



Foundation of Faith

THE ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS GIFT

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

JESUS MUST BE BORN IN YOU

MEDITATION FOR THE NEW YEAR

*The Miracle
of Bethlehem*

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Editorial

God's Word tells us, "For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people" (Isaiah 60:2). Yes, dark clouds of unbelief and godlessness cover the earth, and the people live in a dark night. Sin has ruined many lives. Unrestrained passions, greed, lust, hate, and murder have destroyed the hope of many.

Yes, sin is like a blood-thirsty monster that tramples and crushes everything underfoot. Who is behind this! Paul declares, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). It is the devil, a murderer from the beginning, and a liar who not only wants to bring people into misery, but also eternal doom.


Enough with all sin, darkness, and doom! We have the wonder of Bethlehem! There, in the dark night a light broke through, the glory of the Lord shone, the Dayspring from on high appeared, the Sun of Righteousness arose. Again this year, the wonder of Bethlehem may be declared to all people.

The message of angels given to the shepherds over two thousand years ago can be preached thousandfold anew in many languages among many people: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."

How glorious, how precious: "The Savior is born!" He is Christ, our Redeemer! He wants to give forgiveness, peace, joy, hope, and eternal glory to those who believe and open their hearts. Praise God for His indescribable gift!

*Wonder of Christmas, wonder of God's love,
Christ came to earth to be born on this sod.
Wonder of Christmas, peace comes from above,
Wonderful gift freely given by God.*

H. D. Nimz



THE MIRACLE OF BETHLEHEM

The Ultimate Christmas Present

Christmas is all about giving and receiving gifts, sharing good wishes, and spending time with family. It is somewhat sad to see this special holiday becoming so commercialized, but it is nonetheless a joyous time.

Many people have a special story about Christmas, something they remember after many years. Christmas is the most joyful season of the year, even if we may not appreciate the hustle and bustle of gift-buying and preparation.

A poem entitled “The Week Before Christmas” relates the exasperation and despair of shopping, when a child’s voice sang, “Born in a manger, for mankind He died!” The writer then goes on and says:

*Oh, Spirit of Christmas, in error, I’ve been.
Blinded by trimmings, and Christ have not seen.
Forgive me, dear Father, the wrong I have done,
And help me to love Him, Jesus, thy Son.*

Christmas is, after all, about God’s ultimate gift to mankind. Three things to consider in this ultimate gift:

The Giver

Behind every gift there is a giver. There can be no gift if there is not first a giver, one who selects, purchases, and gives the gift. Normally, a gift mirrors the giver in some way. In regard to the ultimate Christmas gift, it also

reflects the Giver because of the gift itself and the motive with which it was given.

God was the very first one to give a Christmas gift. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

In a gift, we may also see the heart of the giver. The reason for God’s ultimate gift was that God so loved the world. A gift is measured in part from the motive the giver had for giving the gift. Even when the gift itself is only modest, knowing the love the giver tried to express makes it special. We appreciate a gift not merely for its monetary value, but for the motive behind it. And the Giver of the ultimate Christmas gift did so out of pure love. It was not just to make an impression; it was more like giving His heart in the gift He gave. And as we reminisce on a gift we receive for Christmas, let’s value it according to the intent of the giver. It is an expression of love: “For God so loved the world.” When we contemplate the ultimate gift, we first need to recognize the Giver behind the gift: it is God the Father.

The Gift

The second thing we see is the gift itself. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He did not give just any gift; He gave what was most valuable to Him. We live in a time where the mentality of entitlement permeates the attitude of people; they think they deserve all they wish for. The Lord did not give His Son because we were entitled to Him, nor did we deserve Him. The gift of God was what we needed even when we didn’t recognize it. We see the value of the gift because it was given of God’s free will and deep love toward the human race. The value of a gift can also be assessed by the cost. God has given us many gifts, gifts we cannot purchase, gifts we do not deserve any more than other people who don’t have them. All the riches of the world belong to God: “‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:8). The Lord could also have given us a portion of that, but it would not compare to the gift of His Son. He was the ultimate gift, for He satisfies the greatest needs the human soul has: to be adopted and forgiven by Him.

God does not merely give because we like to receive gifts, rather He gives the gift that we need. Paul describes it as His indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15).

People can give expensive gifts lacking in practical use. God does not operate that way. He gives the Gift that

supersedes all gifts: Christ, Who brings us peace, a peace that is beyond understanding, a peace that affects every aspect of our lives, peace with God after being His enemies. He brings peace with others, with the people we love, cherish, and live with. This gift includes love, divine love that cannot be compared with mere human emotions. It gives hope, a hope in a dark and troublesome world where hate and animosity reign. Jesus is, after all, the ultimate Gift!

The Recipient

The last point is the recipient of the gift. We have the giver, who is God; we have the gift, which is Jesus; and then there is the recipient for whom the gift is intended. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” In this sense, the gift is all-inclusive; it is for everyone. And in this, the expression, “one size fits all,” means that One can truly apply to all. Since the gift was given, there is no one who has walked this earth whose exact needs this gift did not fit. Because the spiritual need for this gift is universal: every man, woman, and child is in need of it. When God gives a gift, it is always fitting; it always addresses a need and serves a real purpose. As this gift is meant for all people, it does, however, include one stipulation God Himself has attached: “That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

As eager as God is to give the ultimate gift, He can only give it to those who will receive it. And since man has the ability to accept or reject the gift, tragically, most reject it. If the gift is not accepted by faith, there is nothing God can do to make people receive it. No other gift has been rejected as much as the ultimate Christmas gift of God, His only begotten Son, the great Messiah. But there is no access to eternal life without the Gift, Jesus the Christ. The gift of everlasting life includes joy and freedom from sin, the hope of an eternal reward, and protection in all the world’s temptations.

The ultimate gift is for all of us. God is the giver; Jesus is the gift, and you are the recipient. The question is whether this gift is already yours, and if not, the best time to accept it is now while God is still freely offering it to all. Christmas will only have a real meaning and purpose for you if you possess the ultimate Christmas gift from God. “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Peter Ens
Toronto, Ontario

The Wonder of the Holy Night

Indeed, mysterious and wonderful things took place on the holy night when Jesus became man. A radiant splendor of light poured over the fields of Judah, and its realm resonated with a joyous angel choir.

And the One who traded heaven for earth on that incredible night so that He might become our brother, truly was and is wonderful. His coming, His life, His character, His influence is absolutely wonderful.

The fact that Jesus came as He came is wonderful. In magnificent ways, God revealed Himself as Creator through His great works of creation. But the appearance of His own Son in human form displayed the greatness of God's eternal heart and allowed us to glimpse the glowing splendor of His mighty love like never before.

