

December 14, 1976

The Lutheran Ambassador

CHRISTMAS JOY
RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTO
by Bob Taylor



MEDITATION MOMENTS

CALL HIS NAME JESUS

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

Christmas is a blessed season. Joy wells up in hearts as we remember with gratitude God’s Gift, the Savior, to a sin-sick world. The cheery greeting: “Merry Christmas,” from relatives and friends, stirs a glad response in our hearts. Christmas is more than glitter and tinsel. We know God’s gift of Life is given to a lost and dying world. Therefore, Christmas touches heart strings of young and old and we are glad.

“Thou shalt call his name JESUS.” “There is something about that name”—it means Savior. The name was not chosen by Mary or Joseph. God chose the name because “He shall save His people from their sins.” Salvation not for Jews only, but Gentiles also. “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2).

Jesus came, not to give liberty to sin, but to “redeem us from all iniquity” (Titus 2:14). In Christ the guilt of sin is removed, the dominion of sin is broken, and the punishment is under the blood of Jesus.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. The Prophet Micah prophesied the place of Christ’s birth seven centuries before His coming.

God’s Word must be fulfilled in minutest detail. Humanly speaking, it seemed natural that Jesus would be born in Nazareth. The thought of difficult travel over many miles surely seemed out of question to Mary. But the Roman Emperor, Augustus, demanded a census of all Jewish families in their tribal city. Augustus desired an enrollment of all Jews, to provide information of total population, or perhaps to make available an up-to-date census for taxing purposes. Joseph and Mary had no choice. They must travel to Bethlehem. God was using a heathen ruler to fulfill His Word of prophecy. “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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—” (Micah 5:2).

Welcome news from Heaven resounded over Judaeon hills that night. “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

God chose to announce the birth of the Savior not to national or religious leaders of that day but, rather, to humble shepherds, “keeping watch over their flock by night.” The long cherished hope of Israel was now fulfilled

in the birth of the Promised Messiah.

The shepherds hurried to the stable. How excited they were, telling Joseph and Mary what they had seen and heard. What experiences, seeing the sky illuminated by the “glory of the Lord.” Few hear the Christmas story told by an angel. Also unusual was it to hear the angel choir praising God in song: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” They must tell what they had seen and heard. Our experiences of “Christ in us, the hope of glory” may not be as dramatic and awe-inspiring as the shepherds, yet our salvation is real to us also and we should always share the joy and peace we experience daily in Christ.

The report of the shepherds touched the heart of Mary. The angel’s announcing of the birth of Jesus was received in quiet joy as she “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” The glory of God was so real in that stable that night that Mary was overwhelmed. God spoke and Mary listened—she pondered—she never forgot when Christ was born as her Savior and the Savior of all mankind. As the birth of the Savior is proclaimed this Christmas, may we, like Mary, ponder the “good tidings” in our hearts and rejoice in salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Julius Hermunslie

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Prairie Memories

BY Dr. Iver Olson

Prairies resemble the oceans in one respect—one can see far; but all one sees is more of the same. Yet, what a sight! A person can leave the house and walk until noon and still be at home. He can see more land in one grand sweep of vision than is possible anywhere else on the arable earth. Particularly is this fascinating on cloudless nights of both summer and winter. Myriads of stars look down to light up the earth and make people feel poetic. It is easier for prairie people to understand and appreciate infinity than it is for dwellers in crowded cities. He who has spent his childhood years in the wide-open spaces of the prairies becomes infected with an urge to return that years in city tenements will not efface. He has the same attachments to the land as a lifelong mariner has for the sea.

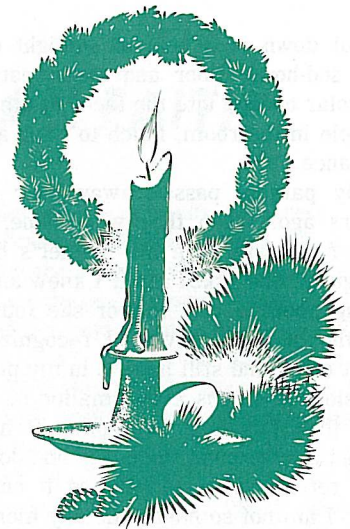
Yet, life on the prairie in the early days of the settlers was not greatly different from that in timberland areas. Both groups were usually poor as they began to carve out homes for themselves. A significant difference was that the settlers near groves had fuel at ready hand, and materials from which to build log houses. The prairie squatter usually had as his first home a sod house. This could be comfortable enough, but it would last for only a limited time. On the other hand, the prairie homesteader could turn his land into arable acres of productive fields in a shorter time than he who had to clear his land of stumps first. Within a decade sod houses had been replaced by commodious and comfortable frame houses.

The undersigned spent his early years in a one-room sod house, the dimensions of which were about 15 by 24 feet, inside measurements. The walls were about three feet thick at the bottom, and 18 inches at the top. They were vertical in the inside, but slanted in slightly on the outside. The

inside walls were plastered and white-washed to make them appear more pleasant. The window sills were even with the inside of the wall; this made it difficult to see more than straight out through the windows.

The last year the sod house was occupied we were seven people who lived there. This is the year of which I have definite memories. It should not be said that we were poor; we just did not have any money. Perhaps we did not notice its absence. In October of 1910, a carload of apples was shipped into our home town in an unheated railroad car. When the apples arrived, they were frozen to the core. The local merchant offered them gratis to such as would haul them away. My father came home with two barrels of apples. We had a first-class deep freeze in the snowbank east of the house. The apples kept well. Just enough of the frozen apples were brought in as would be used immediately; they were dipped into hot water so they could be peeled easily, and then cooked up. That winter we had apple juice, apple sauce, apple pie, apple pudding, apple butter, apple jam, apple syrup, and apple everything. Mother even put apple juice into the bread she baked. We could not have had better apples if we had been rich.

Christmas came, with the usual weeks of preparation both inside and outside. The Christmas tree was a modest one—a poplar or willow shrub found near the edge of a slough. By trimming and adding branches, my father made it do. Mother had saved colored paper, from which she wove tiny baskets to hang on the tree. She had also saved string from grocery packages and used this to string two pounds of cranberries into a long chain with which she draped the tree from top to bottom. A dozen wax candles were fastened to the branches



and lit for short periods during the evenings of Christmas. My heart leaps up still when I think of it: so beautiful!

That Christmas I received the first Christmas present I can remember. It was a two-inch oval mirror with a short handle. The glass was pasted on durable cardboard and tiny white seashells were glued around the edges and along the handle. I had never seen anything so beautiful in my life before. I was literally floored, becoming oblivious of all else about me. I could see myself in it. To be sure, I could not see the whole face at one time. So I looked at the east half and the west, then the northern and southern hemispheres of my face; in my mind I pieced these together into one vast expanse of face. I had not imagined that I was as handsome as the mirror revealed me to be.

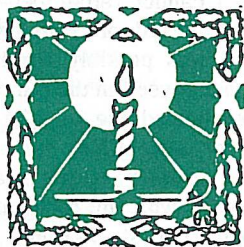
Did we not sing songs and read the Christmas Gospel? I am certain this was done; the grown-ups sang songs from memory and we hummed—off key. Father always read the Christmas Story; he must have done so then, too, but I cannot remember it. What can be expected of a four-year-old. Awake, I was possibly admiring the mirror, and myself in the mirror.

Mother helped me to take care of the mirror after Christmas; she hid it in her dresser drawer, far back, and deep down. On rare occasions, and upon request, I would be permitted to play with the mirror. Of course, I would have to look at myself again. Having satisfied myself that I looked even better than ever, I would

squat down in a pool of sunlight on the sod-house floor and send beams of solar energy into the faces of other people in the room, much to their annoyance.

My parents passed away over 30 years ago. When they were gone, a sister went through my mother's belongings. She asked me if I knew anything about a tiny mirror she found in the dresser drawer. I recognized it at once, and still have it in my possession. It seems even smaller now; but then I have grown some. It has faded a bit around the edges and does not reflect so accurately as it once did; I am not so handsome any more. The price is still marked on the back, 10¢. Where did father get the dime? And shouldn't the price have been erased before the gift was presented? There are two reasons why it was not erased. I do not believe my parents were adequately informed on all of these little social amenities; furthermore, they had no eraser. The only writing implement we had in the house was an indelible pencil with a red beveled top, but no eraser. But it, too, was a thing of beauty. We children were not allowed to use it much; we found that it made better markings if we touched the point to the tongue first. Mother did not like these markings on floor and furniture, Our mouths also looked as though we had eaten too many cranberries.

In reflection, those days appear now even more precious than they actually were at the time. It is good to have good memories; they make for even greater riches. Even now one can be rich whether purses are thick or thin.



CHRISTMAS IN TELEMARLEN

About three or four o'clock in the afternoon (Christmas Eve), when twilight began to creep across the landscape, a strange silence fell upon the busy scene in each household. People both old and young seemed to be waiting for something. Every now and then the men would stop in their work at the barn or wood shed, and the women going from one house to another walked slower or stood still for a minute, and time and again the children would come to the door and listen. Then there would come floating upon the quiet air the sweet tones of the church bells, rising and falling, now so faint that the silvery music could hardly be heard, then again swelling and reaching to the most distant cabin on the mountain side. If a host of shining angels had hovered over the valley and sung "Peace on earth, good will toward men," the peasants outside their houses would not have been filled with a greater reverential awe. Superstition? Perhaps; but would it hurt some of us if we had a little more of this kind of superstition?

The blessed festival had been rung in. There had been a short pause; then the preparations were resumed with greater zest than before. So much remained to be done, and time was getting short.

In the evening the cattle received an extra portion of feed, and the bedding was made as soft and smooth as at no other time. Every living creature was to be made to feel that it was Christmas.

When chores had been attended to, all members of the family indulged in a great luxury; they took a bath. As one after the other came into the living room with new clothes on, they shook hands and wished each other a happy Christmas.

