



Foundation of Faith

The Joy of Christmas

The Season of Love

*Christmas-
With or Without Joy*

Follow the Light

Christmas is....

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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The FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a journal of vital Christianity, published in the interest of the Church of God, that takes a clear and decisive stand for full salvation in Christ, the unity of all true believers, and the truths of the Bible.

The editors reserve the right to abridge and edit all materials and information submitted for publication. Research sources are listed for information only and should not necessarily be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

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cupress@thechurchofgod.cc
www.christianunitypress.com

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH (USPS 9008) is published monthly by Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Flint, MI, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA
Volume 17 Issue 12

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a trademark owned by Christian Unity Press in the United States and foreign countries.
Printed in USA.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is published free of charge. All expenses are covered by freewill donations.

Editorial

Dear Reader,

By God's grace, we are once again in the season of Advent and Christmas. With thankful hearts, we look up to Him Who holds all things in His hands and of Whom the Scriptures testify, "Who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance" (Isaiah 28:29).

Yes, God, the Lord, has done this from the beginning when He began with creation and made everything so wonderfully and guided it perfectly.

Part of God's plan and purpose is to "do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation" (Exodus 34:10). The greatest marvel at the center of human history is the birth of Christ, His coming to the earth. It is the holy night, the revelation of the love of our heavenly Father.

A songwriter rejoices:

Wonder of Christmas!

Of such a love, who can conceive and recall?

Christ has left the splendors of glory;

Jesus has given His life and His all!

Wonder of Christmas! Wonder of love!

God came down as man on earth.

Wonder of Christmas, heavenly peace

Became ours through the heavenly birth!

In this year as well, the message of God's immeasurable love and grace should be preached, proclaimed, sung, and spread!

The shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem were the first to whom the birth of the Lord was proclaimed on that holy night. They believed and hurriedly went to find the Child in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the news and glorified and praised God for all the things they had seen and heard.

Dear Reader, we too should newly proclaim the wonder of Christmas and ask God, "Oh, anoint our lips during our sermons and testimonies, and bless this celebration of Christmas and Your people around the whole earth."

We wish all of our readers a richly blessed Christmas!

H. D. Nimz

Follow the Light!

“Arise, shine; for your light has come” (Isaiah 60:1).

He lived in the catacombs, the underground tunnels in Rome, from the time when Christians were persecuted. It is very dangerous to venture into these channels as it is very easy to become disorientated, and difficult to find your way out. This young man had made his abode at the opening of one of these tunnels. He dared not enter any further, well aware of the danger that existed.

However, one day he was enticed to just enter a few steps and discover the mystery that was part of his current dwelling. He carried a candle, whose light would certainly make his mission successful. With that, he began his expedition. Not finding much, he lost interest, and turned around to go back. He moved through various tunnels to return to his abode. Suddenly, he was overcome with fear as he could not find the exit. He should have been out of there a long time ago! Could it be possible that he had become disorientated? This was definitely a possibility in this maze of pathways. He turned around but without success. Panic seized him, along with the thought that he was lost in this mass of dark tunnels. But he found comfort with the thought that the way out must not be far away.

Suddenly, his light was extinguished. It could have been a draft of air or a water droplet which fell from

the ceiling—but his only light was gone. Immense darkness surrounded him. Driven by despair, he wandered around in the dark. He scraped his body on rough edges. Fearful hours passed by. His predicament became more and more hopeless, until he finally collapsed with exhaustion.

When he awoke, he felt rested. But he was still surrounded by hopelessness. He tried again to grope around in the dark, but he realized it was all in vain. Overcome with exhaustion, he fell to the ground to die.

Vivid pictures from his past flashed through his mind, causing him to forget his present condition for a few minutes. But they returned, and with them, tremendous anguish. He called, he prayed. Perhaps God could help him? But how could He help him now in this great darkness when he had never had anything to do with Him? A miracle would have to take place. How could he possibly get out of this terrible darkness? Oh, if only he had a light!

Suddenly—was it a dream or was it real?—he saw a glow of light in his darkness. A glimmer of light was shining around the corner of the dark tunnel! A voice inside of him said, “Arise. For your light has come.” He gathered his last bit of strength and followed the



light. Bright sunshine flooded towards him. But he was just too weak to walk any further. Totally exhausted, he collapsed.

When he awoke, he was in a hospital. A small group of people led by a knowledgeable leader had found him and brought him to the hospital for help.

We are presently in the Advent season, where in Christian countries preparations are being made for Christmas in almost all circles. Advent means joyfully awaiting the coming of the Light.

Perhaps you are presently in a state of darkness, resulting from sinful follies of the world, and you are lost in various “tunnels” and are lying on the ground in hopelessness and despair. Behold, your light has come. Gather all your strength, and arise, for Jesus Christ, the Light, wants to illuminate you.

What preparations are you making to receive His Light? Perhaps during this time of Advent you are singing the song, “O Lord, how shall I meet You, how welcome You aright? My hope, my heart’s delight.” Is this truly your heart’s desire, or are they only empty words?

You’re really hoping you will be in heaven someday, along with the angels and all the redeemed. How is this possible? Are you not actually ashamed that others as-

sume you will be going where the saints gather in the name of Jesus, of Whom you say He is your heart’s delight? Perhaps you are imitating the Jews who couldn’t tolerate hearing the truth, the Word of God (see John 8:43). With whom are you planning to spend eternity? Consider if that wouldn’t be a punishment for you to endure eternity with those whom you avoided here on earth.

Oh arise, shine, for your light has come! The time is certain when you will be meeting Jesus Christ, the Light. This Light will reveal your entire life; nothing will be hidden. It will be like an X-ray, but a thousand times stronger than the most modern X-ray machine could ever reveal. God’s X-ray even reveals the thoughts in one’s heart. And then what? Then it will be too late to open your heart for the true Light. Instead, you will sink into the night of eternal darkness. Therefore, arise while there is time, and follow the Light that is shining towards you. Let Christ illumine you and bring you out of all errors “to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels to the, . . . church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Hebrews 12:22-23). ■

Then you can truly celebrate Advent.

W. Berle



A photograph of a two-story house with a gabled roof and dormer windows, illuminated from within at night. The house is surrounded by snow-covered trees and a driveway. The scene is set against a dark blue night sky with falling snow. The house has a prominent chimney on the left side. The windows are lit up, and there are bright starburst effects from the lights. The overall atmosphere is warm and festive.

Christmas is. . .

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

Luke 2:14

What is Christmas to you? To many, Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. A time to enjoy the holidays with family and friends. A time to admire all of the Christmas decorations and the beauty of the winter season. A time to attend a

worship service and sing those uplifting Christmas carols. But is there not more to Christmas?

On that first Christmas some 2000 years ago, there was no room at the inn in Bethlehem for a young Jewish couple who were expecting their first child. The baby was born and laid in a man-

ger outside the inn. It seemed like no one really noticed this birth and yet it was like no other. Mary, the mother, was a virgin who bore a child, as was prophesied of old (Isaiah 7:14). An angel had appeared to Joseph, her husband, and explained that this child was God's Son and was to be called Jesus, the Savior, Who was to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:20-23). A very special Child who was also called Immanuel, or God with us. Such good news needed to be proclaimed from the heavens, and so the angels appeared that night and told the shepherds in a field nearby, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Luke 2:14.

The shepherds ran to see the newborn Child with Mary and Joseph. With joy in their hearts they spread this amazing news of the Savior's birth in all the neighborhood. One would assume that many, yes everyone, would come to see Immanuel that night or in the days to follow. Yet to this day, many hear of Jesus but do not know Him as Lord. To them, Christmas is only another holiday season.