This Child in the manger is an incredible image—weak and helpless, and yet Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. For out of the eyes of this Child shone rays of sunshine that brought comfort to the entire world. Out of the mouth of this Child would go forth words filled with the Spirit, and life that would redeem all those who believe in Him. The hands of this Child would stretch out and bless all those who labor and are heavy laden. The heart of the Child which beat in the arms of His mother would one day bring comfort and refuge to millions. And these tender feet would one day leave a trail of blessing throughout the earth. His footprints would continue to shine brightly thousands of years later. Under their steps would grow seeds of salvation that would bring fruits of righteousness, which ripen now and into eternity. What an incredible Child was born on that holy night!

Jesus' life was a miracle. He was poor. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head," Jesus once said (Matthew 8:20). Yet He promised crowns and honor, treasures and mansions in the Father's house in heaven to all who follow Him.

He did not visit a university. Instead, He worked in a carpentry shop in Nazareth until He turned thirty. Yet, He challenged and confounded the scribes with His great wisdom and deep thoughts. And His teachings formed the purest resource of highest wisdom and the finest nourishment for the greatest thinkers and noblest hearts.

He became tired and hungry like every other person. Yet, by His words of blessing, He fed thousands with a handful of bread, and through His powerful words He changed the stormy sea to a gentle evening breeze.

Even though He had a physical body, and was subject to death, mighty powers of life and healing went out from Him to touch thousands of sick people. Even the dead stepped out of the grave at His command. Though He was pressed on every side and continually afflicted, He called out to the world of sinners and offered those who were burdened and heavy-laden, rest and peace, now, and for eternity.

Though He was ridiculed, beaten, and rejected, He still spoke with power from His throne with His angels. And though He could have called on ten legions of angels to protect Him, He allowed Himself to be bound and nailed to a cross. Yet, even there, while He appeared helpless and deserted, He promised heavenly joy and eternal life to the one who was crucified beside Him. And while

God's Great Gift

Many years ago at Christmastime, the daughter of a Russian ruler whose beloved was fighting on the front lines waited expectantly for a gift in the mail. This gift would reveal how great his love for her was.

And indeed, one day a large box arrived. Flushed with expectation, she rushed to open it. But she uncovered nothing besides an old damaged cannonball. She concluded that her beloved was playing a bad joke on her. With disgust, she kicked the rusty cannonball with her foot. It crashed against the wall and burst open. A silver ball was hidden within, from which a shiny, gold ball appeared. This caught her attention. Curiously she picked up the ball and discovered a button which allowed her to open the golden ball. She was almost blinded by the sparkle of a gorgeous, brilliant engagement ring of finest, rare beauty. Naturally, her heart was filled with great joy and excitement. Her beloved had revealed his great love for her in the finest way possible.

How many people sing about God's great gift at Christmastime; they speak about it, but are unable to recognize it. For them, the Gospel is like the big cannonball, without worth, a worn out item, an old story which they have heard and sung about many times. But that which is found within, the inexpressible gift of God, remains undiscovered.

How sad it must make the heavenly Father to see this. He gave everything to show His great love, by giving Himself. Many people who call themselves Christians sing Christmas songs without truly understanding what Christmas is. But God still finds people here and there who allow themselves to be let in on the secret. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16a). God loved us so much. How could He show His love in a more profound way than by giving His Son?

You can see God's great love for you by looking at the cross. There He Himself became the greatest Gift of all for us.

His followers mourned and sat behind locked doors after His burial, He appeared to them as Lord of life and victor over death. Yes, the contrasts of His life were truly wonderful and remarkable throughout His entire life on earth.

The character of Jesus is also no less wonderful. "Born of the seed of David according to the flesh," is how one passage in the Bible describes His human nature. Even though He was born into a Judean family, He was not intended for just one single nation. He was the Son of man. All nations have the right to call Him their Lord. He has the most beautiful, noble, and perfect character. He is love manifested in human form to a world full of selfishness.

Wonderful is the blessing-filled influence that Jesus' life brought from His time on earth until today. No other great individual in all history has made a more powerful impact on mankind, as the One who was born to us in Bethlehem on that holy night. Certainly, some famous people have impacted their time and their nation or have also influenced other nations. But no other person is honored and praised in almost every nation. Even today, His birth is celebrated by great multitudes. They give thanks to God for the unspeakable and glorious gift of His Son.

May we also celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior with renewed joy these next days. As His faithful servants, may we dedicate and fully surrender our lives to Him.

E. L.

H. Waldvogel



The Most Precious Christmas Gift

Who would want to miss celebrating Christmas, the most beautiful holiday of the year? Even for the poor, for those who are ill, for the sad and lonely, this joyous occasion is still relevant. No matter how much the opinions in this world diverge, few want to miss out on Christmas. And yet there are relatively few people who celebrate Christmas in the right way and know the real joy of Christmas.

In that holy night on the fields of Bethlehem, the shepherds heard, “Good tidings of great joy . . . For there is born to you this day . . . a Savior” (Luke 2:10-11).

Do we really have great joy because the Savior was born? Do we with gladness think about the birth of Jesus in the manger? Deep down in our hearts, are we thankful? Maybe we belong to that group of people who, because of tradition, still read that old, old Christmas story on Christmas Eve and also sing the well-known Christmas carols. We find it festive to read the Bible and enjoy the traditional carols. But that cannot be our main inter-

est. What good is it that Christ was born into our world over two thousand years ago if He has not been born in our hearts, and abides there, filling our lives?

“For there is born to you this day . . . a Savior.” What a profound, overwhelming, and blessed message it was for those shepherds! But why did that message specifically come to those shepherds? Why was it not first proclaimed in the royal palace of Herod? Why were the rich and noble not the first recipients of this message from heaven? Why did even Bethlehem itself, where Jesus was born, not notice this wonderful event taking place? Was it because the hearts of the shepherds were open and receptive to receive their King?

The heart of Herod was power-hungry. The hearts of the noble and rich were preoccupied with earthly pleasures, wishes, and thoughts. But the hearts of those poor shepherds were expectant, ready for the One who was to come. Perhaps on that very night they had even talked about the Messiah who was to come, hoping that He would come soon to right the wrongs.

He came to those who expected Him, not to those who had no desire, but to those who longed for Him. He revealed Himself in a lowly stable. The Messiah lay in a manger. Those simple men coming to see Him had no reason to fear. They were familiar with mangers. “He belongs to us.” They were not in surroundings that made them feel uncomfortable.

The shepherds were only the first of a great, innumerable multitude. Everyone belonging to this group knows what the shepherds knew: “He belongs to us!” Possessing true humanity, truly human, this divine Son of God was born as one of us. Into the depth of our poverty, our helplessness, and much more, into our pathetic hopelessness and sinful situation, He came and made Himself our equal. Into my personal hopelessness, into the depth of my sin, Jesus came down and became my advocate and sacrifice. Only in that way could He be my Savior.

Have we ever considered this wonderful truth which truly frees us? Have we experienced it for ourselves? The Child born in Bethlehem is proof of how much God loves us. He loved us so much that He gave us Christ, born as a weak and helpless child. He let this Child grow and

become intimately acquainted with all of our woe and sorrow, eventually dying to be our Savior. What a blessed mystery of the love of God! Who can understand and fathom it?

