes, so after I had removed my coat, I leafed through the old hymnbook. Ah, there was "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," which I had sung as a child. The phrase "For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace of peace on earth, good will to men" always remained indelible in my mind.

As I sat thinking, I noticed a woman talking rather loudly in front of me. I caught her last words, "Imagine, in our church!"

Now what was this that was so shocking to one of our most important members? I certainly did not know of anything new or exciting in our church that called for distracting from our moment of meditation before the pageant.

Suddenly, the cold realization hit me. There in an isolated pew sat a new family, reverently awaiting the service. Their arrival in town had

caused this change in the atmosphere. They were new and they were Negro. Here in our small village, I had been a staunch supporter of civil rights. With no Negro families in our area, I had no opportunity to prove that I actually would carry out my beliefs. There had been no challenge and no testing. . . until tonight.

I began to think seriously and pray fervently. Here was an open door if I only would walk through. Would I willingly shut the door and not leave an opportunity for those on the other side to try walking through?

I got up slowly, picked up my coat, and walked to their pew. I smiled and said, "I'm glad you came. May I sit here?"

I felt sharp stares on my back and also the pride in the hearts of those who had wanted to do the very thing I had just done. The smiles that I received from that family were the only presents that I needed. People began to fill in the empty spaces around us as the children marched in and sang as never before. Then came the song that I was waiting for.

"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."

As we gathered after the service, there were many hands of welcome extended to my new friends. They, too, were children of the same God, and had found peace in the Lord. I felt a surge of joy as I saw how much this new family longed to be accepted, just as anyone in a new community needs a place to belong.

I chose to walk home alone that night, a little slower and a bit more thoughtful than usual. A bright star appeared in the velvet black sky. Maybe it was a coincidence that it appeared in the east, but I'm certain that I heard a single bell tolling in the quiet night. There may have been no distinct melody, but I know in my heart that it was an unbroken song of peace on earth, good will to men.

Jane Thompson,
Fertile, Minn.

WOMEN *for Christ*

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

Christmas was not a happenstance.

It completed a plan,
Designed eons ago by One
Who knew the needs of man.

'Twas in this greatest miracle
Future hope was avowed,
No, Christmas did not just happen,
Christmas was made by God.

As Indian summer changes into the crisp, snowy winter, our thoughts turn to the blessed season of Christmas. Turning back the pages of our Bible to Genesis, we find that already in the third chapter God had promised a Savior for our fallen human race. That prophecy was later fulfilled when the Son of God was born to redeem mankind back to God, provided each individual would receive that Savior into his heart. What a message of hope this brings to the despairing sinner in our day of insecurity and emptiness. What joy comes to the soul of one who has permitted the Savior to be born anew in his heart and life!

A true story of Christmas that has always thrilled our hearts concerns two missionaries who were put in prison in a foreign land for preaching the Gospel. One of these men kept track of time by marking x's on the prison wall as each day passed. It was a cold, bleak December and soon the wall "calen-

dar" reminded him that this day was Christmas Day. Here in his damp, silent cell there were no colored lights, no Christmas tree, no food or gifts, nor dear ones singing carols to the Lord—just a miserable prison with bars on the windows and straw for a bed. It so happened that this missionary occupied a cell directly across from his friend. Suddenly he had a real inspiration. He broke off bits of straw into various sizes and formed the word "Emmanuel" in large letters. When his friend in the other cell looked up and read this word, a smile broke out on his face. Yes, he thought, "God with us"—that is ALL we need for Christmas, and the joy bells from heaven began to ring in his soul. The great miracle of God's coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ became especially precious and wonderfully true.

This Babe of Bethlehem was born to die for our sins and rise again that we, too, who receive Him into our hearts might have eternal life. Yes, this "Emmanuel" was all they needed for time and eternity.

Later when the two missionaries were released from prison and returned to America, they agreed that the Christmas spent in that far-off prison with no trimmings, but with the mighty presence of "Emmanuel" could never be equaled. It is so true—Christ alone

is Christmas.