Days would pass until the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1-12). They had been open to God's leading and followed His star to the city. They inquired of King Herod where the Messiah was born and he gathered the chief priests and scribes to answer this. They based their answer on the prophecy of God's Word, quoting the prophet Micah (5:2), which pointed them to Bethlehem. The wise men traveled the few kilometers to Bethlehem and followed the star right to where the young Jesus was. They were overjoyed and gave their treasures to Him, and worshipped the Savior of the world. Yet, where were the learned priests and scribes of Jerusalem? Could they not travel the few kilometers to Bethlehem to see their long awaited Messiah? Should they not have proclaimed this amazing news to all the people of Jerusalem and encouraged them to come and receive the greatest gift from heaven! Yet we only read of the wise men going to see the Savior of the world. How could so many miss God's most precious gift?

Even to this day, it would seem most people miss Jesus; yet He is not far from any of us and remains the central message of Christmas. Do we listen to the Holy Spirit as He reveals that Immanuel wishes to dwell with us, in us? This is possible if we believe in the message of God's Word, that through repentance and faith in Jesus' name, God's peace will enter our hearts

and He will live there. When I was young, I traveled around the globe seeking truth, and never found it until I met Jesus and believed in Him. It was only then that I found the peace and light of God.

Every Christmas the light of God's truth continues to shine through the Christmas story, drawing all people to God's goodwill. Jesus is "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9). John goes on to explain that many do not receive the light because they prefer the darkness of their sinful ways (v. 5-11). Yet for those who accept this most precious gift of God, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (v. 12).

Dear Reader, have you accepted this wonderful gift of God's grace? Jesus, Who died for each of us and rose again, has paid the price of reconciling us with God. It is a free gift of amazing grace to save us from God's judgment and set us free to serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. It is not enough to know about Jesus and celebrate Christmas with nice traditions and church attendance; we must be born again of the Spirit, as Jesus explains in John 3:1-21.

Are we too busy to listen to God's voice? Is the message of Christ in Christmas falling on spiritually deaf ears? Are we like those who never came from Jerusalem to see the Messiah, or are we like the shepherds who received Him and spread the Good News? Let's take time to quietly reflect on God's story written for us and pray for God's guidance. Do you not hear Jesus whispering your name and offering you His most precious gift of grace and forgiveness?

As Jesus gathered His first disciples, He said to them "Come and see" (John 1:39). Nathanael was one of first to come with an honest seeker's heart and he would declare of Jesus, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). This Christmas, you too can come and see Him and declare that Jesus is the Son of God, and receive Him as your personal Savior! As each one of us receives God's greatest gift, the angels of heaven rejoice and once again declare, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Truly this is Christmas. ■

*Harry Klinger,
Winnipeg (CA)*

The Season of Love

Christmas, the season of love, is just around the corner, reminding us again of the love and grace of our Heavenly Father. Almost all people, whether adults or children, old or young, are glad to be surrounded by love. Of course, that's one reason why everyone looks forward to Christmas. People feel happy when someone, be it father or mother, brother or sister, or someone else, cares about them and even gives them a gift.

But Christmas has a much deeper meaning than external joy and love. To a great extent, we seem to have lost sight of the profound meaning and high value of this season of joy.

Each year, Christmas wants to remind us of the birth of our Savior, of His incarnation. Unfortunately, as humans we are so forgetful; therefore, it is necessary for God to remind us of the angel's message in His Holy Word: "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" (Luke 2:10-11).

These words and this fact encompass the high and godly value of the Christmas celebration. Oh, that we would reflect on this every day and even more during this special season!

It is so necessary to see and grasp the deep meaning of Christmas and allow the Light of Christmas to shine in our lives. This true Light of Christmas is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. All splendor and wealth, all the joys of life including the trappings of Christmas, yes, even our lives will come to an end. But Jesus, the Heavenly Sunlight, will last forever and can never be taken from us. The lives of all men, including your life, dear Reader, is not fulfilled or blessed until you have found the Light of Christmas.

God knew about our impoverished lives. Yes, He knew our lost condition, of the terrible sin and bondage. Therefore, He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will not be lost but partake in eternal life. He came for you and for me to be our Light and our Savior. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

Jesus had to take this way because of us, so you and I could become rich, not in material or transitory things, but to gain treasures in heaven.

Dear Reader, do you see why we should celebrate Christmas? Jesus, your Savior and mine, came to this world as a little child to take the punishment for our eternal death. That is why the angels on Bethlehem's fields proclaimed, "On earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Are you rejoicing in this peace? Do you have this peace in your heart? If this is the case, then you will have a blessed and joyful Christmas. You can rejoice anew in the Christ Child of the manger, your Savior. Have you experienced such a Christmas? If not, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." Not just for some of the people, but this great and marvelous message of joy is for the people of all nations, whether young or old, poor or wealthy. But there is a requirement: you and I must accept this Jesus, Who proved from the manger to the grave that He loves us so much. We must give Him our heart and life. The holy and eternal love of God shines on us again today and in such a wonderful way. Oh, that we would all kneel prayerfully before this Light of Christmas and take it into our hearts! How pleasant are the words of this songwriter: ■

*See now and marvel,
the Christ Child from heaven descending,
See the pure love—sacrificial, complete, and unending.
The LORD, meek and mild, came to carry our sins.
In silence we bow, praises sending.*

*God became flesh—Who can fathom this great mystery?
The gateway to life is open for all now to see.
Come in to receive God's free gift from above,
The one hope for eternity.*

*King of glory came down to earth as a babe.
I will give Him my heart that He lovingly made.
You alone, LORD, I will love and obey;
Forsaking all sin, on Your path I will stay.*

H. Dornhöfer

Christmas and Golgotha

The essence of Christmas was ultimately fulfilled at Golgotha. It wasn't only the birth and life of Jesus that brought salvation to the world; rather, it was His sacrificial death. If Jesus' death had only been that of a shining role model, we could not attain redemption. His death would not have meant more than the death of Socrates or one of the martyrs. However, His death meant unequivocally more, based not on just anyone's opinion but on the testimony of Jesus Himself and that of His apostles.

Accordingly, the death of Jesus means victory over all sin. He provides an atonement for all unrighteousness a person has committed and frees him from the fetters that ensnared him, which were forcing him to transgress. Instead, He grants a peaceful conscience from the past and bestows freedom and victory for temptations and struggles that are sure to come in the future.

No person is in a position to undo even a single action, nor pay back a single cent of his debt to God. All of us, without exception, would helplessly and hopelessly stumble towards an eternal damnation if . . . if it were not for Christmas, if that One had not been born that "Holy Night," Who later fulfilled the promise: "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

This Jesus took the entire debt and guilt of all mankind upon Himself. He carried everyone's pun-

ishment, which we all deserved, onto the cross of Golgotha and thereby atoned for our sins. "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

It must be said that the entirety of mankind is not in a position to better themselves of their own power. Neither the greatest efforts and willpower of man, nor the most successful methods of upbringing, nor the noblest rules of living or the deepest man-made religious rituals are able to change the inner being of a single person. By nature, every person is a slave of his own character. So many yearn for freedom like a prisoner, but all their waiting and efforts are in vain . . . yes, if we wouldn't have Christmas! In a manger in Bethlehem, the One was born Who later conquered all of Satan's evil powers on the cross of Golgotha.

Jesus is the only One Who can truly free slaves. "For He has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two" (Psalm 107:16). Jesus has paid the price for redemption at Golgotha for those who are violent, vengeful, envious, sensitive, vain or conceited, greed-filled, and alcoholic, even enslaved by the darkest, deepest pits of addictions, in which their depraved natures held them captive. His death on the cross is therefore not only an example but a complete and simultaneous redemption and deliverance. In this manner, the Christmas promise of Matthew 1:21, "He will save His people from their sins," was ultimately and completely fulfilled at Golgotha. ■



The King of Glory in His Beauty

“Your eyes will see the King in His Beauty.” (Isaiah 33:17)

At Christmastime, Christians celebrate the birth of their heavenly King. In spirit, we bow our knees before the Christ Child along with the shepherds and the wise men of old. Because of the simplicity and unpretentiousness, the Child in the manger is indeed beautiful. Everything associated with the story demonstrates beauty as well—the shepherds, the angel, the stable, and the manger. We celebrate a beautiful holiday. The glow of the lights, the love displayed, and the blessing that flows from Christ to all people are beautiful. The beauty shining forth from Christ during this celebration has reconciled hearts that were hard and bitter. It has made enemies into friends; it has brought peace and joy to millions. God gives us a glimpse of the beauty of the Christ Child, because through the glory of Christ, we can be made beautiful, pure, and whole within.