Even though we can never fully comprehend it, we can experience it. “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him” (Psalm 24:14a). “He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly” (Proverbs 2:7). If we desire to walk uprightly, the longing of those shepherds long ago can become our longing.

When we realize the world and its pleasures cannot satisfy our inner longing, when we are saddened by our own inadequacies, when we long for a higher power that must exist, then the Savior is there for us. He comes as the compassionate Healer. He is the One who has balm for our wounds. He is that Friend in whom we can confide and with whom we can share everything. Then He becomes our Savior. He lets our hearts become a home for His glory. Only a heart that has experienced Christ as personal Savior can have the true, pure, and deep joy of Christmas.

G. D.

Jesus Must Be Born in You

“How is that possible?” you ask, shaking your head. I can’t explain it to you so that you’re able to understand it with your mind. No other person can do it either.

“And yet you say it is absolutely necessary? But you cannot explain it to me?”—I say “no” again. But this I can tell you: “If Jesus were born in Bethlehem a thousand times and not in you, it would not help you.”

“I don’t understand. What do you actually mean?”—I can believe you’re unable to understand it. You are like Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night. He also could not understand what Jesus told him of the new birth all need to experience if they wish to enter the kingdom of God. Do you know what Jesus said to him?

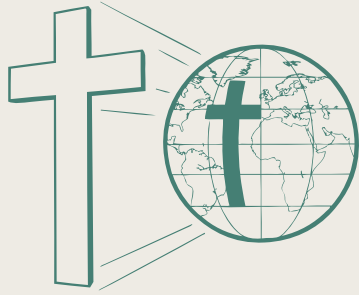
Yes, Jesus asked in astonishment, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”—Correct! And I say again, No one can understand it with his intellect, but he can understand with his heart. One can grasp it in faith. This is what the Lord Jesus once prayed: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,

that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to the babes” (Matthew 11:25).

This is the same thing said in a children’s prayer:
I am so little, my heart is Your throne;
May no one live in it but Jesus alone.

That’s the way it is. Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23). This is what is meant. When Jesus is truly born in us and lives in us, then we are really a Christian.

I advise you to pray in a simple and faith-filled way, “Lord Jesus, although I cannot understand with my intellect what it means to be born again or that You are born in me and live in me, I understand how necessary it is. Therefore, let this miracle happen to me. I want to become a child of God.”



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs, Kitchener (ON)

Why Do We Celebrate Christmas?

If you were to do a survey in your neighborhood with this question, very different answers would emerge. So much has been added to this festive celebration. But this has nothing to do with the true meaning of Christmas. The real meaning is hidden in the word “Christmas” itself.

Most people love to celebrate Christmas. Many see Christmas as a wonderful celebration and look forward to it. Others ignore it because they believe the date is incorrect or even unbiblical.

Personally, I am thankful God’s Word tells us about this special night. It is not a date on the calendar we celebrate, but an awe-inspiring event, a work of God we cannot even begin to fathom. This work of God is worthy of our praise and adoration, not just one day in December, but throughout the entire year.

Each one of us is reminded of our birth on a specific day each year. This day is usually acknowledged and even celebrated. Why, then, should it be wrong to celebrate the birth, the incarnation of the Son of God, which has such a special significance for all of us because Jesus is the Savior of the world?

While we do not read about the apostles or the first Christians celebrating the birth of Jesus, that does not negate this actual divine act of God!* The Bible repeatedly speaks of consecration, “consecrating oneself” and “being ordained.” Altars, priests, and sanctuaries were consecrated, and men also consecrated themselves to the Lord. “Consecration” means anointing, blessing, devotion, and self-sacrifice for specific purposes.

This is exactly what Jesus Christ willingly did for us according to the will of the Father. He was willing as the Son of God to become man, and in recognition of this, we celebrate this holy night. That is the “godly mystery.” “God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). That is why there was the divine, sacred night.

God sent His Son as Savior and Redeemer of the world. John writes in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” He came as a baby and was placed in a manger “because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). He was not only given but also sacrificed on the cross as an atonement for our sins. For this reason, the manger and the cross are closely related to each other. Through His death, we receive life; “unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24).

Jesus was flesh and blood so that He became equal to us in all things. He could not have come any closer to us. This is the “godly mystery” we should worship reverently. When this event occurred, a bright star shone on Bethlehem. The heavenly hosts rejoiced, and the fearful



shepherds were suddenly surrounded by the glory of the Lord.

The first message in that divine night was proclaimed by the angel of God: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:1-12). This child was born in poor and humble circumstances, but John testifies, “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14b). The devout Simeon, who some eight days later was allowed to hold this helpless child, exclaimed, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples” (Luke 2:30-31). That could only be a vision of faith.

When the centurion, standing under the cross of Jesus, saw the Son of God mocked, beaten, rejected, and dying on the cross, he exclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). He, too, had only gained this knowledge through faith. And so, too, must every-

one find Jesus by faith and experience the salvation of his soul. Without faith, we cannot approach this godly mystery, let alone enter into it. Whoever wants to come to God and find Jesus must believe. The shepherds said, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:15-16). And that is also the path to the Savior for you, dear soul.

With Your glory, come, holy night,
Change our tired and weary plight.
Take us to the manger and star,
To the Christmas wonder afar.
Where hearts break in darkest night,
There bring faith and love so bright.
And where hearts cry out for peace,
Enter in, from sin release.

*The German word for Christmas (Weihnachten), encompasses “consecration.”

Meditation for the New Year

It is dark. The earth is shrouded in snow, and the snowflakes fall softly, slowly. Everything is quiet. Nature seems ready to celebrate some of the most solemn hours of the year—New Year’s Eve.

How many a reverent thinker may have withdrawn, now that everything seems so solemn, and become quiet and introspective. And the emotions that move his soul, oh, who can describe them!

The year is so close to its end. Only a few more moments and it will disappear, swallowed up by the sea of eternity, where the word “time” is not known at all. And what will the new year bring? Oh, this question, with its big question mark, arguably arises in the innermost hearts of all people. But time flies; you cannot stop it. Listen, the bells are already ringing as a sign that the old year is over and the new one is beginning.

Time restlessly flies away. There is no respite. Once again, you are in a new year which lies before you like a closed book. What will it bring? Maybe the first half hour will bring bitter disappointment.

There may be a mother with a word of admonition to her daughter, a man to his wife, or the wife to her husband. They are admonished to start a new life in the new year. But the admonition is rejected. Oh, how the heart bleeds in disappointment!

Yes, if we could only lift the veil a little, if we could look in and see how the heart of our neighbor bleeds, perhaps often wounded by the recklessness of his relatives, then we would have more love, more compassion, and often more respect for each other. But the hearts remain shuttered. Perhaps no one but God knows where a heart filled with pain pleads and wrestles for the well-being of their soul in the new year. Will it receive an answer?

But we continue. Already another month, two, and even the first half of the year is over. Our life continues

on its usual course. Nothing remarkable happens. There, something is coming, sickness or death. The dearest that we possessed is wrested from us. Why?