Then all sat down to the most elab-

orate meal of the whole year. There was enough on the table to last the whole family for many days. The principal course was the "Julegrød," a kind of porridge or pudding made of the finest wheat flour and cream. It is the finest dish a Norwegian woman knows how to prepare; and this is saying a great deal. It requires considerable skill to make it right, and although I have seen it made quite a few times, eagerly waiting to have a chance to lick the "Grøtru" or wooden stick with which it is stirred, I am not in a position to give the lady readers the recipe.

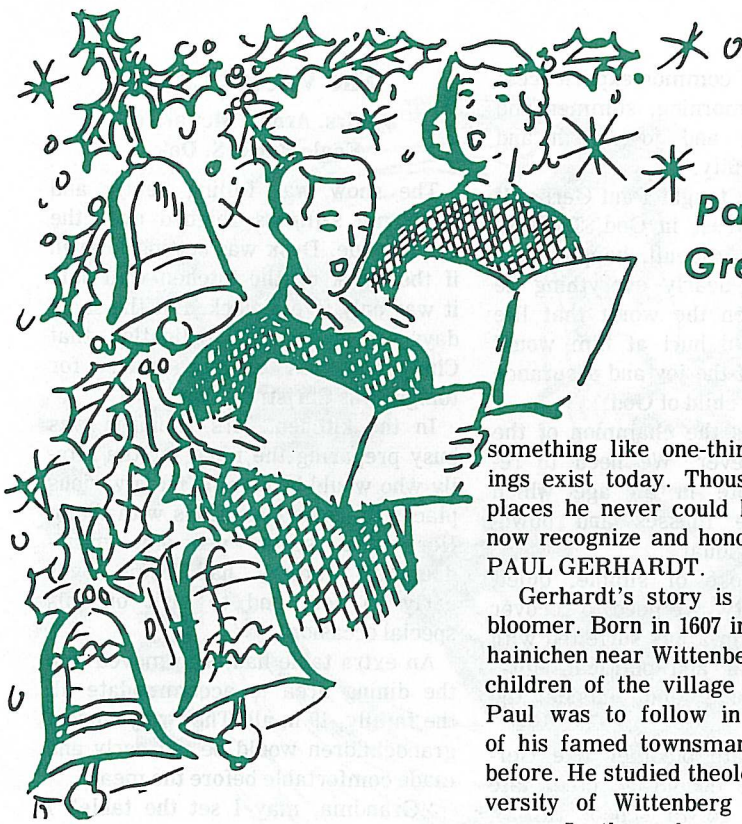
Before the banquet began the Bible was opened and the old, old story was read. Then some old Christmas hymn was sung with many improvised flourishes, and then, well then did they eat as only peasants can eat.

With lighted candles in every corner of the house, and the chimney fire throwing a ruddy glow on festive-clad, smiling, happy people, sitting round the table, you have as pretty a little scene as can be found anywhere.

On Christmas Day almost everything that had feet had to go to church. Hardly a horse in the whole parish was permitted to stay at home. No matter how delapidated some of the old nags might be, when they heard the merry jingle of bells on their backs they began to shake their heads and cut capers as if they were regular race horses.

Of course, many people had to walk, and those living in far-away glens had to start before daylight. Between ten and eleven o'clock the many roads leading to the church in the middle of the parish grew black with people.

—from *A Summer in Telemarken*,
N. N. Rønning, 1903.



Paul Gerhardt, One of Our Great Lutheran Hymnwriters

By Pastor Edward A. Johnson

something like one-third of his writings exist today. Thousands living in places he never could have imagined now recognize and honor the name of PAUL GERHARDT.

Gerhardt's story is that of a late bloomer. Born in 1607 in tiny Graefenhainichen near Wittenberg, one of four children of the village mayor, young Paul was to follow in the footsteps of his famed townsman of a century before. He studied theology at the University of Wittenberg for a full 14 years. In those days one simply remained in school until one obtained a position. Not an outstanding student, Paul nevertheless kept his grades up and prepared himself well for his future vocation.

At age 35, still not sure what he wanted to be, Paul signed on as a private tutor in a well-to-do household in Berlin. At 44, he finally decided upon ordination. His first appointment was as Propst (district superintendent) at Mittenwalde, southwest of Berlin. Four years later, at 48, Paul Gerhardt married the daughter of the family whom he had served as tutor.

When Paul was 50 and his wife 34, the Gerhardts moved back to Berlin where he served St. Nicolai's, one of the larger and better known parishes in the city. (This writer saw the war ruined red hulk of St. Nicolai's while touring East Berlin in 1970. The church will probably never be rebuilt.) After nine years there, he lost his job (more about that shortly). For three years Paul had no regular parish, although unofficially he was still the salaried pastor at St. Nicolai's. Thanks to the intervention of friends, in 1669 he was named archdeacon at Luebben, some 50 miles southeast of Berlin. Now back in his native Saxony, the hymn writer spent his last seven years in the parish ministry

which he loved. He is buried beneath the altar of his church in Luebben.

To understand Gerhardt's problems, we must remember that Germany, as we know it, did not then exist. It was a motley collection of provinces, princely territories, and Laender, about the size, in some cases, of a modern American county. The rule prevailed that the ruler's religion would also be that of his subjects. Those dissenting were free to move elsewhere. In 1613 the Elector of Brandenburg had publicly embraced the Reformed faith. The Lutherans lost 24 Laender to the Reformed, which led to considerable ill will between the two groups. In 1614 the elector forbade any sermons on doctrinal or other controversial subjects.

Then, during the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648), the German lands were invaded, plundered, burned and ravaged by one army after another from all over Europe. Wittenberg and Paul's home village both went up in flames. But the war did not end the religious controversies. In 1662 a new elector, Frederick William of Brandenburg-Prussia, forbade his subjects to study at Wittenberg because it was "too Lutheran." The Lutherans protested and Gerhardt, despite his basically peaceful disposition, spoke out loudly and found himself the chief spokesman for the Lutheran cause in Berlin. When the Elector tried to merge the Reformed and the Lutherans, Gerhardt's sermons became sharply doctrinal and polemical. By now his hymns and poems also were becoming well known.

Despite strong church and governmental protests, the elector fired Gerhardt from St. Nicolai's pulpit in 1666. The following year he did allow Gerhardt to return, but the pastor re-

Earlier this year a 300th anniversary passed by almost unnoticed. On May 27, 1676, the Wednesday after Pentecost and a full century before our own Declaration of Independence, a Lutheran pastor died in his parsonage in the little east German town of Luebben. Few persons beyond his parishioners, his son, and his pastoral colleagues took notice of his homegoing. His wife, four other children, his brothers and sisters, and a sister-in-law who had managed his household, had all passed away several years before.

A shy, self-effacing, almost withdrawn individual, this pastor had kept a low profile. Scarred and hurt by years of doctrinal controversy into which he had been thrust, he was serving this little country church where the church authorities, partly from pity and partly from desperation, had assigned him after he had been fired as pastor of a much larger church in Berlin.

Yet, this humble, unknown pastor in Luebben was to become known to later generations as one of the most inspirational, comforting and prolific hymn writers the Lutheran Church ever produced. He wrote nearly 150 hymns and poems; 80 are said to have been translated into English, and

fused; he was sure he could not preach honestly and forthrightly under the elector's terms. "I am willing and ready," he declared, "to confirm evangelical truth with my blood. I, Paul, am ready to bare my neck to the sword, just as another Paul did."

But Paul always fought fairly, debating issues rather than dissecting personalities. His strong, unyielding faith, which produced dogmatic sermons, also brought forth hymns of a distinctly different character. Here, Paul Gerhardt could balance the spirit of doctrinal defense with that of brotherly love. Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic could find common ground in his poetic expression of faith, of love and of a common Redeemer. The church today, torn between one extreme of rigid, insensitive dogmatism and defense of the faith and the other extreme of an oversensitive concern for the individual that lets doctrinal concerns fly out the window, sorely needs to recover Gerhardt's happy balance.

And what are some of his hymns? Every Advent we sing "O How Shall I Receive Thee;" every Christmas we sing "All My Heart This Night Rejoices." Good Friday and Holy Week would not be complete without his "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," based upon an older Latin text by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. "Evening and Morning;" "The Restless Day Now Closeth;" "Commit Thou All That Grieves Thee;" "Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me;" "A Lamb Goes Forth Our Grievs to Share;" "O World, See Here Suspended;" "Blest is He That Never Walketh;" "If God Himself Be For Me;" "Emmanuel, We Sing Thy Praise;" "Holy Ghost, Dispel Our Sadness;" and "O Enter, Lord, Thy Temple"—the list is almost endless.

Gerhardt's hymns have survived because they are spontaneous, natural, and honest. There is nothing in them of the artificial, the contrived, or the faddish. Nor are they morbid or gloomy, despite Gerhardt's personal tragedies and the agonies of his homeland when he wrote. His simple, direct manner of expression is Biblical, for he drew most of his ideas from the Bible—as well as from nature. As Wolfgang Trillhaas had writ-

ten, he spoke of common experiences: "evening and morning, summer and winter, sorrow and joy, birth and death—and eternity."

Stark tragedy taught Paul Gerhardt to put all his trust in God. This accounts for the tranquil, happily confident tone of nearly everything he wrote. Not even the worst that life and Satan could hurl at him would ever rob him of the joy and assurance that he had as a child of God.

Gerhardt was the champion of the individual believer. We need to recover that note in an age which champions the masses and downgrades the individual.

Gerhardt spoke of simple, quiet, and devout piety. We need to recover that note, too, in a day surfeited with continual social and political agitation both inside and outside the church.

Finally, a late bloomer like Gerhardt ought to encourage other late bloomers. To go to school till 35, not marry till 48, and then raise five children and do all that he did, should tell the rest of us: "There's hope!" To young people just out of school, looking in vain for work, Gerhardt's advice is timely:

Put thou thy trust in God,

In duty's path go on;

Walk in His strength with faith and hope,

So shall thy work be done.

Who points the clouds their course,

Whom winds and seas obey,

He shall direct thy wandering feet,

He shall prepare thy way.

The same advice holds for those in middle life, wondering about their oncoming retirement and old age. "In duty's path go on," Paul would tell us. "Remember the Psalmist's advice (37:5): 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.'"