Christmas has always been a very special time in our lives also, and one part of its joys involved spending a few days with loved ones at our parental home. Some years ago, however, because of parish responsibilities, we found ourselves unable to take the trip "home." Feeling strange in a new community and a little depressed over the thought of not being along at the traditional gathering in our childhood home, the pangs of self-pity quietly appeared. While meditating on God's Word one day, however, the Lord seemed to say, "You have a husband and two boys to be with you for Christmas. Have you ever thought of the lonely widow whose only son is away in the service of his country, or what about the family whose grief over the loss of a loved one is still so tender? What about that kind lady who has been like a grandma to your boys, and several other people without close relatives who would be so alone for Christmas?"

"Thank You, Lord," was our answer, and when these dear people were invited to the parsonage for Christmas dinner, no one declined. What joy we had together as a family of "non-relatives" with Christ as the unseen but very present Guest at our table. In the afternoon one of the friends entertained our small boys with real-life stories of dogs plus other adventures with horses in the early days of the West. The fellowship together was precious and the Christ-child seemed unusually near. Our hearts overflowed with joy as we gathered around the piano singing carols and rejoicing in the birthday of our wonderful Savior. Truly the Lord gave us a special Christmas that year which we shall always remember.

Mrs. Jay Erickson
Radcliffe, Iowa

A GREETING FROM THE WMF PRESIDENT

"O come, O come Lord Jesus"
(Rev. 22:20).

Greetings to all in our AFLC fel-

lowship this wonderful Christmas time!

Don't lose heart or faith, my dear people, for the Word is truth and we know we can hopefully look for the soon, *sure* return of our Lord Jesus. How we need to praise and thank God for that great event in history which took place 1965 years ago just exactly as it was predicted in the first book of the Bible when God tells us of the seed of the woman which will bruise the head of the serpent, and Jesus is His name. And He did, for in Christ we do have the victory over the devil.

When we trace this great plan of salvation through history in our Bible, we note that sin was rampant and the people were bewildered. But God (just in the right time), just as the prophets of old had told of the coming of the Son of the Most High, came down in His glory.

No wonder the bells do ring at *Christmas*; no wonder the angels did sing at *Christmas*; no wonder the shepherds and all the humble children of God, those who were looking and waiting for this great event to take place, were awed and happy at the birthday of our King.

How blessed to know that this Great Son of God, true man and true God, walked upon earth teaching and living a perfect life, and that He was willing to go the way of Calvary to take *all* our sins upon himself so that we, too, might be with Him in glory. How can anyone turn from this baby in the manger—the Son of God on the cross—the Risen Lord and Savior, who by His Holy Spirit indwells the true believers?

In the time of Abraham things looked hopeless but he believed in God. We, too, are living in a day when hopeless circumstances face us all around but we must be "hope addicts," for God is *not* dead but is still on the throne. As we are in the furnace of affliction, let us pray that it will generate the fire of faith so that our thinking and speaking is what God says and not what we feel or what man says.

There is more in the Bible about the second coming of Jesus than His first coming, therefore let us watch and pray as we gather with our families this glad Christmas season and look for His appearing again to get His saints (the true Christians).

"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." (Rev. 22:16-20)

Down from His Glory; ever living story,
Our Lord and Saviour came, and Jesus was His name.
Born in a manger, to the world a stranger,
A man of sorrows, tears and agony.
Oh, how I love Him! How I adore Him!
My breath, my sunshine, my all in all,
The Great Creator became my Saviour,
And all God's goodness, dwelleth in Him.

—W. E. Booth, Clibborn

In all our giving and living this Christmas, let us be sure to come to Jesus and give our time, talents and treasures to the Kingdom work in our *free* church!

Mrs. Herbert Presteng,
President WMF

JOURNEY OF THE WISE MEN (En Epiphany Song)

The Wisemen in their homeland
Beheld a great new star.
To Palestine it pointed,
Where Jacob's people are.

They sought "Christ" in the City,
Where throne and palace are;
But none knew of His coming,
And none had seen His star.

King Herod, when he heard them,
Was troubled by the news;
He must take action quickly,
Lest he his crown should lose.

He called the scribes and chief-priests,
Demanding he be told
The birth-place of the Christ-child,
By prophecies foretold.

The prophet Micah tells us,
"From little Bethlehem
The Ruler of all Israel
Shall come, to bless all men."

Then Herod to the Wisemen
Said, "Go, search carefully.
I, too, will come and worship
Him whom you wish to see."

The star now went before them,
And with exceeding joy,
They followed where it led them,
To find the little boy.

They found Him with His mother,
When to the house they came;
And, falling down, they worshipped
And glorified His name.