Can we submit questions to God and say, “Why?” Aren’t His ways perfect? God knows; He always gives His divine, majestic “Because!” in response to our hesitant “why.” He wants to draw us closer to Him. We are so earthbound that if in His omniscient love and wisdom He were not to place obstructions in our path, we might continue to have no desire for something eternal, and eventually be lost.

Yes, God is love. Is this not evident? Are our spiritual eyes so blinded? Through the strokes of fate God sends us, we learn this world with everything it can offer us, is only futile and transient. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). We learn to divert our thoughts, indeed our whole mind, to please God alone, to serve our neighbor, and in the end to save our own soul. Often a longing, a homesickness, to be united with God grips the soul, to be free of everything that binds it here. With anticipation and yearning, we sing with the writer:

*Paradise, paradise,
Oh, how does your fruit entice!
Resting under your trees of life,
No more heartache, no more strife -
Take us, Lord, to paradise!*

After we have endured suffering, heaven is nearer to us than earth. Although part of this earth, our main interests are in heaven. This earth is a vale of tears where there is hardship and suffering, tears and disappointments without number. In spite of all this, do we really have nothing for which we should thank God?

Look back over the past year. See how God has lovingly guided you. See how He saved you from misfortune, how He kept His protective hand over you where you did not even see the danger. See how He provided you with all the best. He gave you health, preserved your sound mind, gave you nourishment, clothing for your body, and beautiful sunshine that spread light and warmth. And even in suffering, if He sent some your way, wasn't He right there to comfort you so you wouldn't be discouraged?

Let's enter the new year with gratitude. The old one, which was the new one a moment ago, is now gone again. It brought us some things we had no idea were coming, even some incomprehensible things. Life sometimes presents problems with solutions we simply must leave to God. But in spite of all this, we have so much cause to kneel with a humble heart in humility before God that, even if we had ten thousand lives, we could never offer Him the thanks we owe Him.

The psalmist exclaims, "Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. . . . Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:14, 23). Someone once said, "Gratitude to God protects us against falling away from Him." With grateful hearts and childlike confidence, let's commend our souls to the One who is mighty and able to keep us unscathed from all storms the future may bring—Jesus Christ, our Savior!

The Year is Through

*O hear this message, the old year is through;
The days have gone quickly, like ships passing by.
Much has been done, there was much to discover;
Thoughts turned to actions, new things we did try.*

*There were days of pleasure and days filled with laughter;
We praise the good Lord for contentment and love.
God's grace and His sunshine kept us from disaster,
Dispersing the storms and the dark clouds above.*

*And yes, there were some days when suff'ring and sorrow
Assailed me and when the frustration began.
The tempter could rob me all hope for tomorrow,
If I would give in and acknowledge his plan.*

*But Jesus, my Savior, gave strength, help, and courage;
The enemy fled and was vanquished again.
My Savior is stronger, I am not discouraged;
He carries my burdens and breaks every chain.*

*I looked at my life and reflected on living:
What was my striving and what do I hold dear?
I recognized Jesus rich blessings had given;
His presence was with me throughout the whole year.*

*I owe Him so much, I can never repay Him;
He's first in my life and so always will be.
Since nothing will sever me from His salvation,
His peace is mine daily and precious to me.*

*No one knows the years they have left;
God knows the number yet to be seen.
Still our heavenly hope through the rock which was cleft
Will remain certain if our hearts are kept clean.*

*So take it to heart, for this year is now done,
And just like a dream it has now passed away.
So let us do more in the future for others,
And labor in love for our Lord while we may.*

*Oh, don't let the day of the Lord unexpected
Come suddenly on us; let's cleave to His Word.
We'll rise from the grave and we won't be rejected,
Because here on earth we are true to the Lord.*

Edmund Hägele

An *Unusual* Occurrence and the *Exceptional* Response

One day in the seemingly insignificant village of Nazareth, something very special took place. Mary, a virgin, was suddenly greeted by an angel with an unusual message: she, as an unmarried virgin, was to give birth to a child. And that wasn't everything; this was to be an exceptional child: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

How would you and I respond in such a situation? How did Mary react? She was not a famous or highly acknowledged person, nor did she have a high position. And suddenly, she received this very unusual directive. "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (verse 34) is what she wanted the angel to explain. The angel understood this question. He gave her a clear explanation that took away all her concerns (Luke 1:35). Unlike Moses, who absolutely refused when God gave him a mission to do, we don't read of any arguments or excuses. In fact, in Exodus 4:13, he responded, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send," which actually caused God to become angry. We don't read of any doubt as we read about Zacharias or Gideon, who demanded a sign. No, Mary had a very exceptional attitude and replied, "Behold the maid-servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

A servant of the Lord—perhaps you are asking yourself, "What does this have to do with us?" Perhaps you are thinking back to a time of slaves

and servants, as you have read about in books. In today's world, bondage is unfamiliar. However, in this situation, Mary's statement has nothing to do with "slavery or bondage" of a human kind, but rather, it shows Mary's attitude towards God. It shows voluntary devotion and dedication to be obedient to the Lord with respect and honor. In today's society, these characteristics are not particularly welcomed and practiced. Subordination is rather viewed as a weakness. Our society today is stamped with characteristics like freedom in self-fulfillment, self-realization, self-confidence, self-assurance, and assertiveness. However, as Christians and God's children, we know that our security does not reside within, but instead in the hand of our almighty Creator. Every blessing and every success comes only from Him. Without Him, we are without power or strength. For example, if God would suddenly withdraw our health from us, we would see how dependent we are on Him every day.

We have the privilege of serving a wonderful Savior who wants the best for us. We're standing right before Christmas. The Lord of all lords, the King of all kings, He gave Himself to us through His Son. He left heaven's glory and came down to mankind, to save us from the slavery of sin, worldly pleasure, and Satan. Mary was able to experience a part of this wonderful plan of salvation through submission and devotion. God also has a special plan for your life and would like to use your life as part of His plan. Would you be able to answer as Mary did, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word"?

. . . Notes from School (Part 11)

I still remember that youth meeting in Oberá like it was yesterday. The evening's topic was Philippians 2, and I was particularly touched by verse 13: "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." After the session ended, I was left wondering how this verse might look in practice and whether I would know God's will at the time.

It was during the course of my studies that I finally received an answer to these questions. It did not arrive suddenly, as a revelation, but rather grew gradually as I experienced how God heard my prayer and gave me practical, step-by-step guidance. God let my insights, goals, and desires change over time to fit the doors that He was opening for me. This Bible verse ended up guiding me through many decisions in my life.

One day, while I was still in school, I had to take my younger brother to the doctor. I was so touched by the pediatrician's caring, helpful, and friendly manner that I decided to become a doctor too. I wanted to help people, especially sick children. This was my impetus for studying medicine, and so it remained until the 8th semester of medical school, when the pediatrics rotation rolled around. This included working at the intensive care unit for children, where I suddenly realized that I was not emotionally equipped to handle the suffering children's pain. What now?