Small wonder that Christians like Paul Gerhardt live on, giving new insights and fresh courage and hope to each new generation. You and I can be proud to be a part of the same Lutheran heritage which produced him, and which he in turn helped shape for us.



The Vacant Chair

by Mrs. Arnold McCarlson,
Eagle Butte, S. Dak.

The snow was falling gently and a solemn stillness reigned over the countryside. Dusk was setting in even if the clock on the kitchen wall said it was only five o'clock. But the short days were only an indication that Christmas was coming soon... for tonight was Christmas Eve!

In the kitchen, Mrs. Johnson was busy preparing the meal for the family who would be coming from various places to spend Christmas with them. Her little seven year-old granddaughter Tammy had come over early to help and to visit on this special occasion.

An extra table had been moved into the dining area to accommodate all the family, 19 in all. The two youngest grandchildren would be fed early and made comfortable before the meal.

"Grandma, may I set the table? I will be careful." So, Mrs. Johnson set the stacks of dishes on the buffet and Tammy proceeded to set the table while Mrs. Johnson returned to the kitchen.

Later Mrs. Johnson came to check on Tammy and to see if there were enough places set. She counted 20 places. In her heart she knew that was the right number but one would be missing. "Oh, Tammy, you've set too many places," said Grandma.

"No, Grandma, I counted and there are twenty without Wendy and Anthony."

"Yes, Tammy, but Uncle David is in Germany and he had his furlough in July. So he will miss Christmas with us again this year."

Mrs. Johnson began to recall other Christmas Eves... even with their family of six children; there had only been about five times that they had all spent Christmas together. Both she and Mr. Johnson had each spent Christmas Eves at the hospital. Then the oldest son had spent eight years in the service, leaving right after graduation at the age of 17, most of the time spent overseas. The youngest son was two at that time. So seldom had the family been together.

Tammy looked at Grandma and said, "Let's leave David's place and

[Continued on page 16]

Christmas— The Word Became Flesh

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This verse of Scripture has been very prominent in the Lutheran Free Church movement in America. It has had and has a prominent place in seminary lecture rooms.

“The Word Became Flesh” is the message of Christmas. Because of the spiritual needs in the world, because of man’s sinfulness, God took the initiative and caused that His Word became flesh to save man. God had spoken to the “fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways” (Hebrews 1:1) but now He spoke through the Word become flesh, His Son, in order that man might be saved.

“The Word Became Flesh” speaks of God’s love and concern for us. While we were helpless, God acted. It speaks of Christ’s divinity. He was not only a man, but the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin. It speaks of the Word’s purity. It does not have the failings of that common to man, but is eternal, and is not subject to human judgments. It is the center and power of all that really can be called Christian. It speaks of hope for you and me. God works through the Word. The Word is still mighty to save. Men are reborn through God’s Word.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my Word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

The Word is to become flesh in a new way among us. As we receive Christ through the Word, Christ dwells within us. “Christ in you, the hope of Glory” (Colossians 1:27). Our lives are to reveal Him. As people together receive and obey the Word they become a congregation, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ. The Word, as it were, becomes flesh. What a glory and responsibility! Only the Word makes it possible!

May the Word become flesh for you this Christmas. As the Word is made the center of Christmas activity, Christ will become more glorious for you. Your faith will become more simple and childlike. Your congregation will become living. Burdens will be lifted. Joy in Christ will abound.

God has been good to the Association family and friends. Ours has been the faith and assurance that the Word became flesh. Let us continue to pray with and for each other that Christ may be seen in us all, and people be moved to love the Christ we are to reveal.

Thank you for the fellowship in the Gospel. May you, your home, and loved ones be truly blessed this Christmas season. Remember, “The Word Became Flesh.”

A great and mighty wonder
This joyful feast-day brings;
The Virgin bears the Infant,
Our Lord, and King of Kings.

The Word becomes incarnate,
Descending from on high;
And cherubim sing anthems
To shepherds from the sky.

And we with them triumphant
Repeat the hymn again,
‘To God on high be glory,
And peace on earth to men!’

Pastor John P. Strand



THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

by Sandro Botticelli (Florentine, 1444-1510)

From the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTO

GOD'S POSSIBILITY

The rejoicing began
when You were born—
While angels sang praises
and shepherds watched in awe,
Your mother sat by quietly,
joyfully,
remembering the angel's promise:
"For nothing is impossible with God."

How impossible it seemed!
The promised Messiah
born in a stable?
The Son of God
lying in a manger?

Was it possible
that You, the Son of Man,
would never be great in the eyes
of the world?

And be spurned by the people
You came to save?
That You would die a criminal's death
on a cross?

It was possible—
for You who were dead arose
and now live eternally,
bringing new life to defeated hearts
and victory to sin-cursed lives.

So, Lord, we kneel before You,
the Babe in the manger,
the Man on the cross,
cleansed from sin
and made new creatures,
rejoicing

at Your birth,
"For with God, nothing is impossible."

Dorothy Seaman

ART AND CHRISTMAS

Art has lingered near the Khan
(public inn) of Bethlehem and lovingly
transferred to canvas the Madonna
and the Child. Raphael, Murillo, Cor-
reggio, Fra Angelica, Dore and a
host of others have taken Matthew's
or Luke's inspired narrative and pro-
duced paintings well-nigh immortal.
Our own hearts at Christmastide turn
to the manger, and like shepherds and
Magi we kneel and worship the Holy
Babe. Humble though the place, the
Person made it glorious.

(from Doran's Ministers' Manual,
1928)

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

The cold winds of December come,
And men long for the summer sun;
Yet through the veil of winter's tears
The fragile Christmas rose appears,
As if in silence echoing,
This is the birth month of the King.

The winter stars glowed hard and
bright;
The hills returned the frigid light;
The snow gleamed raw on Judah's
peaks.

The valleys lay in icy sleep;
The town of Bethlehem was still;
The darkness on its streets lay chill.
Cold shadows in the doorways crept
And slunk across a sheltered step
To steal away the flimsy warmth.
A beggar child asleep beneath,
With a weak cry of pain awoke
And tighter clutched her ragged
cloak.

She watched the shadows come and
go
And fling dark arms about the
snow.

She heard the faint echoes of song;
The music shimmered strong and
warm

As summer sun upon the street,
But yet the cobbles 'neath her feet
Were bleak and hard as winter's
stone—

And then the melody was gone.
Forgotten now was her cold pain;
She strained to hear the chords again.
Such glories only come in dreams;
She knew naught else it could have
been.

Down the steep path a flick'ring light
Of lantern pierced the waste of night.
Into the city, down the street,
The shepherds walked on whispered
feet;
With voices hushed and trembling
spoke
Of angel chorus that awoke



Them from sleep to tell of a King
Born in a barn in Bethlehem.
The shepherds saw the shivering
maid.

“Come with us; do not be afraid.
God's Son is born to be our King;
Come see the presents that we bring:
A tiny lamb from out our fold,
A hand carved bowl, a coin of gold.
Come now with us,” the shepherds
smiled,
“You, too, can worship this great
Child.”

“Oh no, kind sirs, I cannot go.”
She stood forlornly in the snow
And silent watched them as they left—
She had no gift to give herself.
Naught but the lonely dark and sleet
And cold within an empty street;
Stones, beatings, curses, sorrow, woe.
And hopeless tears upon the snow.
Again the joyous hymn of praise
Streamed from the sky in dulcet rays.
Soft now the warmth around her
flowed.

The grey stone gleamed with crystal
gold.
A being stood there robed in white;
A being made of love and light.
The child saw him not. Still she
sobbed—

She longed to see the Son of God.
“Why do you cry? Why don't you go
And seek the King who loves you so?”
The child looked up. She shook with
fear.

This surely was an angel here!
His dazzling brightness hurt her eyes
Like summer sun that burned the
skies,
But yet his face was full of love
And beauty of God's world above.
“You need a gift to take the King?
Then give your heart as offering.
Tears of love are not shed in vain.
They fall to earth as spring-born rain.
They quicken life where all was cold
For love is mightier than gold.”
The child looked down and at her feet
Were roses blooming in the street.

The cold winds of December blow,
Yet through the blanket of the snow
The Christmas rose blooms pure and
white

In memory of that first night
When it lay sweet as offering—
The gift a child once gave the King.

Written and illustrated
by Marlene Moline

Women For Christ

JAPANESE CHRISTMAS by Mrs. Einar Unseth

Suppose that you are living in a country where Christmas Day is not a holiday, where the work of factory and office continues just as if it were any ordinary day. Suppose that the mail is delivered as usual on December 25th, and that the children all go off to school in the morning. What would Christmas be like there?

As you enter the shopping area of a city you hear Christmas carols over the loud-speakers. You see Christmas cards and gifts on display. You hear those around you speaking of Christmas parties. "Surely Christmas is here after all," you think. During our years in Japan this was our experience. Christmas seemed to be all around us, but we soon found that it was only the "wrappings" of Christmas. We saw and heard only the husks—the heart of Christmas was missing.

Although Christmas is mainly a fun-time to most Japanese, the Christians experience great joy as they gather together in the church to celebrate the birth of the Savior. Often the Japanese Christians find themselves alone in their families at Christmas, alone because nobody else in their family shares their love for Jesus. Therefore, they appreciate the fellowship of other Christians much more than most Christians in America do. To help fill this need, many activities are planned in the church. Christmas carolling is a favorite of young and old. The carollers walk and carry paper lanterns which are lighted by candles. They

go to the hospitals, the nursing homes, and homes of church members. After the long walk, hot tea and cookies are enjoyed upon their return to the church.

The Sunday School Christmas program is a very effective means of sharing the real meaning of Christmas. Many times non-Christian parents do send their children to Sunday School. Though they do not attend church themselves, they will be happy to come to see their children's program. On that night the chairs are set aside and straw mats are spread on the floor to accommodate the crowd. What a thrill to see the enthusiasm of the children as they portray the story of Jesus' birth and sing the familiar Christmas carols.