This beauty had been foretold.

“You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips” (Psalm 45:3). If the Psalm writer had an earthly ruler in mind at the time of its writing, it is nevertheless in light of the New Testament that we see the fulfillment of the text: “who [Christ] being the brightness of His [God’s] glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). John had deep insight into the inner divine beauty of Christ, the King. He wrote, “And we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Song writers have written hymns about His beauty as well:

*Fairest Lord Jesus,
Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son;
Thee will I cherish,
Thee will I honor,
Thou my soul’s glory,
Joy, and crown.*

How lovely are the lips of this divine King, as He gives rest to those who are weary, as He gives living water at the well in Samaria, as Mary hears Him call her brother Lazarus out of the grave, as He gives peace

to those without peace, as He speaks in parables, as He unlocks the mystery of the kingdom of God, as He lets the bright shining pearls of God’s truth shine forth!

How comforting are the lips of our Savior as He forgives sin and offers grace to the sick, the lost, and the hurting. He said, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you” (Matthew 9:2). “Today, salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). No wonder people said, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:46). “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

You will see the King in His glory

That small group that gathered around the manger saw the Christ Child in person. Later, the disciples also knew Jesus in person as He taught in Galilee. Yet Simon saw the Messiah through the eyes of faith and revelation when he said, “My eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:30-32). We, too, can sing with the hymn writer:

*Glorious Lord, Thyself impart!
Light of light, from God proceeding . . .*

God is light. God is love. Jesus is the express image of God and the brightness of His glory (Hebrews 1:3). Another song emphasizes:

*Into our night,
He brought the light of truth we sought.
He stills our hearts and love imparts . . .*

The questions of life are answered in Jesus. Jesus is the answer. Where have we come from? Where are we going? These questions are answered in Jesus. To every “why?” there is resolve to go on. The unanswered questions in terms of suffering and death find an answer in Christ. In Christ, the depths of the mysteries of God are revealed. We behold His glory, full of grace and truth. Through the cross and resurrection, the beauty of salvation shines forth. Christ brings us salvation, freedom from the powers of darkness, and reconcilia-

tion with the heavenly Father. Reconciliation is beautiful. In reconciliation, we experience freedom. He is the One Who gives our hearts peace. It is a foretaste of that day of glorious beauty when He will lay to the feet of the Father the beauty from the world that once was hopelessly lost.

“Your eyes will see the King in His beauty” (Isaiah 33:17). May these words become reality in your life. Don’t let Satan blind your eyes by showing you the

glimmer of his deceitful promises. Give your heart to Jesus today, and you will experience the beauty of holiness and can join in the song:

*All beauty, both on earth and in the heavens above,
Is composed in Christ alone;
None shall I ever want more* ■
Than you, O most beautiful Lord of mine!

E. H.

What Does Christmas Mean to You?

Millions of people, young and old, look forward to Christmas every year, but so few have really grasped its meaning. Their joy does not come from heaven. Some enjoy making others happy by giving presents, and others find their joy in receiving presents. As nice as it may be to make others happy and to be made happy, this alone cannot give us true Christmas joy. As long as we have not grasped the full significance of Christmas, our joy will not last long.

Christmas has a deeper, greater, more glorious meaning. The famous song describes Christmas as a silent, holy night, but in many places, this no longer applies. Surrounded by the hustle and bustle of modern-day Christmas, we are left with no time to reflect on the extraordinary event of that miraculous night.

The phrase “Christ is born” has become so commonplace that we can utter this wonderful fact without giving the actuality any real thought. What a loss of true Christmas joy! Let us take some time out of our harried lives to quietly ponder the immense significance that Christmas has for us.

At its heart, Christmas was a trade. The Son of God traded His divine throne for a manger and infinite fullness for scarcity and suffering. Have you ever really considered what that meant? What would you say if you had to make a similar choice?

Jesus left His Father, the angels, and heavenly glory to come down to earth into pain and suffering. Would you want to trade everything you own for a beggar’s rags? Just the thought of it might seem ridiculous, but the Son of God made a much greater trade not only without complaint, but with joy. He gave everything for us to trade this world’s grimy rags for the Father’s shining glory.

From a spiritual perspective, Christmas is a bright day of grace on which the thrice holy God reaches out to all people—whoever, wherever, and however they may be—to embrace them, calling out, “I love you so much that I gave up My only Son so that you may have peace and eternal life. I do not desire to be angry with you for eternity for I feel pity for you. The prince of darkness is too cruel to you.” God sent Jesus to conduct the peace talks. Jesus completed His mission successfully, and the Father is now reconciled, meaning that we can have this inner peace ourselves and celebrate Christmas with joy and thanks.

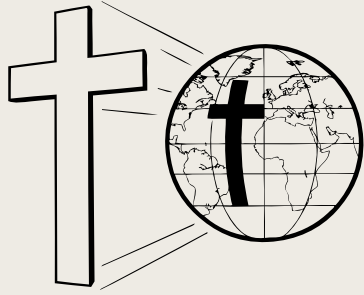
Jesus gave the gift of Christmas to a world swamped in sin. This gift of indescribable grace moved heaven to astonishment and the angels to songs of praise. Christmas is a message of joy for all people, including those living in the shadow of death. If truly understood, it also helps us overcome our present suffering.

Christmas drives all fear of eternal night out of the hearts of believers. They face no more night because Jesus Himself shines like the sun.

Christmas inspired the shepherds to share what they had seen, heard, and experienced. Does it also inspire us to share the message? Or do you no longer find it important to share the Christmas message? If you have experienced Christmas in your heart, rededicate yourself to the Lord:

*Say it loud to everyone
What the Lord for you has done.
Have no fear and freely share
The Savior’s message everywhere!* ■

A. Z.



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, ON

Christmas With or Without Joy?

“Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” (Matthew 3:3)

This Bible verse doesn't speak directly about Christmas but reminds us of making wise and worthwhile preparations. We always prepare for Christmas. We make some purchases, plan family reunions, or invite visitors. The weeks before Christmas can often be stressful, and many preparations don't always end with the hoped-for result.

Instead of the anticipated joy, we may encounter depressing situations. Instead of the hoped-for peace and comfort, troubles and unrest may arise. This can even be through our own fault. We should therefore strive to make wise preparations. Making unwise decisions and taking wrong actions can burden our hearts, which does not lead to a good outcome.

It was during the first few post-war years in Germany. Many people suffered from depression. Food was scarce, living conditions were miserable, and for many people, getting through each day was difficult. It was Christmas again, and a father gave thought to how he could still give his young family a joyful and meaningful celebration.

Spontaneously, he went into the forest and secretly brought home a spruce tree. On Christmas Eve, he set it up in their home. The children were astonished and surprised at the same time. There were no real Christmas decorations, so not much could be hung on the tree. After a more substantial meal, they sat comfortably together. But the anticipated Christmas spirit was lacking. The usually cheerful father appeared depressed. He had a guilty conscience, and no one else knew why. The festive preparations had failed because

he had stolen the tree! It put a damper on the family and the Christmas celebration. Nothing had been prepared for the Lord Jesus. He had been forgotten! And this happens in so many cases.

Years ago, I temporarily lived in a smaller city that also had a Church of God congregation. On the 4th Advent, a few women presented a program with interesting stories. They showed how many preparations they had to complete before Christmas. The stories dealt with the coming of Jesus, the “Christ Child.”

One woman spoke about cleaning her house. While working, she heard the doorbell but did not answer it. Another spoke about her baking. While baking, she heard someone knock on the door. She paid no attention to it. The third woman spoke about packing the gifts. While doing so, she noticed someone at her door but decided not to see who it was. And after all their preparations were completed, they waited for the Christ Child, but He didn't come. They waited in vain! And since they were truly distressed about it, the Lord said to them, “In the first case, I sent a hungry child to your door, but you did not pay attention. In the second case, a beggar stood in front of your door, and you let him leave. In the third case, I sent your sick neighbor who needed help, but you did not care for her. Therefore, assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Matthew 25:45).