God's providence had seen me study anatomy beyond the required curriculum in the 3rd semester. For several years thereafter, I had expanded my knowledge by instructing medical students in the practical applications of anatomy. As a result, when the time came for me to pick a specialty in my 8th semester, this experience afforded me the option of selecting surgery. With this decision, however, I had to make another choice: either practical surgery in a clinic or neurosurgery in a research facility. Here, too, God guided me in a wonderful way, using only a few trial days at the research facility to show me that I was meant to be helping people directly through practical surgery.

Neither as a teenager nor as a university student had I ever considered working abroad or even in Germany. Now, I have been in Germany for four years already and can testify that God had wonderful and glorious things planned for me. He opened one door after another, developing desires and paving paths. Philippians 2:13 has become a wonderful experience for me. If we desire with all our hearts to do God's will in our lives, He will guide our paths. He will pave the way for our desires and expectations to develop until they are in accordance with His will for our lives. If we are sensitive to His leading, follow the way He shows us, and enter the doors He opens for us, we can fearlessly walk in faith. He will lead us down His wonderful way without worries and doubts clouding our lives, for His way is always wonderful.

Patricia J. Günter

VERSE OF THE MONTH

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Galatians 1:3-5)

When one person gives his life for another, there must be a deep, indescribable love motivating him. But how much deeper was the love of the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth as He sacrificed Himself for us insignificant people. His entire life—from the manger to the cross—was a sacrifice. Could this love leave a heart cold and unaffected? He didn't give His life because we were worthy of or had earned His love. No, it was the complete opposite. Nevertheless, He still offered Himself so that you and I would not perish but rather be saved from our sins. Has this love already touched your heart? Or does Christmas just pass by, leaving you nonchalant and empty? Wouldn't you like to experience Christmas this year as a celebration of true joy in your heart and give your Savior the thanks and honor He deserves for the wonder of His love?

Experiences with God

“By my God I can leap over a wall.” Psalm 18:29b

With all my heart, I am thankful to God that He used this verse to motivate me to scale a high wall that terrified me.

After our wedding, the only thing missing from completing my course of studies was my bachelor’s thesis. The academic work at home was so hard for me that the bachelor’s thesis towered in front of me like a great mountain. Furthermore, I did not have any job prospects with my degree, as I discovered that I did not want to work in this field. Despite that, it was important to me to graduate.

The first appointment with my supervising instructor went better than I had expected. I had come to this consultation with a rough idea for the thesis and left with a formulated question, proposal, and all literature references. I was very relieved and encouraged; it suddenly seemed possible, and I began to comb through the literature. I soon discovered that it would not be so simple. At a second consultation, the instructor strongly criticized my preliminary findings. There were clear misunderstandings between my instructor and me. Additionally, I had made several mistakes. At first, he himself was at a loss, predicted a bad grade for me, and gave me no great hope of finishing my thesis, much less passing it. Great doubts arose in me, and I left the office almost in tears. I did get a second chance, but my motivation was at its end. I would rather have stopped my work at this point as it seemed impossible for me to put something remotely worthwhile on paper.

The lyrics of a song we had heard the day before in the car came to mind:

With my God I can leap over walls
And climb mountains so high and so tall;
With His power obstacles are banned,
In His time we will conquer new land.

Although I had despaired, I knew God could give me strength to leap over this wall. It took a while, but I wanted to attempt it with the help of this promise.

Since that time, those lyrics stayed in my mind. It didn’t get easier, though. I made slow progress, and it seemed to never end. Naturally, this was a stress on our new marriage, but I thank God for my patient and loving husband!

One day, when I was distraught and unmotivated once again, I very specifically asked God for encouragement. The next day, I received it when a dear friend unexpectedly sent me a Bible verse:

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

God told me He would personally help me in my situation. I was overwhelmed and so thankful to God that He answered my request with these words and encouraged me. I wrote the words, “You said You will help me!” on a note and stuck it on my computer as a reminder that I should always keep this promise in mind. And God kept His word to help me. He gave me strength to persevere and in the end, to hold a finished thesis in my hands, with a passing grade!

In the meantime, a prospect for my future career opened up. I began to consider going in a different direction. Before Easter, I had the opportunity to do a voluntary practicum in this field, which I really enjoyed. The boss had told me beforehand, however, that she already had someone this year, so I would have to apply for this position. I knew this wouldn’t be so simple as there are few training positions available in this field. Toward the end of my practicum, my boss told me I fit well on her team and that she could imagine bringing me in as well. So I was able to go seamlessly from school to training without having to write even one job application.

Once again, the song lyrics came true: He not only helps to withstand dry spells, to leap over walls, and climb mountains, but also to conquer new land in His time. For this I want to give God praise and thanks!

F. Semmler
Herford, Germany



CHILDREN'S PAGE

A Christmas Gift

It was on a Christmas day towards evening after the lights had already been turned on. It was snowing outside. A poorly dressed boy of six entered the pastor's room.

"Mr. Preacher," he said, and laid a very small sum of money on the table, "I wanted to give something for the poor heathen children too. Are you sending it soon?"

The preacher knew the boy. He was the son of a poor, devout widow who found it very difficult to feed herself and her children with her meager earnings.

"Well now, son," asked the preacher, "where did you get the money from? Did your mother give it to you?" — "No," he replied, "my mother is poor. I earned the money."

"How did you do that?"

"I collected recyclable bottles lying around."

"But could you not have bought something for your-

self for Christmas with that money?" the preacher asked. "Or did your mother or someone else give you something for Christmas?" The boy shook his head.

"Well," said the preacher, "do you really want to send the money far away to another country to children you do not even know? Or do you want to take it back and spend it on yourself?"

The boy thought for a few moments and then replied, "Mr. Preacher, my mother told me that even though we're poor, we have a nice gift on Christmas Day. We were given the Lord Jesus from heaven. But the poor heathen children have nothing. We should help to bring them the message of the Lord Jesus."

The preacher kindly shook the little boy's hand and wished him God's abundant blessing for the missionary gift. The little boy smiled at him cheerfully and then joyfully skipped towards home.

A photograph of a sunset or sunrise over a misty landscape with trees. The sun is a bright orange orb in the upper left, partially obscured by a soft glow. The sky is a deep, dark blue. In the foreground, the silhouettes of bare trees are visible against the misty background.

Seniors' Page

December

It's almost unbelievable that December is here again. How quickly the year has passed. The last month of the year is usually the most eventful. People are busier than ever, spend more money than usual, search for a present for that person who has everything, and write a long to-do list. Every person has their own list to deal with.

This page you have just begun to read is meant for seniors and is written from their perspective. However, it is irrelevant whether you are a senior or not, so just keep reading. One day you will also be one of them. This often occurs to me when I remember what I have heard from

older people. Occasionally, I catch myself using similar phrases.

It is a fact that when we get older, we have greater experience and, in most cases, have learned more. As we age, we view December through different eyes and evaluate events differently. What may appear important to others, we may assess and delegate as lesser importance. We need to understand the core of the matter.