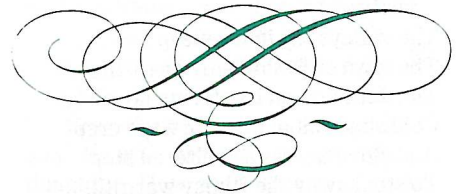
A Candlelight service is held at Christmas, too. One can expect the church to be packed that night since the Japanese people appreciate the atmosphere created by the little candles and the music. And perhaps it is easier to enter the church when you know that a large crowd is expected and the service will be a festive one.

Because December 25th is not a holiday in Japan, the Christmas service is held in the evening. There is a Christmas dinner, too. Some years it was a "sukiyaki" dinner prepared and served in our home, but when the group became too large it became necessary to hold it in the church. This dinner is a festive occasion, a time of praising the Lord for His Son as well as a time of glad Christian fellowship together.

Yes, celebrating Christmas is quite

different in Japan than in America. Though Christmas Day is not a holiday there, yet every Japanese person is in some way made aware of Christmas. However, only the Christian experiences the real meaning of Christmas. The Japanese Christian well understands the words spoken by the angels to the shepherds that first Christmas night, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

(Editor's Note: Mrs. Unseth and her husband were missionaries in Japan from 1954-1963, under the American Lutheran Church.)



WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN

No palace great with splendored bed,
No luxury in sight;
There was no pillow for His head
In Bethlehem that night;
But stable bare with cattle there,
When Christ was born that night.

No bright lights for Christ's holiness,
But cavern lighted dim;
What poverty and lowliness
The world did offer Him!
A dingy stall with pressing pall
The world did give to Him.

But yet, what radiant beauty shone
From yonder manger dark,
What fragrance perfumed wood and
stone
And touched surroundings stark.
Sweet holiness did come to bless
And touch that stable dark.

Without Thee, Lord, how dark my
heart,
Like yon Bethlehem's stall;
So, come, sweet Jesus, and impart
Thy purest light of all.
O enter there with perfume rare,
Thou sweetest Rose of all.

E. I. Mork

JOSEPH, THOU SON OF DAVID

by Mrs. Rudolph Hegge

The evening shadows were slowly creeping across the doorsteps of the little carpenter shop. Inside the shop, Jonah, the carpenter of Nazareth, was getting ready to close his shop for the night. As he worked, his glance fell frequently on the open door and his face lit up with gladness when the sound of quick, light footsteps was followed by the appearance of his little son, Joseph. Joseph, the son of his old age: how his heart lifted at sight of him! A mixture of childlikeness and maturity, a frank open face with eyes dancing with fun, yet quick to fill with concern for the problems of others.

Tonight he was full of excitement over the afternoon of play with his little friends and it was some time before his father could ask about his day at school. But his reply came with enthusiasm.

"Oh, Father, we learned more about the kings of Israel and Judah! And after the reading lesson, Rabbi Eleazar read to us about King David and his sons. It must have been an exciting time!"

"David was a great king and a good man," his father answered.

Joseph hesitated before he spoke again. Perhaps his father would be displeased, but he must ask!

"Father, David was not always good. How could God be pleased with him?"

"Joseph, that is a big question. Let us talk about it later. Your mother will be waiting for us for the evening meal."

The meal was eaten with few comments until Joseph's mother asked him why he was so quiet. "I am thinking," he answered. "I am thinking how to ask the Rabbi tomorrow how God could love David when he was not good."

"O Joseph!" his mother exclaimed. "Does not your father love you even when you are naughty? David says in one of his songs, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.' David truly loved and feared God."

The boy accepted the thought and asked no more questions. But the next

day he announced, "I asked the Rabbi about David and he was not displeased. He said that David was sorry for his sin and offered sacrifices, even as we do today, and God forgave him. I do not understand how killing a little lamb can please God, but the Rabbi said when Messiah comes, we will understand. I shall ask tomorrow when and how Messiah will come. May I go and play now? Simon has a new game to show me!"

He ran off with a boyish abandon that brought a sense of relief to his parents. "I do not understand the boy," his father admitted, "but I think the Rabbi does not object to all his questions."

Jonah had many thoughts about Joseph and his eager curiosity and he was not too surprised at the report he brought to the shop the next day. Rushing in with excitement sparkling in his eyes, he exclaimed, "Father, do you know you are a descendant of King David? And I am, too! And Messiah, when he comes, will be a son of David!"

"Yes, I know it, Joseph, and I am sure you knew it, too."

"But I never thought so much about it, I guess. Father, if Israel were free from Rome, would we have a king? Who would it be? It would—"

"Hush, Joseph, hush! Those are not words to speak where Rome may hear!"

Joseph clapped his hands over his mouth, his eyes wide.

"We will talk again at home, my son. Hurry and tell your mother I shall be home early."

Bedtime came much too early for Joseph that night but he had many things to think about. His father had answered many questions but there was much to ask the Rabbi tomorrow. Perhaps he would tell them about the record of the kings his father had said was kept in the Synagogue. Were there other boys in the village who were also of David's line? Drowsily, he told himself he did not really want to be a king, and could never go good enough to be Messiah. He drifted into dreams of Roman soldiers.

Jonah, too, had troubled dreams. The hours were very long the next day. As the afternoon wore on and Joseph did not appear at the shop, he finished the task at hand and went home early. He found Jochebed alone and not a little concerned about Joseph.

"He seemed unhappy," she admitted, "and he would not eat his usual after-school lunch. But he insisted nothing was wrong and he wanted to go out to play with Simon. Perhaps I should have sent him to the shop."

"No, I think you were right not to make too much of it. We will wait until he comes to us. Something may be troubling him but he will tell us in time. Let us not worry too much."

There was a knock at the door and to their surprise and dismay Rabbi Eleazar stood there.

"Do not be alarmed," he smiled. "I just felt it would be wise to talk to you about Joseph. No, he is not in trouble; he is a good boy. But he is deeply troubled and I feel partly responsible."

He paused, but no one spoke.

The Rabbi continued, "You may have realized how interested Joseph is in being a descendant of King David."

Jonah nodded. "I have had to caution him to be careful not to speak in public of a Jewish king."

"I, too, have cautioned him. We have studied the sons of David and the history of the kingly lines. He was very interested and we spent more time on it than my classes usually do. Then we came to Jeconiah."

Jonah nodded but said nothing. Jochebed looked bewildered.

"Jeconiah was a king of Judah, so wicked that Jehovah decreed that none of his descendants would ever sit on a throne of David."

"And that," Jacob murmured huskily, "is the line from which I am descended. And Joseph also. I know how the boy must feel."

"He feels guilty and rejected," the Rabbi answered, "as if he himself had sinned, as if the guilt of all his ancestors lies on him."

The mother's eyes were filled with tears. "How he must be suffering! What can we do to help him?"

The Rabbi had many suggestions, and finally concluded, "Talk to him

frankly; I am sure that will help all of you. Stress Jehovah's love and forgiveness. Above all, keep reminding him that Messiah will come!"

"Messiah will surely come," they echoed.

The door opened and Joseph entered, his eyes widening at the sight of the Rabbi. The good man greeted him kindly. "Greetings, my child. I have been telling your parents how well you are doing in school and what a good boy you are." He took his leave graciously and Joseph turned to his parents.

"Mother, you have been crying!" he exclaimed.

"Mothers cry for many strange reasons," replied his father, as he placed a loving arm about the boy's shoulders.

* * * * *

How good and wise his parents had been. Joseph drew his hand across his eyes to wipe away the mistiness.

It was very quiet in the stable. Mary and the Babe were sleeping, the tired little donkey was resting with the other animals. Joseph had been keeping watch, half reclining on a pile of straw in the doorway. The eastern sky was lightening; he could faintly see the flocks of sheep on the hillside where earlier the angels' song had been heard. As he watched, his memory had taken him back to his boyhood. When he had heard of his wicked ancestor, Jeconiah, he had felt utterly rejected. Perhaps Jehovah did not even know that a descendant of Jeconiah, a little boy named Joseph, existed! With what love and understanding his parents had drawn him back into faith in a loving heavenly Father and in the hope of Israel, the coming Messiah!

Joseph thought he had never been happier in his life than on the day he and Mary were betrothed. Preparations for their marriage were going on apace, with joy and great anticipation.

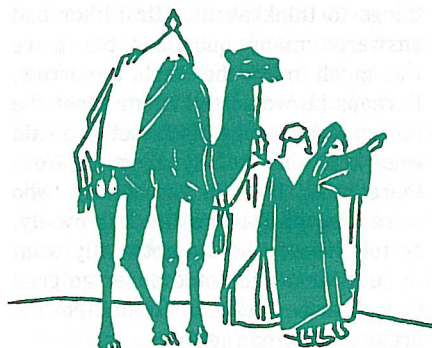
Suddenly his world had fallen apart. Mary had come to him with the words, "Joseph, I am with child. Jehovah has chosen me to be the mother of the Messiah." Joseph had heard her with stunned disbelief. Surely Messiah will come, surely God will keep his prom-

ise. But not now, not here. This must not happen to his beloved Mary!

For many days he had struggled to decide what to do. He would not expose her to public shame and disgrace; even to privately put her away was a difficult decision to make. Then an angel of the Lord had appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "Joseph, thou son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."

These words had had such impact on his life and Mary's that it was some time before the rest of the message really came home to him. The angel had called him a "son of David"! He felt as if the name of Jeconiah had been erased from the roster of his ancestors. In all the responsibility of starting a new home and adjusting to a new life, and even in the journey to Bethlehem, the assurance had stayed with him that somehow the coming of this child had taken away from him all the burden he had assumed when he first heard of Jeconiah. And had the angel not also said, "He shall save His people from their sin"?

How this would come to pass he did not know. Mary foresaw dark shadows in the Child's future and Joseph had confidence in her spiritual discernment. For the immediate future, how should he provide for His physical needs? Would a Holy Child need the spiritual guidance of his parents? Would He need protection from powerful enemies? and from the slanderous tongues of their neighbors? Surely Jehovah was able for all these problems; surely He would direct, and provide, and protect. Let this be a time for rejoicing in the Lord, as the angels had sung, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!"



LISTEN TONIGHT!