Do we understand this lesson? We can pass Jesus by in the midst of all our work. Year after year, Christmas can remain empty for us. Christ was at the center



of that divine night! He was God's gift to us! A poet wrote: "Without a Lord, without a Savior, oh how poor you are!"

But John had preached, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight"! That's what people really did at Jesus' incarnation. When the shepherds in Bethlehem heard the wonderful news of Jesus' birth, they said to one another, "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 both Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child" (Luke 2:15-17). They did not celebrate this divine night without Jesus. And by spreading the news, they prepared the way for other people.

The same can be said of the wise men. They came from distant lands and wished to see the newborn King. God saw their longing hearts and led them

safely to their destination. And it is written: "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. . . . they saw the young Child" (Matthew 2:10-11). Undoubtedly, on their return home, they would have tried to show their people the way to Christ.

Living in Jerusalem, the godly Simeon had also faithfully waited for Jesus' coming. He had received a revelation from the Holy Spirit, clearly directing him to the Christ Child. We can be sure that he had prayed for it. It was similar to the prophetess Anna, of whom we read in Luke 2:38, "And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." This is how we make His paths straight.

In Isaiah 44:21 we read, "O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!" What a wonderful reminder! It is also valid today. We don't want to lose ourselves in all the stress. A blessed, joyful Christmas can only be experienced if we put Christ at the center of our celebrations. ■



Christmas—Peace for you?

One day, a visibly distraught colleague of mine came to the office where I had formerly worked and urgently asked to speak to the manager. What had happened? She explained, amidst many tears, that she had been notified by an official government letter that her mother had passed away a month earlier, and no one had disclosed this to her! (Her mother lived several hours away.) She now needed to clear up some details regarding the estate and needed to consult with her manager. I felt sorry for my colleague, while another colleague remarked, “Sure, someone who grew up in different circumstances can hardly understand something like this. My sister wasn’t present at my mother’s funeral either . . .”

A co-worker suddenly vanished one day and with the help of police, an investigation was launched. He could not deal with the separation from his wife, who also worked for our company. We feared he would try to harm himself.

Broken relationships—often incomprehensible to an outsider. Without a doubt, many further examples of unrest, distress, and misery could be reported of.

Nevertheless, the worst possible misery for humanity is the broken relationship with our heavenly Father. The union between God and mankind back in the Garden of Eden was severed and destroyed by sin. There is the possibility that people may reconcile with one another. In the above-mentioned case of my co-worker, he and his wife reconciled after a long period of time. However, by no means whatsoever could man rebuild the broken relationship with God. Sin burrowed further and deeper and eventually reached

every one of us. The results are separation from God and the coming judgment, at which every person must give account for himself before God.

God knew about this wretchedness and had a wonderful plan. He offered the first step of reconciliation by sacrificing His only Son, Who brought peace to mankind. To bring peace to a lost world, Jesus came as a little child that holy night. In the middle of the darkest night, heaven suddenly came down to earth and proclaimed the joyous message, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

In John 14:27, Jesus Himself declares the message of peace, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Everyone who prayerfully reaches out to Jesus and repentantly confesses his guilt and sins may partake of this great offer to be reconciled with God. It’s so wonderful, after having lived in fear, uncertainty, and strife, to now experience deep peace and rest in your soul and to have assurance of being reconciled with God.

Christmastime is here again. Are you able to say with glad assurance, “Christmas—peace for me!” Perhaps you have lost your peace for some reason. Then you may seek it once again, because God’s grace and mercy are still available today.

I wish you a true Christmas celebration with peace in your soul!

■
*Dina Grötzingler
Eppingen (DE)*

. . . Notes from School (10)

The Selection

Our university had an arrangement for approximately one third of the students to complete their last six semesters at a reputable clinic in the town of Minden. Despite its good reputation, few students from the urban Ruhr Valley really wanted to move out to the rather rural clinic. The ones who went said you had to choose between living near the clinic or living near a supermarket. Living near both was not an option, so you had to have a car (which I do not) or be an enthusiastic cyclist (which I am not). I was also less than thrilled at the thought of moving on top of all this.

Since there were never enough volunteers, some students were always selected by lot to fill the quota. If your name was drawn, your only recourse was to plead hardship, and so my fellow students began debating how to best present their cases. Reasons to stay included a salaried job, children, a spouse, or relatives in need of care. Surprisingly enough, several students suddenly saw a pressing need to assume the primary care of invalid relatives and made certain their applications to remain reflected this need and their own indispensability in great detail.

I thought about submitting an application myself but soon realized that hardship simply did not apply in my case. I declined my friends' offers of help, saying that I did not want to tell half-truths or even lies. Instead, I decided to pray about it. In the midst of the excitement and anxiety gripping the other students, peace and tranquility enveloped me. God would not make a mistake. When the lots were drawn, I lost a lot of my classmates and university friends to the move, but I was allowed to stay. When I complained that so many of our friends had to leave, a girl said to me, "Sure, but their leaving means we get to stay!" And that was true. God knew that my place was here and chose to send others in my stead. ■

Corinna Kowalski, Hamm (DE)

Verse of the Month

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." Colossians 3:13

How easily it happens that someone feels misunderstood: a thoughtless, hasty word, improper conduct, an awkward response, perhaps even a wrong facial expression. Perhaps we have unknowingly and unintentionally hurt that person. Is it possible you have had the opposite experience and you were the one who was mistreated or hurt? We really need forgiveness in these situations.

Forgiving does not mean we just ignore the matter or force ourselves to forget. That would be like pulling the top off a weed and leaving the root in the ground. Within a short time, the weed flourishes tall above the ground's surface. It follows that bitterness or insult emerge as soon as we remember the incident.

Forgiving means excusing, granting pardon, acquitting, or declaring someone not guilty. Is that possible in the turmoil of an "unfair" situation? Yes, with God's help and grace it is possible. God's Word does not ask us to do the impossible. If you're struggling with a dilemma, get on your knees and bring it all to God. Think about all the injustice Jesus endured from the Garden of Gethsemane on to the cross: the flogging, the crown of thorns, and the wounds from the nails. Remember how much Jesus has forgiven you. Is the unfairness you have suffered greater? Likely, your problem will seem trivial in comparison. Keep praying until you have peace about it.

Let's pray for a forgiving heart. We need it!

A Christmas

Welcome in the Father's house!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The train was crowded, and the only seat left was beside a young lad who looked to be no more than fifteen years of age. The minister set his handbag down and sat beside the boy. Desiring to be pleasant, he made some commonplace remarks about the fact that everyone was hurrying home for Christmas, but the lad did not answer; he had been crying. Puzzled, the minister ceased his attempts at conversation and waited for the boy to speak.

It was going to be a white Christmas all right. Great flakes of snow were coming down, and the window was almost covered. He thought of the long ride ahead of him and wondered how far the boy had to go.

“Excuse me, Son. I don’t know about your troubles, and you don’t have to tell me unless you want to—but I am a preacher, and I might be able to help you with your problem.”

The boy looked at the minister for a moment, and then said, “I want to tell you—I have got to tell someone.”

“All right, then—let’s hear it.”

The boy laid his head back and looked out the window as he began. “I guess I don’t deserve much Christmas, but I can’t help wanting it. I’ve been away from home four months now. I got fed up with school and all the chores I had to do. Nothing ever happens in our town. Dad has a store, and farms on the side. We keep two cows, too. I got tired of milking them in the winter mornings before daylight and coming home from school to feed and water them all over again. All the older fellows were getting jobs.