Yes, we do celebrate Christmas in December. No one knows with certainty the exact date of the birth of the world's Savior, but that is unimportant. Important is that God came into our world through His Son Jesus Christ.

Somewhere and at some time, it was decided to celebrate Christmas on this date, and that is how it has remained.

For me, the date is not important, but the joy it brings to all is. It is almost impossible to understand what is behind this love of God. Jesus expressed it this way: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This love has also won my heart. It is above all and overshadows all else. Christmas is more than just a flood of presents and celebrations. I am not speaking against such things, but just want to put them in their proper place and not stray. I want to celebrate Christmas properly. I can do that even when I am older, weaker, and unable to get out among people. I am even able to celebrate Christmas alone. I can take my Bible and reread the words about Jesus becoming man, or I can read about the Old Testament signs by the prophets announcing the coming of Jesus. Like a common thread, Jesus Christ is present in all the Scripture. He is the major theme of the Bible. When I think about why He came and realize that it was for my sin, I am amazed and can only thank God. What did Jesus say? We who believe in Him are no longer lost but are saved. Thanks be to God!

Then the thought of our own passing needs to be mentioned. How could I travel towards my end without fear if I did not know where I was going? Christmas does not only remind me of the love of God, but also brings hope into a lost world, the hope of eternal life. Even if my body becomes older and I am in need of help, when I reach my final end, I will awaken in a better place, a place of unimagined beauty. All this because approximately 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, and His death on the cross gave us an eternal home. This December, I want to remind myself of this and be joyful because of it.

But there is another aspect to this discussion pertaining to December which needs to be mentioned—the coming of the New Year. December 31st ends another year, and a new year begins thereafter. For many people, this changeover brings with it unknowns and worries. This fear is understandable because for us humans the future is hidden. We don’t know what lies before us and what the new year may bring. We have no control over the time before us, and therefore we just need to accept what will happen. The more we think about this and conjure up potential scenarios, the worse our situation appears. Sometimes it may be friends who influence us

through their negativity, and soon we are singing along in their sad song.

Let me remind you of the situation related in Numbers 13. You probably know this story; however, we will let the Word speak to us. It happened that Moses sent out twelve spies (vv.1–20) to check out Canaan, which lay before them. God had promised this land to them. After 40 days (v.25), the spies returned and gave an account of what they had encountered. Ten of the twelve spies said they were unhappy with what they had seen. They mentioned these people were giants and arrived at the conclusion, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we” (Numbers 13:31). In a short time, a plan to return to Egypt had materialized. However, two other spies had also been in the same situation and assessed it differently. They included God in the picture, while the others appeared to have left Him out. In Numbers 14:9, we read that Joshua and Caleb said, “Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.” In their fear, the one group forgets about God, while the other group places their hope in God.

If we had been one of these twelve men, how would we have assessed the situation? Surely we would have aligned ourselves with Joshua and Caleb, and would have put all our trust in God. We think that’s what we would have done. So when December comes with its worries about the unknown future and wants to rob us of our sleep, why do we not align ourselves with Joshua and Caleb? Instead of letting the “giants” occupy our vision, let us look to Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Dear brother and sister, why do we let the devil make our lives difficult? He is the one who shoots “fiery darts” (doubts, fears, and worries) at us (Ephesians 6:16). We need to hold up “the shield of faith.” Therein lies our security, and through that we can eliminate the fiery darts. We will be surprised how our wonderful God will carry us over the threshold into the new year. He has assured us of His nearness and help. Trust Him.

Why don’t we decide today, no, right now, to ignore the difficulties and instead look to the Lord Who knows how to deal with all our difficulties!

December—let’s celebrate this month with joy and hope!

Harry Semenuk



STORY

Coming Home on Christmas Eve

It is a cold Christmas Eve. The father has just returned to the house from the barn. He shakes the snow off his boots and sits down by the stove. The mother whispers, “Do you remember? Today is the anniversary.” The father’s brows knit into a frown; he’s never permitted this to be discussed. On a night similar to this, his daughter had left home never to return.

On this Christmas Eve, the church in town is magnificently decorated. Drawn by the brilliance of the lights, a poor young lady, dressed in a light dress and shivering from the cold, sneaks inside. She stands near the door while the minister speaks of Him who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The poor young lady examines her own heart. She needs Someone to know her and to forgive her sins. At the end of the service she approaches the minister, and says, “He was wounded for my transgressions. That was said for me.”

She goes out into the cold winter night. She is seized by a coughing fit. She then walks unsteadily and half-starved past the houses. She comes to the suburbs, turns onto a side street and after a while notices a light. This

light has been lit behind the window pane every night since she left home. She stands still and then opens the garden gate. She climbs the steps to the house and lays her hand on the doorknob. Had the door been locked, the poor daughter may have been found dead on the doorstep the next morning. However, the door has never been locked since she left. And so she quietly enters. The old dog growls at first, but then recognizes the daughter of the home. She nears the dwindling fire and sits down exhausted and broken on the hearth.

When the mother comes down the next morning, she notices a pile of rags next to the extinguished coals. The rags move and she recognizes her own daughter! The daughter receives no severity, no harshness, no outrage from her parents. They welcome her with arms full of joy and love. “Mother,” she whispers, “He was wounded for my transgressions.”—“Yes, my daughter, if your mother feels such an indescribable joy to see you again, how much more joy does God feel to have found you again.” The poor, dying daughter repeats, “Wounded for my transgressions.” Those are her last words. After a few moments, her face is transfigured by God’s peace and the seal of His forgiveness.



From the Editorial Team

Looking back over the past year, we have a lot to be thankful for. In His grace, the Lord helped, carried, encouraged, and richly blessed us in doing His work throughout these twelve months.

The year 2018 might bring to remembrance 1918, when the horrors of World War I were nearing their end and the awful crimes by the Red Terror (Bolsheviks) were just beginning. How much did the interceding 100 years bear witness to!

But now it is 2018. Of all that has happened in the world—be it in politics, in the economy, or in a godless society—not everything has been to our liking. Nonetheless, despite many a dark hour, we can all be thankful and unafraid. The Savior has kept us in peace. The Lord is there! The Lord reigns! Yes, the Lord is King!

We sing in one of our hymns, “Our God is moving quickly to fulfill His plan!” Let’s praise the Lord for this and continue doing our part in the coming year. Many of our brothers and sisters supported us in prayer and with their talents and offerings. Let’s continue to dedicate our skills and resources to the Lord while we still have time. Even if we are limited as individuals, we can do much to advance the Word of God if we work together.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:14-15).

Yes, dear reader, let us serve the Lord faithfully wherever we are, shining as bright as the stars in the night, so that together we may exalt His glory!

The Publication Team



Experiences with God

“Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!” (Psalm 66:20)

Praise be to God, I was personally able to experience this verse during the last year. I am so thankful to serve an amazing God who is able to do more than we often dare to ask.