Listen tonight to the **message**,
Promising pardon and peace,
Bringing the sinner salvation,
Giving the captive release.
Sweet is the Gospel of Christmas,
Coming from Heaven to earth,
Telling of Jesus, our Savior,
And of His wonderful birth.

Listen tonight to the **anthem**,
Ringin' o'er Bethlehem's plain,
Sung by the angels of Heaven;
O, what a thrilling refrain!
Caught by the lips of God's people,
Sweetly it echoes again:
"Glory to God in the highest,
Peace and good-will unto men!"

Listen tonight to the **story**,
Telling how shepherds of old
Hearing these wonderful tidings
Hurried away from their fold,
Making their way to the manger,
Eager their tribute to bring.
Come, let us hasten to join them,
Worshipping Jesus, the King.

Listen tonight to the **praises**,
Sung by the shepherds of old,
Joyfully praising the Christ-child,
As they returned to the fold.
Let us unite in their praises,
Singing with gladsome accord;
Hail Him, our King and Redeemer,
Jesus, the Christ-child, our Lord.

C. K. Solberg

"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Galatians 4:4, 5

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich." II Corinthians 8:9

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:4, 5

editorials

THE HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Perhaps at no season of the year does the pastor who is no longer serving a congregation miss the parish activities as much as at Christmas and Easter. And somehow or other, the days of Advent and Christmas seem to bring out the best in everyone, including the pastor, and there is a great spirit of goodwill abroad in community and church.

"The happy Christmas comes once more
The heavenly Guest is at the door,
The blessed words the shepherds thrill,
The joyous tidings: peace, goodwill."

So wrote the hymnwriter long ago, but the sentiments, yea, the truths, live on among us. The days are busy with our celebration of Christmas in our homes, schools and congregations. Some of you will have to lay your copy of the Christmas *Ambassador* aside until Christmas Day is past. But in spite of all, through it all, may you be conscious of what your observance is all about. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son into the world to be the Savior.

It is the "happy Christmas" which we celebrate. Let us look more closely at the reasons for this.

First, the angel brought a message of joy to the shepherds and to the world. Another songwriter said, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come." Good news is always the occasion of great joy. A dream comes true, a hope is realized, and great joy follows. Try to imagine the joy the prisoners in the Vietnam war experienced when they got to leave their prison compounds and to come home.

The world has a false conception of joy. There may be a lot of laughter in night clubs and corner taverns, but there is no joy. Some people will buy bottles of "cheer" for their Christmas observance, but no joy will come with the consumption.

True joy is found in the Christ Who came that first Christmas. It is found in letting His life be our life and discovering the purpose and meaning which He brings to life. There can be no joy in life unless the question of purpose is answered and we submit that it is answered only in Jesus Christ.

Second, the happy Christmas brings a message of peace. In the world any of us know anything about, peace lies uneasily. This is true of relationships among nations.

Often peace exists only through fear, not goodwill. In our own society, the unprincipled prey upon the unwary and the weak.

Isn't Jesus called the Prince of Peace? Where, then, is the peace? It is found in individual lives where His Saviorhood is acknowledged and the old barrier of enmity toward God has been broken down. And following upon that, it is found where the gentle words of Jesus are received, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you—" (John 14:27). The Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus, Paul, Luther, they all knew this peace, even as countless other saints better or lesser known, have known the peace of God in their hearts to their dying day.

Finally, the happy Christmas speaks a message of hope. Hope is the belief that there will be an answer, that better things will come to pass. More than once we have heard someone who has been in a hard place testify, "I never lost hope." Indeed, when hope is gone a situation is desperate.

Spiritually speaking, we refer to hope in the sense of a blessed and better life beyond what we may know here and now. The Christian message is that Jesus, by His very coming to be among us, and then by His death, resurrection and ascension offers those who believe in Him the assurance that death is destroyed and they will live with Him forever in a life far better than anything that can be experienced here, although the relationship begins in this life. "Unto you is born—a Savior." The saving is not just for the here and now but for ever.

How is this hope obtained? It comes through the joy and the peace. It comes to the opened heart, open to the message of the happy Christmas.

We give you the wish the late Dr. Walter A. Maier gave in one of his sermons: "May the Christ-child, the Word made flesh, 'the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,' today be born in your heart, adored and proclaimed in your life, until we all may blend our voices with the angels' chorus to sing the Savior's praise in endless glory and majesty,"

(from *Peace Through Christ*)

SEASON'S GREETINGS

God bless you at this Christmas-time and always. May you, our readers, have a wonderful and "happy" Christmas in home and church. And then may the new year be one filled with an ever greater awareness and reception of the blessings the good Lord desires to give to you and to us all.

To those of you who have been in our family of subscribers for the past year, or part of the year, we say "thank you" for your interest and participation. Any publication is possible or necessary only as there is a reading audience (yes, we've checked the dictionary). Others of you have for the first time, on the occasion of this Christmas issue, picked up a copy of *The Lutheran Ambassador*. We hope that that fact will add something worthwhile to your observance of Christmas 1976, too.

Again, a happy and merry Christmas to all of you, living as you do from coast to coast, border to border, in Canada and in other lands.

Christ the Savior is born.

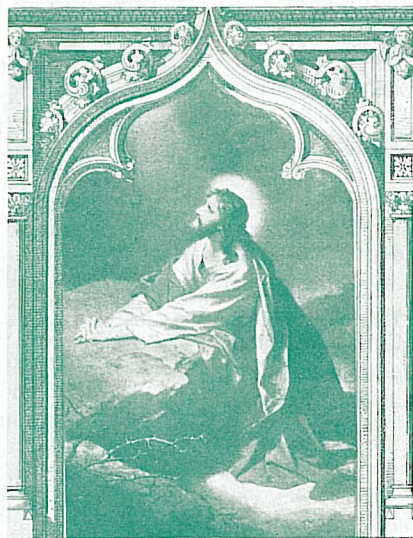
AUGUST KLAGSTAD, Artist

by N. N. Rønning

One looks into Mr. Klagstad's honest eyes, and hears his hearty laughter when he answered our question, "How many church paintings have you made?" by saying, "Over one thousand." That is undoubtedly more than any other artist has painted.

"And where are these paintings now?" They are found in churches in the United States, in Canada, Norway, Africa and Australia. "What subjects are the most popular?" "Christ Knocking at the Door," "In Gethsemane," and "Come unto me." The Christ who wishes to enter the human heart; the Christ who suffered, and Christ who invites. A good sermon might be preached on these three titles. Good sermons are being preached on these three titles. Good sermons are being preached to thousands of men and women and children every Sunday by these altar paintings. It is art in the service of the Lord.

Mr. Klagstad hands us a booklet, "Portraits in Oil," six quadricolor reproductions. There is J. N. Kildahl, with this fine tribute, "Profound spirituality, devoted passion for soulwinning and popular eloquence, and a lovable disposition, are the principal qualities by which Prof. J. N. Kildahl, D.D., is remembered." Other reproductions are: Bjornstjerne Bjornson, James J. Hill, Parker Paine, Agnes Melby, and Justice John W. Stone. Many years ago, Wilhelm Pettersen met Mr. Klagstad while the latter was still living in Marinette, Wisconsin, and afterwards wrote a very appreciative sketch of him in "Ungdommens Ven." "If our poets sing to deaf ears, our artists paint for blind eyes," was Pettersen's caustic comment on Norwegian-American cultural life of that day. "Before I stepped into Mr. Klagstad's studio I was almost ignorant of the fact that in this beautiful Wisconsin town there is a real artist of Norwegian stock."



Christ in Gethsemane by Klagstad

We asked Klagstad at what time he discovered or anybody discovered that he had a talent for drawing. "Well, as a boy, I liked to copy the figures made by the frost on the window panes." Ah, that was illuminating. "Any artists in your tribe?" He mentioned the celebrated Norwegian painter, Skresvik, a relationship on the mother's side. This was also illuminating.

Klagstad was born in Modum, Norway, and came to America with his parents, at the age of five, in a sail-ship; seven weeks on the ocean. After attending common school, he worked in a saw mill, that he might earn money and go to Valparaiso College. The noise of the mill did not drown the inner voice that called him to the realm of art. He studied art at Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. Pupil of Arthur Fuedell of New York, Carl Wentz and W. J. Reynolds of Chicago. Before opening a studio of his own, he worked in the large studios of Chicago, Brooklyn and Boston.

On his recent trip to Europe he came back with thirty water color paintings of scenes which impressed

him the most. Many of these can be seen in his studio.

It is interesting to know that his favorite poem (he has committed it to memory) is Kipling's, "When Earth's Last Picture is Painted."

In 1915 Klagstad moved to Minneapolis, where he not only continued his chosen work but entered into the church life and cultural life of the city.

(Taken from THE FRIEND,
October 1938 issue)

THE CHILD

This Child is sent to fill thine heart,
and for no other reason is He born.
... No word can say nor understand
that so small a thing would hold so
great a treasure. Thus the great and
wonderful sign is repeated and the
heart is made sweet and glad and
fearless, for it is at peace with all
the suffering that may befall it. For
what should cause it woe? Where the
Child is, all will be well. The heart
and the Child cannot be parted.

Martin Luther

NOT BUSY INNS

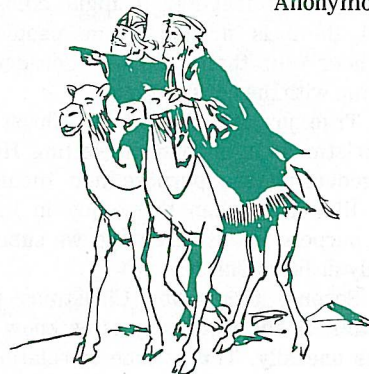
Let not our hearts be busy inns
That have no room for Thee,
But cradles for the living Christ
And His nativity.

Still driven by a thousand cares
The pilgrims come and go;
The hurried caravans press on—
The inns are crowded so!

Yet hunger dwells within these walls,
These shining walls and bright,
And blindness groping here and there
Without a ray of light.

Oh, lest we starve, and lest we die
In our stupidity—
Come, Holy Child, within and share
Our hospitality.