“One day I ran away from home. I didn’t think much about how bad it was, or how I would get along after I got to where I was going. I just went—hopped a freight train that went through town early in the morning, and by night I was in St. Louis. I had never seen as big a place as that, and I was scared. I had some money

with me, but it didn’t last long . . . I guess grown folks can tell how old a boy is no matter how big he looks. They told me to go back home—but, you see, that was the trouble. I felt my parents would be angry with me, and even if they weren’t, I hated to go sneaking back like a whipped dog. I got awful lonesome, especially at night. I went home with another boy, but it was not like my home.

Finally, I wrote Dad. I didn’t give him an address, but I told him I would be on this train today. If they wanted me, I would stop; if they didn’t want me, I would keep on going. I guess it was a foolish thing to do, but I just couldn’t stand to think of getting a letter from him telling me he didn’t want me back, and I didn’t want him to come after me. I figured out this way, so it would be easier on us all. But now I’m scared.”

The preacher looked at his young companion and knew that he meant it. “What are you afraid of, Son?” he asked.

“I’m afraid they won’t want me.”

“But how will you know?”

The lad rubbed his fist on the steamy pane until a small portion was clear. It was growing dark now, and the snow was falling fast, but the few houses stood out as if etched against a soft, fuzzy sky.

“Just a little farther,” he said in a low voice, and then he hid his eyes. “I can’t look,” he said, desperately, “I can’t!”

“What is it you’re looking



for? Some sign to let you know if they are expecting you?"

"Yes, that's it," came a muffled reply. "I told Dad if he wanted me back, to tie a white rag in the old apple tree in the front yard. It's near the railroad, and we can see it plainly. We're just about there now, but, I just can't look."

He was crying now. The minister's eyes were misty. Leaning over he put an arm around the youngster and patted his shoulder. "I'll be your eyes—I'll be your eyes—I'll tell you when I see it."

"But I'm afraid you won't see it," he sobbed. "I'm afraid they won't tie the rag there; I'm afraid they don't want me anymore."

Suddenly the hoarse note of the train whistle broke in upon them and the boy sat up. "We're almost there," he cried. "You look, and see—I can't."

The train was slowing to a stop as it came around a long curve. The minister strained his eyes to peer through the falling snow. He must not fail. But he need not have worried for a half-blind man could have seen *that tree!*

Laughing and crying, the minister pulled the lad up to the window. "Look there," he said, "the apple tree is all bloomed out!"

And sure enough it was, for upon its bare branches, not one, but at least fifty white rags gaily fluttered in the brisk wind like victory banners of forgiving love.

Such is the spirit of Christmas, and such is the welcome and unbounded forgiveness of our heavenly Father when the penitent sin-sick wanderer returns to the Father's house. ■



How Can We Have a Meaningful Christmas This Year?

Do you enjoy the Advent season? Some people enjoy this time of the year and others feel so overwhelmed with all the preparations, planning and events that they can't seem to find the time to enjoy it. The truth is, Advent and Christmas are a busy time and it takes a conscious effort on our part that we don't rush past all the blessings of the Advent and Christmas season. We can be like the lady who was taking a train ride through a short but beautiful countryside. There were breathtaking fields, meadows, and hills to observe. Her problem was, she was so occupied with organizing and fixing the luggage she had brought along that, when she was finally done stacking, organizing, and placing them, they had reached the destination and she had missed the beautiful, peaceful ride. What a disappointment! If we will go through the Christmas season focused on the wrong things, it will inevitably lead to feeling disappointment and exhaustion when we reach the end of the season. So how can we have a meaningful Christmas this year? We want to absorb some lessons from two sisters who had Jesus in their home. One was frustrated and the other was richly blessed.

Good intentions can be foiled by distractions

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:38-42).

When we look at these two sisters, we can very easily label them incorrectly. It's so easy to label Martha as a person who is only concerned about the things of this world and Mary as a person who is concerned

about her soul. Martha is earthly minded, Mary spiritually minded. But that isn't an accurate label. Who invited Jesus? Martha did! She loved Jesus, as we read in John 11 verse 5: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." She had a plan to spend time with Jesus, but there were distractions. Good things that had taken the place of the best. It was good to serve Jesus with a meal and to wait on Him, but it was better to make that secondary and focus on listening to Him. So, to have a meaningful Christmas, pray the prayer of the Psalmist: "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things and revive me in Your way" (Psalm 119:37).

Don't forget Jesus at your family gatherings

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house" (Luke 10:38). When Jesus was born, there was no room for His parents and Him in the Inn. In this house, Jesus found room. He was welcomed and served. We want to welcome Him into the center of our celebrations! Jesus is the reason for the season. Has it ever happened to you that you were together for Christmas, there was the usual amazing dinner, there was the excitement of the children, the presents, the joyful time together with loved ones, but when you drove home after that you felt empty? You felt like something was missing. It has happened to me. When I reflected on the gathering, I had to conclude I was distracted like Martha was. I remember other gatherings where a portion of the Christmas account from one of the Gospels was read and Christmas songs were sung. Children recited verses they learned for the Christmas program. There was a time of "sitting at Jesus' feet". Let us be intentional about making Jesus the priority in all our planning. As you plan to have company, ask yourself how you can glorify Jesus by doing so. How can you ensure that the soul will be fed?

Don't let work rob all the time for worship

The good can quickly become the enemy of the best when we allow our priorities to be shifted. It was a good



thing for Martha to serve the Lord, but it took too high of a place in her schedule. It is good to spend time with family and friends, but the time spent with Jesus, the reason for the season, is more important. Ensure you aren't so busy working for the Lord that you don't have time to personally worship Him. If we zoom out and think about the busyness of the Christmas time, aren't most of the things that make us so busy the "details" of the celebration rather than the main focus? Decorations, varieties of food, and gifts are all good things but can easily become a distraction from the reason for the season. They can hinder our genuine worship of Jesus.

Then there's the topic of spending. So much money is spent during the Christmas season on each other, on ourselves, on the "details of Christmas." To have a meaningful Christmas, I believe we would do well to remember the poor and needy, especially at this time of the year. After all, the way to give to Jesus is to give to "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40). How the children get excited if you plan a specific Christmas mission to help someone who is in need! When they get to go shopping, not for them, but for a child that would otherwise not receive any gifts. We can prepare gifts and bring them personally to the needy family or make a collection to support a mission that you prayerfully selected to help a specific cause. That way you can be intentionally giving to Jesus. Heartfelt giving will add meaning to this busy season.

Remember this season is about *Him*—love *Him*

Jesus was pleased with the hostess who spent time with Him. Jesus wants our hearts. In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul illustrates how good things and even sacrifices for God are meaningless if love is not the motivating factor: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). We can sing songs at Christmas, share the Gospel, give generous gifts to those in need, but if it doesn't come out of love for God and the neighbor, we have no reward. The needy people receiving the support will still benefit from our help, but our reward is gone. So, as a father, mother, or child in the family, ask Jesus to fill your heart with love for Him and your neighbor. Allow God's love to flow into all the activities that you can be part of this Advent and Christmas season.

Bring the true spirit of Christmas (Jesus) into all that you do, and you will be blessed! ■

John Reimer



On the Road of Salvation

Part 11

In the Sanctuary of God

Ron Taron

God's Plan of Salvation in the History of Israel

What reverence was evoked in the hearts of the Israelites when they saw Moses enter the tabernacle and the pillar of cloud come down upon it! They knew their leader was now in a holy place, in the presence of God Who was speaking to him. It made such an impression upon them that the Israelites stopped all other activities, bowed in the direction of God's presence, and worshiped. The holy God of creation was present and speaking with a man!

What did the almighty, holy God do when He came down to the tabernacle? "So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Imagine that! The great God of the universe seeks fellowship with a man! What all would Moses have experienced there! Much of it would not have been describable in human terms, but the face of Moses glowed when he had spent such moments with God. Everyone knew; Moses had been with God. It was obvious beyond any doubt.

Why did Moses go into the sanctuary?

Sometimes, because God called him into His presence. Although God is omnipresent, He desires to reveal Himself to man in certain conditions and places. God called Moses to His presence when He had specific assignments and instructions to give him. Also, when things had gone wrong among the people. In such cases Moses often lay facedown before his God and cried for mercy for his people!