Great treasures they presented;
Myrrh, frankincense, and gold.
A king, indeed, they welcomed,
And did His face behold.

The Wisemen, at God's warning,
Went home another way;
For Herod would not worship,
But sought this King to slay.

O Word of God, still giving
Thy light to sinful men,
For darkening days before us
We need Thy light again.

Incline our hearts to long for
The presence of our King:
Our aim to serve and worship,
And others to Him bring.

Ella Rasmussen
Tucson, Arizona

Christmas In Pioneer Days



My father and mother came to this community in 1900 where Father served five or six preaching places which later became congregations. He walked to them much of the time, but he also had horses to be used on the buggy in summer or the cutter or jumper in winter. A jumper was an enclosed sleigh. The roads were poor, just trails, and he always had an ax along to cut off a tree that might have fallen across the road. That was very common.

In those early years Mother was home alone with the children much of the time. She often spoke of hearing Indians hollering in the logging village a mile away, of wolves howling close to the building, of wildcats and storms. I asked her if she wasn't afraid, and she said, "Den Gud vil bevare er uten al fare. Set din trøst til Gud."

At Christmas Father was gone a long time since he had to go to each congregation for Christmas services, then to each in turn again, from one to the next, for New Year's services. So our "Christmas Eve" often waited until he was free to be at home with us, sometimes on "tretten dagen" or Epiphany. Sometimes Mother would give us our gifts when we got home after the Sunday School Christmas pro-

gram.

There were no churches; services were held in the schoolhouses, lighted with a kerosene lamp or two. We sat in the school desk seats. Someone played the organ. All the singing and pieces were in the Norwegian language.

I recall the tree—a large spruce, decorated with homemade decorations. I remember the feeling of awe, wonder, adoration—it was a big night. All too soon it was time to bundle up and go home.

For many evenings before Christmas Mama would get us together with her and make paper flowers to decorate the tree. She was very good at that, at making roses and chrysanthemums. She had bought red, yellow and green tissue paper and thin wire. She cut a strip of paper, about three inches wide; then cut slits in the folded strip, each about two inches apart; then rolled the corners tightly around a hat pin, crushed the rolled paper together—she made lovely roses. For chrysanthemums she cut the slits narrower, then with the round lump or "head" of the hat pin she rolled the strip of paper on her knee—making lovely chrysanthemums. These adorned our tree. The tree was the largest we could find and get into our living room. We had strings of pop corn from Mama's garden, of cranberries picked in the swamp, apples tied next to the trunk, cards with links of tinsel, chains of paper—oh, our tree was beautiful.

Christmas Eve supper consisted of sweet soup made of prunes, raisens and cinnamon sticks; rice pudding, chicken, "fattigman" and many other goodies Mother made. In later years we had lutefisk and ribs.

When supper was over we had our program of pieces we had learned and all of us joined hands and walked around the tree singing the dear old Christmas hymns—"Her kommer dine arme smaa," "Deilig er den Himmel blaa," "Jeg er saa glad hver julekveld." Father read the Christmas story: "Og det skudde i de dage at der udgik et bud...."

Mama always had gifts for us. I have wondered now how she did it, as poor as we were. One member of this congregation told me a few years ago that he was sure my father did not have \$50 in cash in all the eight years he was here. Once I asked Mother how she did it and she said, "Jeg syntes det var bare moro da" (I thought it was only fun then). She was young then and well. She had chickens, a cow, sheep and a pig, and raised a big garden, so we had food.

I remember one Christmas she told us about. She had given us each a doll. She bought the porcelain heads with painted heads and hair. For these she made bodies of cloth stuffed with sawdust and sewed the heads to the bodies. To each of us girls she gave a doll. Together she gave us a set of small dishes, and these were the toys we seemed to like best. Our brother was trying to get our attention one time but we were too busy with the dishes, so he took a doll in each hand and smashed the two together. They broke into many pieces.

Father and Mother were kindness and generosity personified. The most important was to tell people about Jesus. Dad had a lovely clear tenor voice and to the accompaniment of his guitar he would sing for people we visited, and how they loved it. I remember their faces, tears streaming down their cheeks, sitting so quietly, listening. "Om jeg eied alt men ikke Jesus...." Today no one cries, no matter what the song or the sermon.