Anonymous



The Lutheran Ambassador

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

by Pastor Ralph M. Rokke

"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. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

I. Enlarging the Family

When Jesus Christ was born, he came not only into the family of Mary and Joseph, but into the whole human family. His birth expanded, enlarged and enriched the human family, even more than the birth of the most-welcomed child has ever enriched the circle of any one earthly family.

When a baby comes into your family or mine it alters things. It makes a difference. The birth of Jesus Christ altered things in the human family, too. It made a great difference. It did so because His birth introduced God Incarnate into the human family. God united with man in the person of Jesus Christ. God became flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus Christ.

His birth was God's gift to the whole human race. Isaiah tells us this when he says, "... unto us a child is born ..." Isaiah doesn't specify to whom he refers by the word "us." He doesn't need to. He means to be all-inclusive. The birth of Jesus Christ was a gift given to all of the human race. Jesus is received by some and rejected by others, but he was given to all.

Think of it! Isaiah prophetically identified Jesus as "The mighty God, The everlasting Father." At the birth of Jesus Christ in the stable in Bethlehem, the human family was expanded to include one bearing the names of God Himself!

II. A Poor Family

It is appropriate to think of the human race as a family. We are a family



biologically. The life in the cells of your body is the life which Adam had in the cells of his body. There has been no interruption of that life as it has been passed down to you.

Previous generations held for a time the spark of life, then flickered, and were extinguished. But they passed their spark on until it has come to you. Your life is one with theirs, just as the life of your grandson's grandson will be one with your own.

Spiritually, too, we are a continuity. Every soul today is a continuance of the breath of life which God breathed into Adam at creation. That is why the Bible teaches us about

original sin, which Luther defined as "evil inclinations and attributes... transmitted to us as a heritage from Adam and... bred into our very nature." God gave to Adam spiritual life which became spiritual death at Adam's fall into sin. Then to each successive generation of Adam's children the death-in-life was passed on.

The human race is a family, but it was a poor one until Jesus Christ entered it. It was a family afflicted with sin, with physical death and, worst of all, with spiritual death. Its problems were utterly insurmountable for it.

III. New Hope for the Family

Then Jesus Christ was born. The angel Gabriel appeared to a Jewish maiden with this message, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest ..." (Luke 1:31-32). Jesus brought into the dying human family a new, life-restoring factor. He brought to it the wholeness of God and to each member of it the opportunity for renewed fellowship with God.

When a baby is born into an earthly family, it brings with it the opportunity for new fellowship. The baby's parents and older brothers and sisters receive a new and unique personality whom they may come to



Rev. Ralph M. Rokke

know and with whom they may share experiences.

When Jesus was born into the human family he opened for it a new opportunity for fellowship. He opened the opportunity for a new kind of fellowship with God. He was both God and man.

Previously, man had been able to have fellowship with God only as with something other than himself, something outside of himself. At the birth of Jesus Christ, however, man became able to fellowship with God as with someone who was one with him. God made himself a part of the human family. We gained a High Priest able to be touched by the feelings of our infirmities because he, too, was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin.

How God and man were united in the person of Jesus Christ is a mystery beyond our understanding. Theologians are able carefully to define some of the aspects of the union, but they are never able fully to explain it. The fact that an infinite God could unite with the human family remains forever a testimony to the power and wisdom of Almighty God.

When Jesus was born, the human race finally gained a member immune to death. Jesus was without sin, as the Word of God tells us in Hebrews 4:15, and therefore sin's penalty, death, had no dominion over him. Jesus did not need to die. Yet he chose to die. Voluntarily he satisfied the demands of God's justice against the sin of His family by dying on our behalf, for you and me. His death and resurrection atoned for our sins. He has made it possible for us to live. He has brought to us a new hope.

IV. A King from the Family

Isaiah wrote his prophecy about the birth of Christ approximately 750 years before Christ was born. That fact is a tremendous testimony to the power of God. He is able to reveal centuries ahead of time what He shall do and then He is able to accomplish what he has promised.

We still look forward now to the accomplishment of another part of Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah said of Jesus, "The government shall be upon

His shoulders. . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end. . . . the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

These verses promise the same thing that is promised in Revelation 11:15: "... The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."

Some day Jesus shall rule everywhere as undisputed King. Some day, one who has felt blood coursing through his veins, and who has felt it flow from his head, and hands, and back, and feet, for your sake, shall be Lord of all.

How wonderful it will be then to know that Jesus is yours, that He is mine! When the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, will you not want God to be your Lord?

At that time he shall be your Lord if you now receive the gift which he offers to you. "Unto us a child is born." Claim today and each day of your life this gift which God gave to the world, which we celebrate at this Christmas Season, the gift of his Son Jesus Christ.

THE GIFT

O Lord, You lived in golden halls
And walked in golden streets.
Why did You come down to be born
Amidst the cows and sheep?
Why did You leave Your Father's
house?
Why did You leave Your throne?
It could not be for wealth and power—
Was it for love alone?
You who did speak the worlds in place
And bend them to Your call,
Could You love us so very much
To be a baby small,
To come to an uncaring world
In sinful struggling lost?
O Lord, You knew the manger bed
Would soon lead to a cross.
You knew the sorrow and the hurt,
You knew the awful pain.
You knew that we deserved not love,
Yet, knowing that, You came.

Marlene Moline

[Continued from page 6]

pretend he's coming."

"Okay," Grandma agreed, "As long as we pretend, it's okay, but..." then she stopped.

"What's the matter? You look so sad... David will be here with us next year for sure. Then his place will not be empty." Grandma wasn't thinking about David. Her thoughts had raced on to those whose chairs would be permanently empty this Christmas.

"Yes, Tammy, God willing, David will be here next year. But..." "Oh, I know," Tammy interrupted, "I bet you're thinking about Christy and Sarah's Mom." Grandma could only nod.

"Our Sunday School teacher said that she's gone to be with her Father in heaven but she will be looking down and watching over her little girls." And, she added on her own... "Especially tonight when it is Christmas Eve."

"Remarkable!" thought Mrs. Johnson as she listened to her granddaughter. How easy little ones accept the truth! No remorse or regrets, no questioning why. She thought of all the homes of close acquaintances which would have a "vacant chair" for the first time this Christmas Eve.

As the time to celebrate the birth of the dear Savior came closer, it served as a reminder that the Savior was coming again. As in I Thess. 4:16, 17: "The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Praying a silent prayer that on that great day the family circle would not be broken and that there would be no vacant chairs, Mrs. Johnson returned to the kitchen to finish preparing the meal and to await the arrival of her family. She thought, it is written in Luke 12:40: "You, too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect." So while we are celebrating His first coming, let us also be ready to meet Him in His Second Coming.



With the Shepherds

by Pastor Howard A. Kuhnle

Although the event happened almost 2000 years ago, the journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem can teach us how the Christmas message should be received by people in this year 1976, the Bicentennial year of the United States of America, at the time when our nation is only a tenth as old as the story of the shepherds.

The message of the shepherds is simple, yet beautiful, in the grand language of the second chapter of St. Luke, a writer who is an outstanding figure in the world literature of the ages.

Consider several points in connection with the shepherds:

The shepherds encouraged each other to go to Bethlehem

Really, what made the shepherds go to Bethlehem when the infant Jesus was born?

Was it curiosity?

Did they have worldly and secular ideas of gaining material blessings?

Was it merely eagerness to experience new sensations?

Was it the announcement of the single angel followed by the song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"? We may well imagine that the shepherds were puzzled about the meaning of the song of the angels!

Indeed, one ought to underscore the religious motives. The shepherds, like many others, some years later, were ready for the Christ, even as Zac-

chaeus (Luke 19:1), the little fellow who climbed a tree to see the Lord Jesus, Nicodemus, who came by night in order that he might not be observed by others (John 3:1), and a group of Greeks who said to the disciples, "We would see Jesus!" (John 12:20).

Did the shepherds fully realize for whom they were seeking? Probably not, but that does not matter at all. At any rate, the shepherds consulted one another. They encouraged one another. So they found Jesus! Just think how much consulting one another and encouraging one another actually helps even in our time for those whose wavering faith needs strengthening and renewal!

When their decision to go to Bethlehem was made, they went with haste.

Procrastination is always so easy in everything, including religion. Yet, why put it off? Use the Christian opportunities that you have!

In this case, there was no time to lose because Jesus and His parents would be on the way to Egypt, fleeing from King Herod who wanted to kill Him. The haste of the shepherds, then, paid off because they found the infant Jesus and His parents. When they found the infant Jesus, they believed in Him and accepted Him. Indeed, Jesus became their Savior, a Savior from sin and death in the true spiritual sense.

Here's a needed reminder for the present day. Follow Jesus when the opportunity comes. In all truth, the action of the shepherds is another illustration of the teaching of the adult Jesus, "Seek and ye shall find."

The shepherds glorified and praised the Lord God.

Consider that the purpose of the Christian religion is to emphasize that people are disciples of Jesus Christ for the purpose of praising and worshipping the Lord, our Father. The shepherds experienced in their own

lives the importance of this great truth.

People praise the Lord, whether the infant Jesus in His cradle or the Lord Jesus, as the King of Glory, even in this 20th century because He is worthy of praise in His position as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

So often, people ask, "What do I get out of religion?" This question is asked more and more frequently in our times. No doubt the same question has been asked in past ages, too.

Let it be suggested, however, that the most important and the final question is not to ask what a person gets out of his religion, but to explain that the purpose of all of Christianity is to emphasize that Christian people ought to praise and worship the Lord, our Father and the Father of Jesus Christ, even as those shepherds in Luke's Gospel. In the Old Testament, this broad concept is found especially in the Psalms and in the prophets, while in the New Testament the idea is developed much more definitely in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and the book of Revelation.

When they had seen the infant child Jesus, "they made known abroad the saying."

The message of the shepherds was to all people, beginning at the manger and reaching out into all the world, including every place to which the Holy Bible, Christian churches and even this article happen to come. Here is a foretaste that our holy Christianity is for everybody, including Lutherans of this last quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, too, many in the past and a few still to this day think and act as though our holy Christianity is only for those who happen to be born into the Lutheran church.