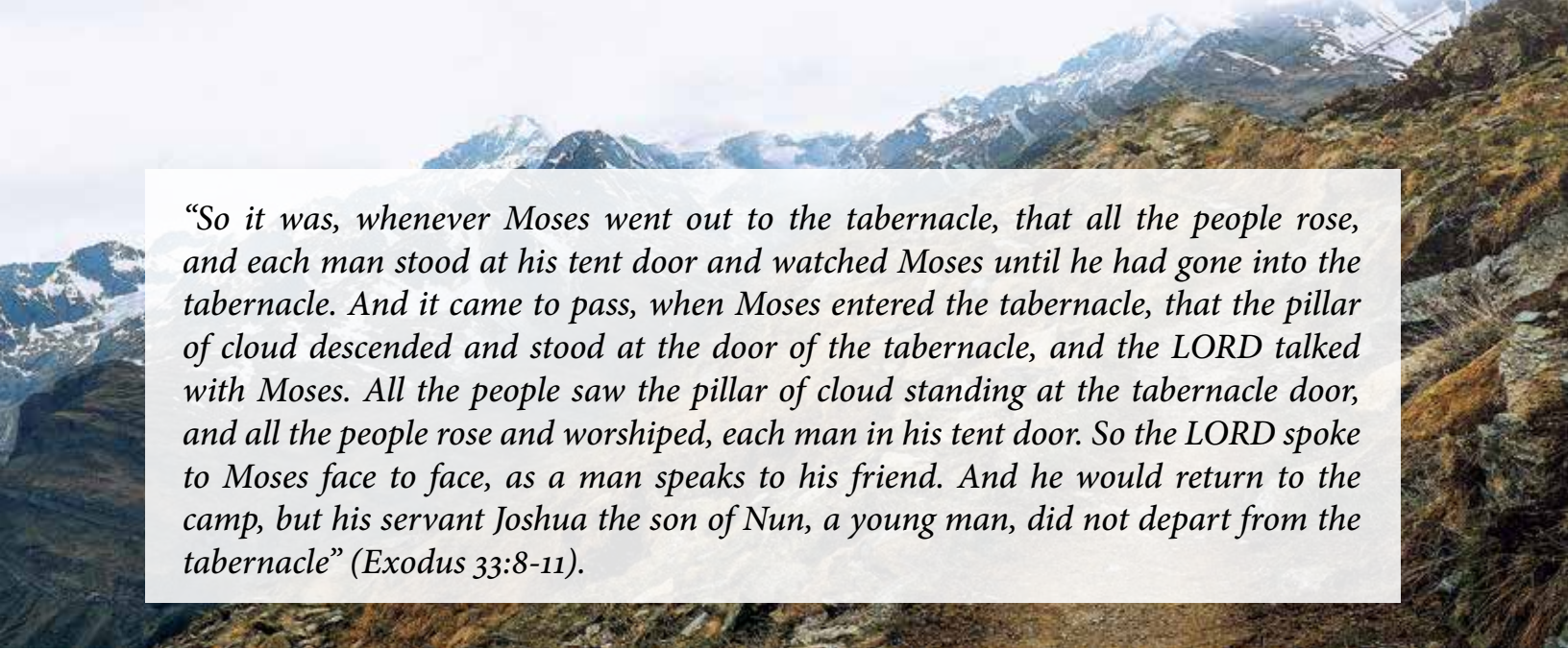
Moses also came into the sanctuary when he had questions or needed guidance. Sometimes they were questions concerning an understanding of unclear portions of God's law. Other times, Moses desired that

God would show him the way forward. As physical leader of God's people, He needed a Counselor and found him in his God.

When Moses was in trouble, he hurried to the sanctuary. When the people wouldn't obey, when they wanted to stone him, when they rebelled or were obstinate, Moses knew where to turn. In these situations, he always hurried to the sanctuary. The wonderful thing is that God hurried to meet him there too! Moses didn't need to attempt to secure an appointment, he just came running . . . and God came down and spoke with him!

Moses came to the sanctuary when he needed to be comforted. As designated leader of such a vast and diverse nation, of whom many had their own ideas and opinions, he often needed comfort. There was no way Moses was able to please them all. Even Aaron and Miriam [Moses' brother and sister] made his life difficult at times, and then Moses came to the sanctuary and poured his heart out to God. Every time he found comfort and the reassurance of God: "You are my servant. You are my own choice. I am with you and will never leave you." God knew that His children would often need comfort, and so Jesus later promised the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, before He left His disciples to return to heaven. Praise God, it is just as true today: in the sanctuary of God we find comfort!

Moses came into the sanctuary when he needed new strength. He was often overtaxed and drained to the last drop. Not only did he need comfort then, but strength to continue his great task. After all, he was an old man with an immense responsibility. How could he cope with it? How could he deal with such stress



“So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle” (Exodus 33:8-11).

day after day? Dear Brother and Sister, do you often feel overwhelmed by what's required of you? Do you feel at the end of your strength? Go into God's sanctuary. Seek His presence and His strength. Strength for the day, strength for your duties. Strength to overcome the enemy, strength to have victory, and strength just to live for God.

Why did Moses go into the sanctuary? To reorient himself when he was influenced, literally torn back and forth from all sides. Storms and troubles came over him in angry waves. Questions and doubts would not have spared him. “Are we still on the right path? Could this really be God's will that this mass of humanity travels out into this deathtrap of a desert? Is this even the way to Canaan? Why are things so difficult? Why are there so many obstacles in the way? God, I've tried to serve You with all my heart; why do I have to suffer so?” These and many other questions would have tortured him, and so Moses went into the sanctuary. Much later in Israel's history, Asaph did the same. We read in Psalm 73:16-17, “When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.” Suddenly, Asaph could reorientate himself and see things from the right perspective again.

In the sanctuary of God, the holiness of God will overwhelm us anew. Sin will become sinful instead of harmless and inconsequential, as Satan tries to convince us. We will see things as God sees them. Like Asaph, we will regain a clear perspective of eternity. Suddenly, we will realize that it pays a thousand times over to serve God amidst all the turbulence of life. We can realize anew that this is really God's way for us and

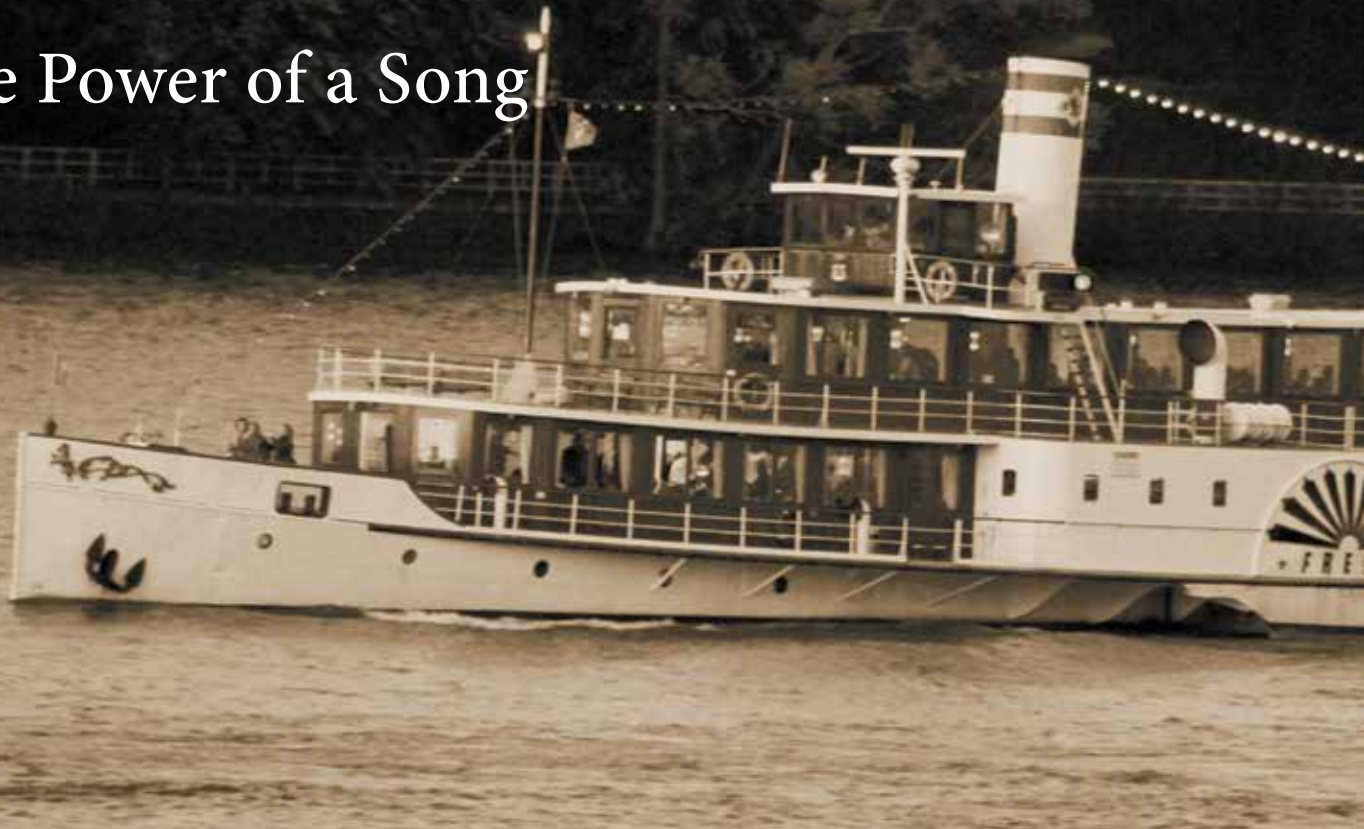
that we are still on the narrow path of life which alone leads to heaven.