During the last few years, I have had many back issues, which seemed to be getting worse as time went on. Thankfully, I was always able to get back on my feet until one day, on February 14 of this year, I slipped on the ice while brushing the snow off our car. From that day forward, the pain became so severe that I was unable to function normally. Although I had been told by a number of doctors that surgery was not an option, I silently prayed, “Lord, if surgery would help, You could make the impossible possible.”

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28) was a special Bible verse that came up in my Bible reading during this time. I prayed, “Lord, I don’t know how, but I trust and believe that You will do this in my life.” All the many prayers sent up for me during this difficult time upheld me and prevented me from becoming discouraged.

During a short hospital stay at the end of February, a very kind nurse who saw my predicament emphatically encouraged me to ask my family doctor for surgery. After much hesitation, I ventured to ask. Although he didn’t think it was possible, he did give me a referral. I don’t think it was coincidence, but rather God’s leading, that the surgeon he recommended was the same one who had done surgery on our son’s leg after he also slipped and fell on the ice on February 14th. Our son was able to talk to the surgeon and ask if he would at least look at his mom. He consented, and, after seeing me in his office, said he could try to help through surgery.

Although my family doctor cautioned me not to get my hopes up, I was soon able to book the surgery date of May 30. Praise God, the surgery was successful, and after a couple of days, I was able to go home, sitting in the front seat of our car, a position I had been unable to endure for months already.

The Lord was in control all this time, and I thank Him from the depths of my heart. Every morning when I get out of bed, I’m so grateful I no longer have severe pain shooting down my legs. A special thanks to all the prayer warriors at home and abroad. God heard those prayers and sent His help just at the right time. In July, all of our family was here, and we were able to celebrate our 50th anniversary.

I also want to thank God for the privilege of watching the Edmonton worship services online, since I was unable to attend for many months. What a blessing this was to me! Our grandchildren sang a song at our anniversary titled “God is so good.” To Him be all the glory and praise for all He has done in our lives. My prayer is that we would serve Him faithfully to the end and be a good example to the next generations.

Edith Makus
Edmonton, Alberta



In Psalm 73:25-26, Asaph wrote very beautiful words: *“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”*

My mother taught me to pray, so as a child, I had done so often; however, I was still bound in sin. At age 17, I surrendered to the Lord and received a new life in Jesus. My heart was so light! I wanted to share this with everyone, and I was able to share with many how good it was to have a clear conscience and to know that I was saved. I often had exceptional opportunities when I would offer walking travelers a ride and in our conversation would say, “Perhaps this is my only chance to speak with you. I would like to share with you what a privilege it is to serve the Lord.” I would then continue to relate how I found Jesus and how I received victory over sin.

The opportunity arose for me to become a teacher. I began teaching Classes One and Two in a village in Chihuahua, Mexico. This was such a wonderful time for me! When I reflect back, I would love to do it all over again.

After Jesus questioned Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter answered, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” Then came the reply from Jesus, “Tend My sheep.” I was also able to say I loved the Lord, which gave me the privilege from the Lord to take care of His lambs. I had such joy in showing the children Jesus and His great love for them. After three years, I married a young lady whom God had chosen for me. The following three years, with my wife’s help, I taught school in Santa Rita. After becoming acquainted with the Church of God, we moved to Neustaedt and found our spiritual home in the Church of God there. Many teachings from God’s Word were totally new for us, as we had been taught differently. However, we received the Word as God’s eternal truth and served the Lord with joy. In Neustaedt, I was able to teach in the school and also assisted in the church services with certain duties. After about nine years, we were called into the ministry to tend not only the lambs but also the sheep of Jesus. Our next placement was in Barrhead, AB, Canada, followed by serving in the mission field in Bolivia for thirteen years, where we shared the blessed Gospel of Jesus to the souls living there. In December 2017, we returned to Canada to retire.

Recently, I celebrated my sixty-sixth birthday with family and friends, with whom I could confidently share, if I were to live my life over again, I would absolutely serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and never be without Him!

To God be all honor and glory!

Gerhard Thiessen
Barrhead, Alberta



REPORT

Youth Seminar in Mexico

We are grateful to God for the Youth Bible Days which were held from August 6-8, 2018 in Neustädt, Mexico. Brother Roland Stieben, Brother David and Sister Karina Knelsen, and Brother John Reimer led the seminar. The main theme was “A Christian and his Music.” The danger of “Christian” rock music and other secular music was extensively discussed. Other topics studied were: preparing for marriage, effective Bible study, victory over temptations, knowing God’s will, and God’s call for workers in His vineyard. God poured out His blessings on these days, and a lasting impression was made on those who attended. The following testimonies were shared from the young people’s perspective.

The Youth Bible Days were a great blessing to me. I learned a lot and was actually very astounded at a lot of points. The theme that really touched me, and I believe that really touched a lot of us, was the one about music. I had often wondered if all the music I had been listening to was actually good music. If I had not attended

these seminars, I would still be on the wrong path today with my music. Some of the teaching was difficult to listen to, as I repeatedly told myself that it wasn’t possible for a song to influence me so much. However, the more I heard and the more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that I would need to let go of that music. It was difficult to simply delete so much of my music collection. But I can testify that afterwards, I felt more relieved than I had for a long time, for the question I had wrestled with for so long had now been answered. Sometimes I question whether or not a song is a “Christian” song, but with God’s help, I am able to answer these questions over time. I thank God and each person that made these Bible Days possible, because they were unforgettable.

Sonja Neufeld
Neustädt, Mexico

Music was a huge and important part of my life. I was compelled to listen to music wherever I went, as

well as whenever I did any kind of work at home. The style of music I listened to was soft rock, country, pop, really a bit of everything as long as it had the rhythm of soft rock that seemed to relax me. It wasn't music with offensive lyrics. The music was far more important to me than the words. I knew that it wasn't edifying music, for I would not listen to something like that in front of Jesus, but I didn't think that it had any influence on me. However, in the last few months, I wasn't myself anymore. I screamed at my mother, smacked my siblings, and was very irritated over things that didn't work out well for me. I wouldn't have done any of this in the past. I never even noticed that in the home, I had become this way, since in public I was still a friendly person. My mother often asked me, "Why are you screaming?" or "Why are you so angry?" My answer was always, "I'm not screaming" or "I'm not angry." I thought the reason for all this anger was because I didn't work during the summer months, and my laziness made me weary. Then, when the Youth Bible Days commenced and Bro. Stieben explained how the beat and rhythm of rock music affects us, I realized that my anger stemmed from the type of music I listened to for days on end. Even though the lyrics may not be sinful, the rhythm can influence us to the point that we are not clear-headed anymore. I would never have thought that we could be serving God half-heartedly because of the music we listen to, but I have clearly realized this now. As a result, I decided to get rid of all the music I had been listening to and to make a fresh start and listen only to music that is spiritual and uplifting.