Yet, at the present time, every congregation has people of many backgrounds. That is the way it should be. Every congregation needs to expand its understanding and viewpoint and be ready to invite and urge all people to accept the gracious and free message of God's grace in Jesus. To be sure, those who come into Lutheran congregations accept their teachings and standards.

Christians must keep up the work of evangelism, with the encourage-



ment of Jesus to "go into all the world" with His message, not only at Christmas-time, but all through the year.

Above all and through everything, the best thing to say is that the shepherds were filled with wonder.

You can hardly claim that the shepherds completely understood everything that was implied in the wor-

ship of the infant Christ Child, the Lord Jesus. Even when they could not understand, they could believe.

To be sure, the complete and final understanding for disciples of Jesus, then and now, is a life-time process, as shown by His appearance in the temple in Jerusalem at the age of twelve, by His interpretation of prophecy in the synagogue at Nazareth shortly after the beginning of

His ministry, by His merciful miracles of healing, by His stilling of the waves on the Sea of Galilee and, indeed, by all the marvelous actions of His earthly ministry, climaxed by His passion, death, resurrection and ascension, and now continued in heaven for all time and eternity, as He guides, directs, heals and helps people in this Holy Season of the Blessed Nativity in the year 1976.



WINTER SOLITUDE
Roger C. Huebner, D.D.S.

WMF Reminders

The General Fund was our project for December. This fund helps WMF projects which do not reach their projected goals and is used for promotional literature and administrative expense. This project is badly in need of funds. The project for January is Church Extension. Through this fund money is loaned to new congregations and those who need to expand their facilities. As the loan is repaid, the money is reloaned. The need is great. We have received a little over half of our goal for this project.

We are still in need of funds for our Honorary Membership and In Memoriam projects. These funds are used for housing of missionaries on furlough. We encourage you to support this project with your gifts even though you may not be honoring someone this year.

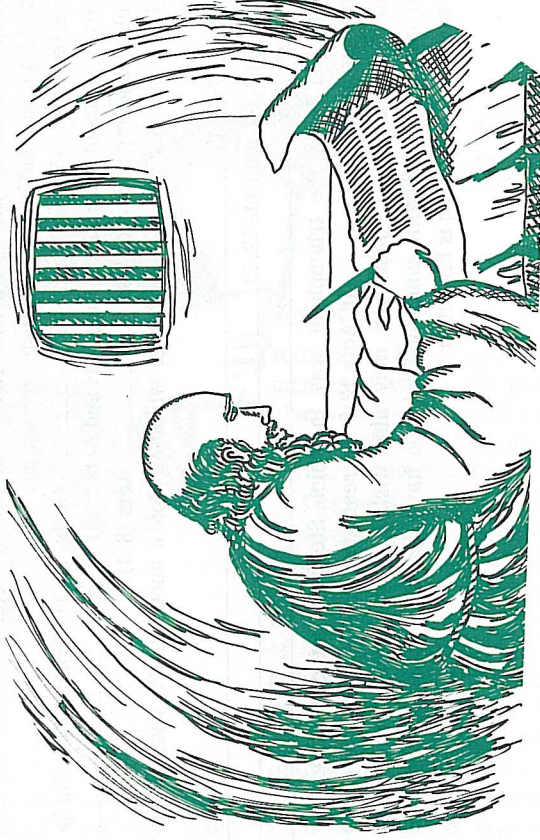
Mrs. Robert Dietsche

LITTLE BETHLEHEM

City of David,
Little Bethlehem,
You did not know your name would
live
And linger on the tongues of men
For twice a thousand years,
When, within your walls that night
A Child was born,
A Child of destiny,
Sent by God
To be the Saviour
And Redeemer of the world.

"For unto you is born this day in
the city of David a Saviour, which is
Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

W.M.F. BIBLE STUDY



LESSONS IN PHILIPPIANS

January, 1977
We have just crossed the threshold of the new year, 1977. What lies before us, we do not know, but when we are "in Christ" we can confidently and joyfully face the future.

"Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: **there hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses His servant**" (I Kings 8:56 KJV). God has not failed us in the past, and He will not fail us. His promises are sure and steadfast. "The Word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8b).

What a joy and privilege we have to read and study God's Word, commune with Him in prayer and gather together for Christian fellowship. Let us ask ourselves: Which is more important to me: physical or spiritual food? Which is more serious: to die physically or to die spiritually?

This year our WMF Bible Study will be based on the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians. In our first lesson we will study the life of the Apostle Paul whom God inspired to write this epistle. Read together II Peter 1:19-21 and Job 32:8.

Background

1. **Birth and Family:** Acts 22:3 tells us that Paul was a _____, born in _____ a city in Cilicia. Paul was a _____ citizen (Acts 22:25-28). In Acts 23:6 Paul said of himself that he was a Pharisee, the son of a _____. In Acts 23:16, we find that Paul had a sister and that her son aided Paul and told him of the conspiracy against him.
2. **Education:** Paul studied with _____ (Acts 22:3). What does Scripture tell us about Gamaliel? (Acts 5:34 and Acts 22:3) _____ Paul's trade or occupation was _____ (Acts 18:3).
3. List from Scripture some things which we learn about Paul's young manhood.
 - (a.) Acts 7:54-60 _____
 - (b.) Acts 9:1-2 and Acts 22:19 _____
 - (c.) Acts 26:5 _____
4. Do you think the triumphant way in which Stephen met death had any effect upon Saul? _____ (In Acts 13:9 we read that his name is also called Paul.) **Discussion:** Perhaps you may also wish to share experiences which you may have had with saints of God who have departed from this life "to be with the Lord, which is far better."

Conversion

- Read Acts 9:1-22 and Acts 22:1-21. In Acts 26:13-20, Paul, in speaking before Herod Agrippa, gives his testimony concerning his conversion.
5. What happened as Saul came near to Damascus? _____
 6. What did the Lord ask Saul to do? (Acts 9:6) _____
 7. How was Ananias used of God? (Acts 9:10-18) _____
- Praise God, Ananias obeyed! Think of the countless number of lives which have been blessed through the witness and testimony of the apostle Paul.
8. What caused Saul's life to be changed? _____
- Compare Saul's experience with that of Isaiah. (Isaiah 6) _____
- Discussion:** Is there a need for changed lives today? Share together examples from Scripture or of other individuals who have experienced the joy of forgiveness and have become new and changed persons through the work of the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 5:17).

Call

9. What definite work did the Lord have for Saul to do?
Acts 9:15-16 _____
I Timothy 2:7 _____
Acts 22:15 _____
- Throughout Paul's three missionary journeys he was greatly used of God as His witness, not only by his preaching, but also by his life and willingness to suffer for Jesus' sake.

Commitment

10. What do we learn about Paul from the following Scripture verses?
I Corinthians 15:9 _____
I Corinthians 2:2 _____
I Timothy 1:15 _____
Acts 20:24 _____
11. What is Paul's personal testimony in the following "I Am's"?
Galatians 2:20 "I am _____"
Romans 1:16 "I am _____"
Romans 1:14-15 "I am _____"
Acts 21:13 "I am _____"
- Let us ask ourselves: Is this my testimony?
12. According to Philippians 1:21, what may well have been Paul's motto in life? _____
13. What solemn charge did Paul give in his farewell words? (Acts 20:28-32)? _____
14. Name the epistles which were written by Paul. _____
15. Paul endured much hardship and affliction, but God was with him. Read the words of Jesus regarding persecution for His sake (Matthew 5:10-12).
16. Read and discuss together II Timothy 4:6-8.
May the prayer of each one of us be that "Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Philippians 1:20b KJV).

Mrs. Kenneth Rolf

THE CREEDS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

by Pastor Donald Greven, Sedan, Minnesota

The word "creed" comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning "I believe." A creed is a statement of belief, and a testimony and summary of one's faith. Martin Luther states in the Large Catechism that the Creed is a response and confession of Christians to such questions as "What kind of being is God? What does He do? How can we praise or portray or describe Him in such a way as to make Him known?"

There are three creeds, three ancient symbols, that the Christian Church has accepted and proclaimed as a summary of its faith. They are the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. One or more of these ancient creeds is quoted or referred to in each of the Lutheran Confessions many times to show that the aim of the Lutheran church was to bring us back to the faith of the New Testament Church. For example, in the Formula of Concord, we read, "Since in ancient times the true Christian doctrine as it was correctly and soundly understood was drawn together out of God's Word in brief articles or chapters against the aberrations of heretics, we further pledge allegiance to the three general Creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as the glorious confessions of the faith—succinct, Christian, and based on the Word of God."

The Apostles' Creed is the oldest, and most widely recited creed of the Church. Although the text of the Creed as we now have it dates from the 8th century, it is merely a revision of the Old Roman Creed, which was widely used by the 3rd century. Irenaeus (d. 202) and Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) both claim that it was used everywhere in the Church since the time of the apostles.

There were two basic purposes for the Old Roman Creed in those early days of the Church. First, as an easily learned summary of the Christian faith, this simple confession, which formed the nucleus of the Apostles' Creed, served as a uniform public confession by candidates for Christian



Rev. Donald Greven

baptism. It became a sign of recognition and acceptance among orthodox Christians, and so it became variously referred to as the "Rule of Faith," the "Rule of Truth," and the "Rule of the Church."

The second use of the Creed was to help in identifying heretical teachings. This clear, concise summary of the faith helped Christians detect any serious departure from the truth.

Considering the circumstances the Christian often finds himself in today, wouldn't we all greatly benefit by consistently using the Apostles' Creed for the above purposes, instead of merely mumbling through it on Sunday mornings, without giving it a second thought?

The Nicene Creed emerged out of a raging controversy in the Church in the fourth century regarding the doctrine of Christ. The dispute centered around the question Jesus asked His disciples, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" To that the Arians answered that Christ could not be God in the true sense of the term; He must rather be a part of creation. As a result, Arius thought of Christ as a "middle being," as less than God and more than man. He also said that Christ was a created being, having been created either in time or before time. Arius, and those who followed him in his error, therefore denied the preexistence of the Son in all eternity, and attributed divine attributes to Him only in an honorary sense.

