

Foundation of Faith

For
*God So
Loved
the World*

And Then Came Love

Light in a Dreary Time

A Precious Savior

New Year's Eve Reflections

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Editor

Hans-Dietrich Nimz

Editorial Team

Harry Semenjuk

Ron Taron

Hermann Vogt

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Questions and suggestions can be sent to:
contact@foundationoffaith.cc

Please address all other correspondence
and subscription requests to:

Christian Unity Press

5195 Exchange Drive

Flint, MI 48507

Tel.: (810) 732-1831

or email us at

cupress@thechurchofgod.cc

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

This Christmas, let us turn back to one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible: “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 verse tells us two actions God fulfills: God loves, and God gives. It also lists two actions we should complete: We are to believe, and to have.

One important message for us all is that God loves. It is written, “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9).

God not only loves us, He also gives to us. From His sea of love flows a glorious wealth of heavenly goods and wonderful blessings. Can we truly grasp all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge found in God, and that He holds His goodness, grace, and mercy in abundance for us? Giving is the theme of Christmas. God gives.

Dear Reader, do you want to accept the love of God, His gift to us?

Finally, the two points that affect us here on Earth. First, God wants you and me to believe, because whoever believes in Him will not perish. We are meant to believe and repent with all our hearts, accepting that Jesus died on the cross and arose from the dead on the third day.

Second, once we believe and accept salvation in faith, we also take possession. What do we have? We have eternal life. We have an eternally living Savior, a wonderful Redeemer, and an eternal King. The Holy Scriptures further confirm that “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

The best and greatest Christmas present is to believe, so you can receive God’s gift!

H. D. Nimz

An Advent Experience

My bedroom door flew shut with a powerful bang. I was furious. Furious at my fellow human beings, furious at myself.

To distract myself, I turned on the radio at full volume, not caring what my neighbors thought. But soon I pressed the button again, not out of consideration for the other tenants, but because the solemn organ music just irritated me more.

Next, I picked up a book, listlessly leafing through it, but when I started reading, I couldn't even absorb what I had read, couldn't even concentrate.

In the meantime, twilight had fallen. It all fit together: the gloomy November evening, my dark room, and the darkness in me.

Since it was Advent, I lit the candle standing on the table. At first, there was a slight flickering, then a steady flame shone its bright glow into the darkness of the room. Spellbound, I looked into the light, and it was as if the candle spoke to me:

"Look, I am spreading a bright glow; I am consumed by it. And you, you only think of yourself. You are angry because things are not going your way; you feel hurt because others tell you the truth. With your sensitivity, irritability, and critical spirit, you make others and yourself unhappy!"

This was going too far. I was about to blow out the candle when I realized it wouldn't help in the least, since that inner voice could not be silenced.

I rebelled. Maybe I was too sensitive, too critical, but . . . all my excuses didn't help. Finally, I had to admit, "It's true, I think about myself far too much. What I lack is light. I lack joy. I carry the weight of doubt within me. I am unhappy and disappointed because I don't have God."

The desire to get out of this predicament, this darkness, grew. But how could I do it? I knew the answer,

but it was as if I had to experience this truth again, the truth that Jesus Christ had proclaimed: "I am the light of the world," (John 8:12), the truth that only through Him the light could come into our lives.

So I couldn't do anything else but ask God, "Lord, forgive my selfishness, and help me get out of this place where everything revolves just around me. Fill me, Lord, with Your light, with Your spirit of joy, that it may become light in me and around me. Lord, instead of making those around me unhappy, help me invite them into this circle of light."

This Advent experience not only helped me come out of the darkness into the light, but it had a decisive effect on my attitude toward life. Although I did not become a "sunny" person right away, I did move forward step by step into the light of the One, Jesus Christ, so the Word from 2 Corinthians 4:6 could become more real and true in my life:

"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

D. R.

"For God, who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ"
(2 Corinthians 4:6, NLT).



Christmas in Heaven

The professor was a very educated doctor, and he was proud of it. But the reality was that a number of people in the educated world

unwittingly closed themselves to any light of science by hiding behind truths that seemed to the professor to be fairy tales, superstition, and folly. Depending ▶

on his mood, he vacillated between contempt and pity for them.