When it was time for him to die, God called Moses into the Sanctuary. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him’” (Deuteronomy 31:14). How better could we transition into eternity than from the sanctuary of God? How else could we dare, because only if we're already in God's holy sanctuary will we be there in eternity.

Do you know the sanctuary of God?

For Moses, the sanctuary was an indispensable part of his life. So often he had to flee there. How clearly he had come to know that only if he preserved his access to the sanctuary and continued to experience God there would he make it and be able to stand before God. And how about you, dear Soul? Do you know the sanctuary of God? Do you long for it, or are you satisfied with a mediocre spiritual walk? Are you drifting along with a vague hope of somehow making it to the eternal Canaan, heaven? Know that Satan will do all in his power to keep you out of the sanctuary of God, be it by busyness or a myriad of distractions. And listen: sin cannot enter the Holy Place of God, the sanctuary. Nor can chasing the glitter of the world. Jesus wants to save you from all such things and to reorientate your focus and desires anew towards the sanctuary of God. Through His precious blood, He wants to renew your access to His presence and there He will speak to you “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” ■

The Power of a Song



It was Christmas Eve. A big ship cruised slowly along the Potomac River in North America. On the deck of the steamer sat a number of travelers, huddled warmly in their coats. Others wandered back and forth across the deck. Still others sat quietly, looked at the starry sky, and probably thought about Christmas.

“Sing something for us”, asked a lady of Sankey, Moody’s friend, whose voice was heard and admired so often in the old and new worlds.

“Sing?” questioned Sankey. He looked with confusion at the somewhat remarkably-dressed woman and said, “I only sing religious songs.”—“Then I ask you for a religious song,” the traveler said laughingly. “After all, it is Christmas, the day for a religious song, don’t you think, gentlemen?”

All those who were present agreed, and so Sankey stood up. The devout singer uncovered his head. For a few seconds, he stood still and looked up, the moonlight falling on his distinct face. His first thought was, of course, to sing a Christmas song. But when he opened his mouth and his resonant voice resounded far across the river, it was a song that seemingly had nothing to do with Christmas. He sang:

*“Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care.”*

*In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy folds prepare.”*

Touched, the travelers listened. For a short time, only the noise of the machines and the lapping of the water could be heard. But then, something remarkable happened. A little to the side, a man stood up and approached Sankey. He stood in front of the singer and looked at his face. Curious, the travelers looked on to see what would happen.

“Did you serve in the army years ago?” asked the man.—“Yes, I did,” answered Sankey.

“Were you in the 123rd Regiment’s 2nd Battalion?”—“That’s right. But why are you asking?”

“Just wait a moment. Weren’t you on watch on a moonlit night in the month of May?”—“Yes, that’s correct. I can still remember that night well.”

“Me too!” said the man, “For it was the most meaningful night of my life and your life, too. But I have to explain this to you; I also served as a soldier in this battle, but as your enemy. I also stood watch on that moonlit night. Our station lay in the deepest shadows of a hill, while the enemy’s station lay in moonlight. Then a man appeared. He stood motionless for a while. I lifted my gun up and still recall today how I was deciding, ‘It is only one man, but regardless, one



Longing For Home

Many years ago, a traveler met German emigrants on the shores of the Mississippi River. As they worked, they sang of the beauties of the new land, of the great forests and mighty mountains of America, of the radiant sky above them, and the mighty waters of the Mississippi beside them. They sang of their freedom and good fortune in the foreign land. But at the end of each verse, the stanza repeated, “But it will never become home.”

The traveler inquired after their circumstances. They were doing well. They were otherwise quite satisfied, but they kept talking about the foreign land that would never become a home. Deep in the heart was an unquenched longing for the good old home.

Isn't it the same for the child of God? Although the true Christian may have everything on earth that the heart desires, the lament will remain through the changing of seasons. This poor earth never becomes home, but:

*‘We are Thine,
do Thou befriend us,
be the guardian of our way.’*

*My home is above where the heavenly throng
Sings praise to our Redeemer all the ages long. –*

less is worth something.’ I saw how the man tilted his face up, exactly as you have just done, and then started to sing. I took my finger off the trigger and listened. Very clearly, I heard the words:

“It touched me. I can’t explain what I felt. But while I listened to this song, my long-ago deceased mother stood before me in spirit, my mother who often sang the same song when I was a small boy. There was no way I could have shot this man. The song ended, and the man disappeared.

And now, when I saw you standing in the moonlight, your face tilted up, and heard you sing this song, this experience came back to me so clearly as if it were yesterday.”

Sankey opened his arms and hugged the man whom God had kept from spilling his blood.

On this very Christmas night, this man found peace with God. Sankey’s song had opened old wounds. Now the singer could bandage them. Jesus entered with His light and peace into a guilty but repentant heart. And with that, a new life for this old soldier began on the birthday of our Savior. ■

The tip of Africa was once the terror of sailors. Of those who had been driven there by a storm or the current of the sea, it was believed at the time not a single one had returned. It was called “Cape of Storms.”

A bold sailor dared to sail around the dreaded Cape. He unlocked the treasures of a new world through this maritime route to India for his country. When his king heard this, he exclaimed, “Now that headland shall no longer be called Cape of the Storms but Cape of Good Hope.”

We also have a dreaded “promontory” to sail around on the journey to eternity on which we all find ourselves. Death is its name. If you want to get safely through the cliffs of this “promontory” you must receive Jesus already now into your heart and into your ship of life as Captain and Ruler of your salvation. ■

All Waters Flow into the Sea

A year passes by like a drop into eternity—a short year, composed of minutes, days, weeks, and months. And likewise, many years have gone before this one; they fled restlessly like little drops of time and yet, eternity remains.

“All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full,” exclaimed wise Solomon millennia ago as he looked at the course of all things (Ecclesiastes 1:7). And it seemed to him, who had achieved so much in his life, as if there were nothing new on earth. He found nothing that really made life worth living.

Man remains unchanged, even if the worldview of the past has changed. While the stage of world events was once isolated to small parts of the earth, today, the whole world has moved closer. The big cities of the world all have the same buildings, the same means of transport, the same advertisements; and indeed, the people resemble one another in fashion, in the same mixture of rich and poor, educated and uneducated, young and old. “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

And the human heart has also remained the same in its searching and longing, in its discontentedness. And whether its desire manifests itself in one way or another, in the deepest depths of his heart, each man longs for that one thing: peace with God, forgiveness of guilt!