Nancy Friessen
Rosal, Mexico

The Youth Bible Days were a real blessing to me! They were fun and brought our youth closer together, which was an encouragement to me because I came to realize that there are many other young people serving Christ! Having this fellowship built me up and encouraged me to stay strong in my walk with Christ and to keep looking up to Him, from where all help comes. As the lessons passed by, I learned many things that were a blessing to me and will help me to grow spiritually. God spoke to me during these days, and I am so thankful for His voice which still calls people to follow Him and sacrifice everything in order to live a life for Him. This kind of life is my desire because I know that the will of God is the best place to be. I am also very thankful for all the adults who care for our

youth and invested their time and energy to make these Youth Bible Days possible!

Amelia Hiebert
Rosal, Mexico

Sometimes the enemy comes to shackle you in a way you never thought possible. That is exactly what happened to me. Music had a captive hold on me, and I could not escape its hold on my own. I grew up in a Christian family. From the time I was young, I was taught from the Bible, and I also learned to pray. Music was of great importance to my family and also part of my personal life. As a young child, I learned to play the violin and in the following years, other instruments as well. Our family gatherings were not complete without singing and playing music. As I became a teenager, however, I found Christian music to be boring and began listening to other music. That music had a substantial influence on me. I started to rebel against my parents and anyone who crossed my path. When at age 16 I gave my life to God, I tried listening only to Christian music, but sadly, that didn't last. I found new friends who called themselves Christians, but their music was not Christian. This past year, I was baptized and experienced great joy. However, deep inside of me, I had a nagging feeling that something was not totally right. I couldn't put my finger on what it was until we covered the topic of music in our Youth Bible Days and Bro. Stieben explained the impact music has on us. It became clear to me what had robbed me of deep joy in serving the Lord this past year. It was the music. He first pointed out that music in itself is not wrong. God invented music, but Satan twists it. He explained that the lyrics and the body language must suit the music. Spiritual music does not fit with secular lyrics, and spiritual lyrics do not fit with secular music. I was severely tested in this. I always thought that only the lyrics played a role and not the music so much. Now it was clear how I stood. He also mentioned that music is not neutral, as so many people think. He gave us tips on how to evaluate our music. Our music should have deep content and be untainted, spiritual, inspirational, and clear. This is how I want to continue to examine my music. Music can be very beautiful and edifying when we listen to the right kind. My wish and prayer, especially for our young people, is that no one might be ensnared by music. I can attest to how difficult it can be to gain freedom from it. You cannot do it in your own strength; only God can help you.

Claudia Neufeld
Rosal, Mexico



REPORT

Annual Business Meeting of the Christian Unity Press

Once a year, the Board of Directors of the Christian Unity Press (CUP) meets for two days in the CUP facility in Flint, Michigan, USA. This year, the Board was comprised of Dieter Heinze (Swartz Creek, MI), George Sippert (Flushing, MI), David Goertzen (Swartz Creek, MI), Kurt Pudel (Edmonton, AB), and Harry Semenjuk (Wetaskiwin, AB). CUP is a joint project of the congregations in the USA and Canada. Since it is located in the USA, the majority of the Board of Directors must be from there as well.

For many years, from 1928 to 2015, CUP was based in York, Nebraska. After much prayer and consideration, operations were moved to Flint, Michigan, in 2015. The new location is more convenient, and the building itself is more practical. Thanks to a new laser printer, the printing process was also improved and is now simpler and faster than ever before. CUP prints the *Foundation of Faith* and its German-language counterpart (*Evangelium Posaune*), Sunday school lesson booklets, and Church of God literature. It has also printed hymnals in the past.

The Board of Directors is not responsible for the content of the *Foundation of Faith* and other publications. Responsibility for the content falls to the editor (Brother H. D. Nimz) and the editorial team (Hermann Vogt, Ron

Taron, and Harry Semenjuk). For its part, the Board of Directors is responsible for CUP's economic and financial affairs.

CUP is a nonprofit organization, which means it has statutes which it is legally obligated to observe. According to the Statutes, the directors are appointed by the ministerial assembly and are accountable for its actions to them as well. Significant acquisitions or changes must also be approved at the Pastors' Conference. Brother Dieter Heinze is the managing director of CUP and therefore also the principal point of contact for the government. Two sisters (Sue Jaster and Margaret Jabs) assist him on a part-time basis.

When the committee meets in September, the day begins with morning devotions—praying together as brothers is a great blessing to us. We then move on to the agenda, the primary items of which include reviewing the financial records, establishing the budget for the next fiscal year, inspecting the printing plant, and enacting changes and repairs. Having participated on several occasions, I can confirm that this has always been a richly blessed time.

It is surprising just how much goes into publishing the *Foundation of Faith*. It is all a little hard to grasp when you are finally reading the finished product. A great



The CUP board meeting in the Office of the Christian Unity Press in Flint, MI.

Names left to right:

- Kurt Pudel (Edmonton, AB),*
- Dieter Heinze (Swartz Creek, MI),*
- Harry Semenjuk (Wetaskiwin, AB),*
- David Goertzen (Swartz Creek, MI),*
- George Sippert (Flushing, MI).*



Brother Dieter Heinze by the laser printer which produces our publications.

number of brothers and sisters in Germany and North America are involved. Finding and compiling the material, creating the design, doing the proofreading, completing the translations into English or German, printing the publication, and distributing the finished product—there is a lot of work to be done and often very little time to do it. Many thanks to all who offer their time and talents to the Lord!

Maybe you are wondering whether there is something you could do to help out. There absolutely is! For example:

- You can support the work with continuing prayer. We read in 1 Corinthians 3:7 that it is God who grants success—and we have to ask Him for His blessings.
- You can gift someone a subscription to the *Foundation of Faith*, hand out individual issues, or occasion-

ally leave a copy lying around. I am reminded of a sister who makes a practice of “forgetting” a *Foundation of Faith* in the waiting room when she goes to the doctor. God can make sure it finds its way into the right hands. Why don’t you also resolve to participate in the literature ministry?

- You can provide financial support. A ministry of this kind costs money, and bills need to be paid. Publications are sent out even if the recipient does not send in a donation; this is sustainable only because others make up for this deficit by sending in extra money. Let us follow the Lord’s leading in this regard as well. We want to do what we can to advance and promote the work of the Lord together. May God bless you and your service!

Harry Semenjuk

My Christmas Story

*If Jesus had not come to earth,
To Bethlehem in humble birth;
From heaven high into our night
To bring salvation, life, and light,
Where would we be? Despairing!*

*Lo, all of heaven was His own,
For you and me He left His throne;
A stable dark, a humble birth,
A dismal welcome here on earth
Was His. What was the reason?*

*In Mary's lap Christ gently rests,
An infant small, yet great and blessed,
God glorious and wonderful;
The greatest story ever told
On earth and up in heaven.*

*Say, is this miracle for me?
I'm only human; can it be
That Jesus Christ was born that night
For my salvation, life, and light?
O yes, Christ is my Savior!*

*O praise the Lord, I know He's mine;
Above all names, He is sublime!
He's my salvation, King and Lord;
He came for me! Eternal Word!
This is my Christmas story.*