In 1908 Father moved to western North Dakota. There were no spruce trees there. So for Christmas we wound green paper on the branches of a poplar tree and used it as our tree. Mother wrote to one of the ladies who had been a neighbor back in Minnesota about our Christmas, and the dear woman, bless her, always thereafter sent us a spruce tree for Christmas.

I get such an ache—oh, to go back to those years! We were happy and contented.

—Mrs. L. K. Prescott
Shevlin, Minn.



HOME MISSIONS

WORDS DESCRIBE CHRISTMAS

Pastor Harold Schafer
Mission Director of AFLC

The words that we use as we speak of the Christmas holidays describe what Christmas means to us. Check the words in these two lists carefully. (1) Santa Claus, stockings, reindeer, Christmas trees, colored lights, parties. (2) Angels, shepherds, wise men, peace, salvation, God's great gift, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Which of the above lists are you using the more often this Christmas season? Be honest, and consider carefully how you answer. What Christmas really means to you is shown by the words most often on your tongue. Notice, too, the conversation of your children in order to see what Christmas means to them. The influence of your home determines largely the attitude of your children toward the true meaning of Christmas.

Read the first list again. All the items are popular today, but they are not mentioned in the Bible. Reread the second list. Did you notice that these are all Biblical words and tell what happened the first Christmas day and what it means? We must understand these essential words and accept by faith God's great gift, the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to receive His peace and salvation.

Have you ever wondered why we have two sets of words that are in use this season? One set of words is completely unrelated to the story of Christmas in the Scriptures and the other brings the true meaning of Christmas. Satan, the enemy of our souls is trying to confuse the

meaning of Christmas. This is one reason why there are two types of Christmas vocabulary. He does not want people to hear the true message—that God sent His Son to save His people from their sins.

In modern warfare many methods are used to win the battles. One tactic is for one side to send a message to its enemy, using the enemy's language, hoping he will assume it is from his own headquarters. The purpose is to confuse and deceive the enemy.

Something similar to this takes place at Christmastime. The enemy of men's souls, Satan, does not want God's message of free salvation to be received. He therefore brings in other things and sends false messages that confuse and deceive. He tells people that the items in the first list are the most important and that if a person has these, then he has celebrated Christmas in the proper way. Yet a person may have these and miss the true meaning of Christmas. A person may even be able to tell the Christmas Story and what it means and yet not have experienced salvation through Jesus Christ. Satan tells many there is plenty of time to repent of their sins and plead for God's mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Are you one he is deceiving in this way? No one knows how much time we have left in this life and we cannot accept God's offer of salvation whenever we want to, but only when the Holy Spirit is prompting us to do so. May this Christmas be for you a blessed Christmas because you have seen your sin and have claimed the Savior from sin!

CHRISTMAS GREETING FROM NOGALES, ARIZONA

From the words of the Magnificat, we greet you. Luke 1:50—"In every generation, his mercy is on those who revere him."

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of His Church. His Church has stood the tests of each generation, that whosoever would may



Shown are the four Simpson boys who were baptized in September. Their mother, the sponsors and Pastor Dynneson are also pictured.



Some of the 61 children who attended Vacation Bible School in Nogales in August. Pastor L. C. Dynneson is at the extreme right.

receive mercy and help in the hour of need.

How wonderful that His witnesses have brought this message of salvation on down to us, that we may be saved, yes, but also that we may be co-bearers of the Light of Life with His Church triumphant and militant.

God is extending His heart of mercy to the people of Nogales in this generation, because the Holy Spirit has brought His love to bear upon hearts throughout the Association and ours here at Nogales, to pray, go and give.

Many have written, "We are praying daily for you." Praise the Lord! Many have sent gifts to the mission funds of the Association, thanks to God. The Women's Missionary Federation has helped raise our building fund so that we have dared make an offer to the First Baptist Church of Nogales for a fine property. At present, Nov. 17, we lack a loan to make the deal complete. God has moved among us to show forth His praise.

The Luther League Federation has shown a wonderful missionary spirit and fulfilled their pledge of \$1,000. These are not the future church only but truly an arm in the present church, reaching out in mercy that many more may revere His worthy name. Thank you, leaguers!

Many individuals, Sunday schools, Ladies' groups and congregations have remembered us in a real way with gifts and offerings. Thanks to God for all these who revere His Name in this generation that others, too, may follow in His train.