Although Arius was excommuni-

cated on the grounds of heresy, the controversy continued until 325 A.D., when the Council of Nicaea was called to decide the outcome of this matter. Bishops from all over the Roman Empire were invited to participate in making this crucial decision for the Church. The formula that was finally adopted at the Council of Nicaea, and which contains the main thrust of the Nicene Creed, upheld the Scriptural proclamation of the Deity of Christ. The Creed itself was in its present form by the end of the 4th century.

There is a close resemblance between the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. Both follow the same general outline and deal with the three general topics of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, the Nicene Creed is more precise in its doctrine of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Concerning Christ, it states that He is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made."

Concerning the Holy Spirit, we read that He is "the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son: who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified: who spoke by the prophets."

Again, as we look at the false doctrines so prominent in the world today, we recognize that Arianism is not dead yet. We need to be reminded again and again of the truths that were hammered out at Nicaea so many years ago.

The Athanasian Creed differs in form and in substance from the first two creeds. It deals essentially (and at length) with two subjects: the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine of the two natures of Christ.

The origin of this creed is uncertain, but it was probably not written by Athanasius, after whom it was named. One thing is quite certain, however, and that is that in all the centuries that have passed from then until now, very little has been written on these

two deep subjects that is as clear and precise as this ancient creed.

The first major section of this creed, which deals with the nature and functions of the Trinity, begins and expands from this statement: "This is the true Christian faith, that we worship one God in three Persons and three Persons in one God, without confusing the Persons or dividing the divine substance."

The second section explains clearly the following statement: "We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and man."

In conclusion, permit me to make a couple of personal observations. First, I believe we have, to our detriment, neglected the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. They are not even found in our catechisms. It is a shame to think that one might spend his life in one of our churches, and never have the privilege of coming face to face with these historic, and very timely, statements of faith.

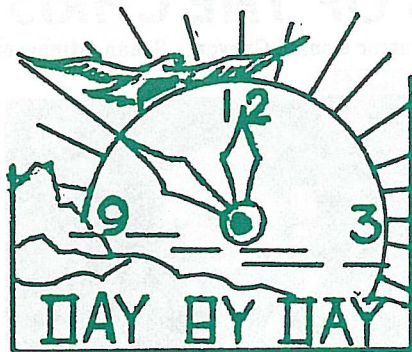
Secondly, we should take what we believe more seriously. The issues dealt with in these creeds are not negotiable; they are vital! The last words of the Athanasian Creed are these: "This is the true Christian faith. Unless a man believe this firmly and faithfully, he cannot be saved." How well they fit the words of Jesus, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23).

WISE MEN

They followed His star
 Across the plain,
 Across the desert
 To Bethlehem,
 To kneel in a barn,
 A stable cave,
 Before the manger
 Where God's Son lay.

Dark now the stable
 Where once He lay.
 Gone is the manger,
 To dust decayed.
 Yet through the ages,
 Here and afar,
 Wise men still follow
 His holy star.

Marlene Moline



BLESSED CHRISTMAS!

by Lars Stalsbrotten

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared . . ." (1 Cor. 2:9).

No one but God could think of such a plan of redemption. Incarnation is His divine plan, His answer to man's problem.

Think of it! The creator of heaven and earth laid in a manger in a stable! The mighty God of glory born of a lowly virgin!

Such an event defies all human description and comprehension. Paul rightly calls it the great "mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16).

The fact, the astounding fact, that Christ left the form of God, "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). And through His atoning death on the cross He reconciled the world unto Himself.

In one great sweep He solved the sin-question, defeated death, conquered hell, overcame evil and subdued Satan. This is God's marvelous answer to the problem of sinful and fallen humanity.

With His atoning blood on the cross of Calvary He swept away all our transgressions as a dark cloud, and our sins as a thick fog, so every repentant sinner can now walk right out in the glorious sunshine of God's forgiving grace. You can live there day

by day and have a Blessed Christmas all the year around.

Then you can join the Hallelujah Chorus and sing with all the redeemed: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing for ever and ever" Amen (Rev. 5:12-13).



IN OUR HEARTS

Silent now the angels' song
 That sweetly rang of yore,
 But in our hearts the echoes glad
 Shall ring forevermore.

Far above the sounds of earth,
 In carols sweet and clear,
 We hear again the living song,
 When Christmas time is here.

Peace on earth, good-will to men,
 A Savior King is born;
 And men still greet with thrilling
 hearts

The song of Christmas morn.

Lizzie DeArmond

THE OLDEN CHRISTMAS ROAD

Along the olden Christmas road
 We journey year by year;
 We sing again the carols sweet,
 To mem'ry ever dear.
 O blessed Christ of Bethlehem,
 Give us, we humbly pray,
 Thy song to cheer, Thy star to guide
 us

In Thy holy way. Amen.

—Unknown

THE NAME OF JESUS

Jesus is the human name of the Savior. It designates His manhood, His life of lowly service, His sufferings and death for our salvation, the type and pattern for our living. Christ is our Savior's official name. It indicates the office in the fulfillment of which He, as the god-man, redeemed the world; it reminds us that He was the world's great Teacher, and High Priest. The name Lord indicates the Savior's oneness with the everlasting Father, His divinity, His absolute sovereignty over all things.

—Robert E. Golladay

LET'S SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS

by Mrs. Solveig Helgeson



The gifts had all been opened and the mother and daddy sat watching their three children who were admiring again the gifts which they had received. Their faces were lighted by the happy glow of excited childhood experience and anticipation. For a long time no one spoke. When the silence was broken, it was by Renny, the oldest boy.

"What a perfect Christmas!" he said. "I got exactly what I wanted. How did you know just what to give me?"

His parents smiled at one another, then looked at Douglas and Beth, who had put aside their gifts and had drawn close to them, affirming what Renny had just said.

"I hate to see the evening pass," said Beth. "It's such a long time until Christmas Eve comes again. But I suppose we must go to bed soon, but not until we've sung a few Christmas Carols, Mother."

"Yes, let's sing for a while!" added Father, getting up to find the song book while Mother took her place at the piano and the others crowded around her.

"What shall we sing first?"

"'Silent Night', of course, it's our favorite!" So they all sang reverently.

"That's an old German song, isn't it?" asked Doug.

"Not so old," said Renny. "There are others that are much older. I read that it was written only a little over 150 years ago by young priest Joseph Mohr in a little village hidden among the snow-capped mountains of the Austrian Tyrol. Living there in the quiet beauty of the rolling hills, Mohr composed the words of 'Silent Night,' on a starry Christmas Eve."

"What year, Renny, do you remember?"

"1818, I believe."

"Did he write the music, too?"

"No, it states here on the music that Frantz Gruber wrote the music," added Mother.

"He was the school master in the village and organist of the little chapel where Mohr preached," said Renny. "He wrote the music on the following day and the two sang the carol at the service that Christmas in 1818. This hymn had always been a favorite."

"Renny, which carol is older than 'Silent Night'?"

"'Joy to the World' is over 250 years old, Douglas," called Beth, as she paged through her hymnal. "It says here that Isaac Watts wrote it in Southampton, England, where he was born."

"Yes, you're right, Beth," said her father, "but my favorite carol is over 475 years old."

"Which one is that, Daddy?"

"'Away in a Manger,' which was written by Luther for his own son Hans to sing at a Christmas service in 1500. Let's sing that, too, because it was the first carol I ever learned."

So the group sang this lovely hymn, and when the last words,

"I love Thee, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay,

Close by me, forever, and love me
always,

Bless all the dear children in Thy
tender care,

And fit us for heaven to live with
Thee there"

had been sung, Mother said wistfully,

"I have another song to suggest that is perhaps oldest of them all, 'O Come, All Ye Faithful.'"

"Oh yes, Mother, that's one we must sing. How old is that song?"

"It was written in the 13th century and sung to an old tune. This tune we use today was not composed until 1763 and was made for a king! the Portuguese king, and was sung by the boy singers of the king's own choir."

"What about, 'Hark, the Herald Angels sing'? When did Charles Wesley bring that beautiful gift to the world, Mother?"

"Douglas, look in your book. What does that say?"

"1739, and the music is by Mendelssohn, 1840. I didn't know that. And here's the carol, 'While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks,' by Tate, and written in 1702. These are both English."

"Aren't there any modern carols?" asked Beth.

"Yes, I suppose there are. New songs are being written every day, and perhaps later they will take their places with these old, familiar Christmas carols. 'It Came Upon the Midnight Clear' was written in 1850, and 'O Little Town of Bethlehem,' written by Phillips Brooks in 1868 is America's contribution to carol lore."

"I think that has a lovely story, don't you, Beth?"

"I've never heard it, Mother, what is it?"

"Oh, I remember how that came to be written," said her father. "This young pastor had traveled in the Holy Land, the land of Christ's birth, and on Christmas Eve he had gone to the field where the shepherds were supposed to have seen the Star. He wrote: 'The shepherds were still keeping watch over their flocks or leading them home to the fold.' There, in the brooding stillness, he, too, must have seen the Star, for his song is inspired by it as was his very life after that."

"I wish we could keep on singing these Christmas carols and talking about them and their origin, but it's really getting very late, and we must go to bed. There is an early Christmas service in the morning."

"You're right, Mother, there is!" said Douglas.

"But can't we sing more Christmas songs tomorrow?" asked Beth.

"Oh yes, let's sing again tomorrow," pleaded Renny, "and begin with the first Christmas carol, 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo,' which was sung by the angels to the shepherds, and then sing all the songs of Christmas right down to our newest songs! Merry Christmas, everybody!"

—With minor changes,
from *The Child's Friend*

AS EACH HAPPY CHRISTMAS

As each happy Christmas
Dawns on earth again,
Comes the holy Christ-child
To the hearts of men;
Enters with His blessing
Into ev'ry home,
Guides and guards our footsteps,
As we go and come.
All unknown, beside me
He will ever stand,
And will safely lead me
With His own right hand.

Johann Wilhelm Hey
(Tr. by Harriet Reynolds Krauth)

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