Millennia ago, Indians sought forgiveness for their sins in their holy Ganges River. The Egyptians wrote it in mysterious hieroglyphics. The Greeks and Romans and the ancient Teutons sought forgiveness of sins when the blood of sacrificial animals flowed on their altars. And today, all the penitent and the praying, the

pious and the godless, are searching from pole to pole. Whether they hide under the armor of philosophy or rebel in savage defiance to God—now, as then—it would be their greatest joy, their only satisfaction, to have peace with this unknown God.

Humanity is like the blind man who sat begging on the road to Jericho. It also begs for a little luck in life, a little fame and success, and a few small coins to be satiated. But no one notices how the years pass and all the panhandled goods run through their fingers like nothing—until Jesus of Nazareth passes by.

And again, a year has come and gone—it flowed into the sea of eternity, like so many before and perhaps some after. “There is nothing new under the sun.”

For me or for you, this might be the last year. The calmly flowing stream of the new year will bring many ships of life into their final harbor. A new scene will appear. When the earthly sun sets, which illuminates the cycle of our short earthly life, something new will dawn. In prophetic words, the last book of the Bible says, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). Herein lays the solution to all of life’s mysteries. Here, the longing of the never-satisfied human spirit is rooted, and here it finds its greatest solution. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (verse 3).

Today, thousands of human hearts are eagerly awaiting the new year: “What will the new year bring me?” But who looks past this short time on earth to the new, enduring city? And who prepares himself so that he is worthy to enter the gates of this city? ■

G. T.

Experiences with God

“My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you” (Isaiah 54:10).

I would like to give a testimony to the glory of God. In May of 2018, I went to the optometrist for my yearly check-up, due to a cataract that had formed on my left eye. At this time, the doctor reassured me that my eye would not need an operation for some time and that my vision had actually improved. I was very happy and thanked God for this.

After three months, I sensed that something was amiss with my eye. I did not think that there was anything seriously wrong, until after the examination. I received the diagnosis: detachment of the retina. On the same day, I was admitted in the Ophthalmic Clinic in Stuttgart, followed by an operation the next day. In addition, my right eye needed laser treatment because the retina was beginning to detach there as well. I was devastated. I cried and called out to God, until I could say, “Lord, and if I become blind, I want to hold fast to You. Your will be done!” A long healing process followed, until I reached the point when I could see normally again. After nine months, I was operated on again on the same eye to remove the cataract. Even though the doctor prepared me for the possibility of another detachment of the retina due to the surgery, everything went well. Every day, I thank God for this miracle. A song states:

*I do not know what the day may bring,
But there is nothing for me to fear;
For this my soul has surely learned:
To trust in God and keep Him near.
And so I wait in joy and rest;
I know His will for me is best.*

May God help us succeed in this! Amen. ■

Anna Schöffmann (DE)

*We wish
all our readers a
happy and blessed
Christmas
and a rich measure of
God's grace
for the new year.*





Observations at Year's End

It is dark. The earth is covered with snow, and the snowflakes keep right on falling, slowly and softly. A hushed quiet is present. Nature appears to be prepared to celebrate some of the most festive hours of the year—New Year's Eve.

How many thoughtful people have silently withdrawn at a time when everything appears so festive? The emotions that affect their souls are so difficult to describe.

The year is so close to its end. Only a few more moments and it will be gone, into the sea of eternity, where the word "time" is unknown. What will the New Year bring? This great question, likely arises in the hearts of everyone. Nevertheless, time passes quickly. You cannot restrain it.

Tirelessly, time flies by. There is no pause. Again, you are at a

new year, which lies before you like an unopened book. What will it bring? Maybe the first half hour already brings bitter disappointments.

Perhaps a mother is sitting and admonishing her daughter, or perhaps a man to his wife, or vice versa. They are admonished to begin a new life in this new year, but the admonishment is ignored. Oh, how the heart bleeds from these disappointments!

Yes, if we could lift the veil and look into the bleeding heart of our neighbor, perhaps often wounded by the thoughtlessness of family members, we would spread more love, have more empathy, and have more respect for each other. However, hearts remain closed. No one but God knows where a hurting heart may be that is praying and

wrestling for the salvation of a soul in the new year. Will they receive an answer?

We move along. Again, one month has passed, two, and the first half of the year is gone. Our life continues on its usual pathways. Nothing special happens. Suddenly, something happens, an illness or a death. Our most loved one is taken away. Why?

May a human ask God questions and say "why?" Are His ways not perfect? God knows, because to our hesitant "why?" He has answered with His godly and majestic "that's why." He wants to bring us closer to Him. We are so tied to this earth that if God, in His all-encompassing love and wisdom, wouldn't place something in our path to awaken a yearning for a higher goal, we would be lost at the end.



Yes, God is love! Are we unable to see this? Are our spiritual eyes blind? From the misfortunes that God sends, we learn to recognize that this world, with all it has to offer, is futile and will pass away. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). We learn to focus all our thoughts and views to please God, to serve our neighbors, and in the end, to save our souls. Often, the soul may acquire a yearning to go home and already be with God, free from everything. The soul sings yearningly with the composer:

*Paradise, paradise,
How sweet is your fruit!
Under your trees of life
We will be as if dreaming.
Bring us, Father, into paradise!*

A person who has experienced suffering is now closer to heaven than to earth. Although such a person is tied to the earth, their major

interests pertain to heaven. This earth is a valley of misery where troubles, pain, tears, and disappointments are boundless. However, in spite of all these, have we not anything for which we should thank God?

Take a look at the bygone year. Note how God has lovingly led you. He has protected you from dangers. His protective hand watched over you, even when you were unaware of any danger. Look how He has provided you with all good things. He has given you health, maintained your mind, provided food and clothing for your body; and sent the beautiful sunshine, which provides light and warmth. Even in suffering, if He sent you this suffering, was He not present to comfort you so that you did not become discouraged?

Let’s enter the new year with thanksgiving. The old year, which recently was the new year, is now

gone. Some of the things we experienced were unexpected, and some were incomprehensible. Life sometimes presents problems, whose solutions we must leave to God. Nevertheless, we do have many reasons to humbly bow before Him with thankful hearts. If we had ten thousand lives, we would still not be able to give Him the thanks we owe Him.

The Psalmist calls out, “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, “Thankfulness towards God is a good guarantee against falling away from Him.” Then let us, with thankful hearts, trust Him like children with our souls, even in the new year. He is mighty to protect us in the future through all life’s storms—Jesus Christ, our Savior! ■

God's Austerity and Loving Kindness

Thunder and lightning on Sinai's mountain
Proclaimed God's power and terror with might;
All ten commandments, complete in their counting,
Given to Moses, as many took flight.
Mighty the Voice that was heard from the mountain,
Piercing and loud as thick smoke filled the air;
Trumpeting forth with the force of a fountain,
God gave the Law, as was evident there.

Bethlehem's message came centuries later;
Humbly and gently the Christ Child was born,
Angels proclaiming the birth of a Savior
For all of mankind, so lost and forlorn.
God showed His goodness and love everlasting;
Through Jesus Christ, a new life He imparts.
All is fulfilled; grace is ours for the asking.
God through His love writes His law on our hearts.

Christmas reminds us of that wondrous story;
Heavenly sunshine has come, grace is free;
We can partake of salvation, what glory
Purchased on Calv'ry for you and for me.
Come to the manger, repent, seek the Savior;
For He will cleanse and forgive all your sin,
Since through the cross He has purchased your favor.
Instead of anguish, you'll have peace deep within.

Once more, the Lord will appear in His glory.
All will rejoice who are waiting for Him.
But it's too late to repent and be sorry,
Terror and anguish for those lost in sin.
Millions will wail as the world burns with fire,
For heaven and earth will then pass away.
God's people rejoicing, with hearts beating higher,
For theirs is a land that is fairer than day.

W. M.