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us to victory, and through us makes our knowledge of Him penetrate every place like a sweet perfume" (II Cor. 2: 14).

Sixty-one were registered at our Vacation Bible School last August. Six children were baptized in September. So in this generation, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior." "You also can work together with us, and for us by your prayers, and many will thank God for His favors to us, no doubt an answer to the prayers of many people" (II Cor. 1: 11).

Faithful to accept the Christ Child, faithful to His calling, "Then with unveiled faces we can all behold, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. And be changed into His likeness, from glory to glory, through the Spirit of the Lord working in us" (II Cor. 3: 18).

Sincerely,

Rev. L. C. Dynneson

(All Scripture from Norlie's *Simplified New Testament*)



GREETINGS FROM BRAZIL

Caixa Postal 44
Campo Mourao, Pr.

Dear Friends:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa. 9: 6).

As we write this it is difficult to realize that Christmas is just around the corner. Time has gone so quickly since this time last year, which found us in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

There is little to remind one of Christmas here. But perhaps ours is more like the first Christmas. Our days are longer and hotter at this time of year. We did see a lighted Christmas tree on one of the main avenues here last week. It was in a store selling toys, so you can see that commercialism has already invaded Christmas even here on the frontier. This small sign of Christmas has been a delight to our five older children who pass it on their long walk to and from school.

Our Sunday school is proclaiming the reality of Christmas in a way which we trust will bring out His eternal truth. The children are practicing a Christmas pageant, to the music of John Pederson's famous "Night of Miracles," which is now translated into Portuguese.

Our teenagers are preparing a play called "The First Christmas" and for most of them, children and youth, this will be their first Christmas program. How thankful we are for some fifty souls at this time. Pray for them and their parents, that the Holy Spirit through the Gospel may really get hold of their lives.

Ruby is working with the children and the adult choir, while I am helping with the play. We are doing this short Christmas letter together, so please count it as a greeting from both of us.

We are very thankful to our Lord for each of you who have made our ministry possible through your prayers and support this year. Souls have been won, many have heard, but there is yet so very much to be done. Continue to hold us and all your other missionaries up in much prayer—the Grothes who are in language study, the folk on the Mexican border—and also pray for our Association that it may be enabled to soon send more laborers into His harvest. All this is necessary that the many souls who sit in darkness may see His great light.

Sincerely,

John and Ruby Abel
and children



Mrs. Arnold Jodock



GIVING AND GETTING

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Christmastime—what a thrilling time for both young and old alike, and I suppose Christmas has as many meanings as there are persons.

To me, first of all, Christmas means the bringing of Christ to us and all that salvation includes. But Christmas also means a time to show our love by giving to others. It isn't always a tangible monetary gift either that will bring the most joy.

My mother always said that Christmas was a time for families to be together. So when we were grown and away at school or work we came home for Christmas. Often this coming home cost much more than a gift mailed, but what real joy it brought. And just to see eyes fill with tears of joy at our welcome home was well worth the sacrifice.

As far back as I can remember Christmas was always an outstandingly wonderful time in our home. There being seven of us at our house and as we were a family of meager means, it was the unselfishness of my mother that made Christmas what it was, especially when we were young. This godly mother, by her life, taught us that

giving gifts was much better than getting them.

We played a game of dropping hints long before Christmas about what we would like to get. In this way every member of the family could pick out what he or she could afford to buy. We learned, too, that by watching and listening we could give what was wanted.

One year I remember going with my dad to help him pick out a gift for my mother. To my great disgust he kept looking at pocket knives. I couldn't change his mind and to my great disappointment he bought a small pearl-handled pocket knife. I wrapped it for him and tied it to a branch of the Christmas tree. What a surprised girl I was on Christmas Eve when I saw the gladness of my mother at getting just what she wanted. My dad knew his wife better than his daughter knew her mother.

How like our God and His spiritual family this seems to me. He knows all our wants and our every need. What an all-inclusive package we have in God's gift of salvation and to those of us who have received this *gift of gifts*, we have eternal life.

But today I have been thinking of the gift within this gift. That is the gifts of the Holy Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22, 23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law."

And there are many other verses in the Bible about these and other fruits of the Spirit.

So at this blessed, exciting time of gift-giving and gift-getting, I want to take all God has for me and to hand this life of mine back to Him as a Christmas gift this year. Don't you?

Mrs. Arnold Jodock
Kempston, N. Dak.

CASPAR, MELCHIOR, AND BALTHASAR

Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar,
Three wise kings from lands afar,
Ever following a star;
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar

From lands where twin rivers run,
Lazy under pagan sun,
From the palm tree's shade they come;
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

'Cross the desert's burning waste,
Journey they in greatest haste,
To see a Child's holy face.
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

Hurry now, the hour grows late!
Camels swift, impatient wait,
Before cruel Herod's gate.
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

Herod smiles as the star looks down
On Bethlehem, David's town;
"But He'll never wear my crown,
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar."

The star always at their side,
On wing'd feet the camels stride,
Eagerly the three kings ride;
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

The star stops, the angels sing,
The three kneel 'before their King,
To His love their tribute bring;
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

Gold whose glitter fills the room,
Frankincense's sweet perfume,
Myrrh for the cross and the tomb;
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

As He smiles on you and me,
He smiled that day on the three,
Blessed may they ever be;
Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar.

Marlene Moline
Lansing, Iowa

A CHRISTMAS WISH

I wish that I might lead to Christ's
dear feet—
Those nail-marked feet—
Some straying soul, some wander-
ing one
Who has no Christmas in his
heart or home.
The year has been so blank and
dark,
And my devotion but a spark,
A glimmering light, uncertain, dim,
So poor the service I have ren-
dered Him
Who loves me so.
That while I smile this Christmas
Day,
And join my friends in mirth and
play,
I cannot let the day depart
Without an honest look into my
heart.
Be this my prayer:
O Jesus, let my earnest word be
brother to my deed,
And let my uttered love to Thee
be more than creed.
And when upon the threshold of
another year I stand,
With joy may I stretch forth to
Thee
A full and not an empty hand.
—Author Unknown

IS THERE ROOM?

No room for Jesus, God's great Gift
that day,
No room for Him when to the
earth He came,
And now, as then, it still is just
the same,
No room for Him in hearts and
homes today.
Why will not men make room and
let Him in?
Can they outside of Him true
riches find?
Do they not know that they are
poor and blind?
Only in Christ do life and hope be-
gin.
He comes again this Christmas as
before,
Comes ever seeking those who
need Him most.

Still He stands knocking, though
the door is closed—
Shall He be left outside that bolted
door?

To those whose hearts are open to
receive,
The light of Christmas sends its
wondrous ray,
The peace of Christ comes in the
hearts to stay,
And God's great Gift finds room
when you believe.
Mrs. I. M. Norum
Clayton, Wis.

A GIFT FROM THE HEART

"Give a gift from the heart!"
Those words stood out in bold let-
ters as I hastily picked up the mag-
azine from the table which I was
dusting. Everything these days was
rush, rush, rush! but that phrase
stopped me!

A gift from the heart! Christmas
season was here. Everyone was
buying gifts—mostly "required"
gifts because that person was ex-
pecting one. Some were exchange
gifts—but gifts had been asked for
—so the joy of selecting and giving
had been missed.

Then my thoughts drifted on—
the birth of Jesus was a gift from
the heart. God sent His begotten
Son to save us from our sins (John
3:16). How selfish and thoughtless
we become at Christmas! Our de-
sires are vain and grasping for
worldly things. Our hearts are filled
with commercialized ideas. We are
caught up in a rush of things and
the good is put aside.

Let us examine our hearts and
our gift lists. Let us purchase our
presents with the right spirit and
endeavor to bring a ray of divine
love into our giving.

Give from the heart—not only
in material gifts but prayerfully
in spiritual life. Give from the love
of your heart to souls who are dis-
tressed. Comfort the weary and
troubled. Remember someone who
is seldom remembered. Give a
kind smile to a lonely heart. Give
a few words of testimony to the

unbeliever. These things are free
and will reap greater rewards than
any gift purchased at Christmas-
time.

In sharing Christ and His Gos-
pel, we really can feel the glorious
Christmas spirit in our own hearts.
To me one of the greatest gifts I
could receive was the thought that
I had shared the love of Christ with
someone near and dear to me.
Then we could truly say that in
giving from our hearts, we had let
Christ come in and share our
Christmas joys.

Give a gift from the heart,
Give one of real love:
He fulfilled his part,
He sent his Son from above
Mrs. Arnold McCarlson
Webster, S. Dak.

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