It was the Christmas season. The path the professor took on his way to the hospital led him through the middle of the Christmas market. With a smile on his lips, he entered the operating room. The young doctors stood there waiting in awed silence for their professor. In the corner of the room, lying on a stretcher, was a deathly pale boy twelve years old. His large, brown eyes looked fearfully at the person who entered. There was something in his eyes that touched the professor's heart. He stroked the boy's hair. "Are you afraid, Willy?"

The child's lips moved. What was the boy saying? "I am yours, Lord; help me!"

The professor said no more. At his beckoning, they brought the boy to the operating table. "Chloroform! You must count, my boy: one, two, three, and so on." But Willy did not count. His eyes looked into the far distance. "I am yours, Lord; help me!" A young doctor's lips twitched mockingly. The professor clenched his teeth. Something that rarely happened to him occurred just then: his hand trembled. Well, it wouldn't matter much whether the operation succeeded or not; Willy was doomed to die.

As Willy lay in his hospital bed, the professor hurried home. The stars twinkled in the winter sky, and tomorrow was Christmas Eve. Thinking about Willy and how sick he was, the professor suddenly felt the need to give him something for Christmas. He stood in front of a toy store and looked intently into the large window. A jumping jack? A horse? No, those were not for Willy. Then his eyes fell on a picture, an angel in a white dress with golden wings carrying a child in his arms, with the words "To God" written underneath. It suited Willy. The child may believe in fairy tales, but why not? He went in and bought the picture, but he felt something inside that he wouldn't have felt if he had bought only a book of fairy tales. What was this? Anger, contempt, or was it the deep pain of homesickness?

Christmas Eve. It had not yet arrived, and the stars were not yet twinkling, and the Christmas trees were not yet glowing. But anticipation shone from children's eyes, and Christmas fragrances filled the streets.

The professor walked into the hospital and smiled, a rare occurrence in this serious man. The boy had

done this to his heart, but how? He wanted to see his brown eyes shine once more, before death came.

He stepped up to Willy's bedside. The boy smiled at him, a sweet smile from a narrow little face on which the shadows of death already lay. "Well, Willy, I see you're getting better. Soon you'll be up and well." Willy did not move. Slowly, he raised his hands and covered his narrow face. A sob lifted his chest.

"Willy, why are you crying? Do you have pain, my dear boy?"

"No," he sobbed.

"What is wrong, then?"

"I thought, I believed . . ."

"What did you think, Son?"

"I was certain I would celebrate Christmas in heaven!"

The professor turned away angrily, it seemed, and stepped to the window. Then he reached into his pocket and took out the picture. The boy's sobbing was unbearable to him. "Here, Willy," he said almost harshly.

"What is this?" asked Willy anxiously.

"An angel."

"Who is he carrying?"

"A child—he is carrying you!"

"Where is he carrying me to?"

"To God!"

The sobbing had ceased. Willy lay there, pale and still. "Is he really coming? Is he coming soon, today still?"

"Perhaps. Just wait." The professor walked hurriedly through the streets toward his house. His heart echoed Willy's incessant message from yesterday: "I am yours, Lord; help me!" No, the doctor was not "His." Perhaps he had been once, but that was long ago. In the distance, someone lit the candles on a Christmas tree. Before the eyes of the lonely man, a memory came alive. He saw them again, the shining eyes of his father and mother. And he felt the song welling up from his heart, "O thou joyful, O thou wonderful grace-revealing Christmastime!" He buried his face in his hands, as Willy had done. Oh, to be just a child for once, a blessed, believing child!

The memory faded. "I want to check on the boy," he thought. But when he came to Willy's bedside, he saw Willy no longer needed him. He was celebrating Christmas with Jesus up in heaven. Quietly, the professor went back home. ■

Advent

“Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation”
(Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus Came to Me

Nothing but His great love compelled Him to come to me. What was worth loving in me? Nothing; nothing at all. And yet He came. Did He appear only once? No, He came several times. Jesus came several times and knocked at the door of my heart until I finally opened it to Him.

A writer once said, “If You had not looked for me first, I would not have come looking for You.”

However, this is not only applicable to me; it really applies to all people. That is why the Bible says, “He first loved us.” And the Savior Himself said to His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16a). He, Who came from heaven to earth more than 2000 years ago to redeem us from all power of sin and to lead us back to the heavenly Father’s house is the same One Who sought each one of us with great patience until He found us.

The foundation of our salvation is grounded in this truth. It is not to my credit when I honestly say, “As surely as the sun shines from above, so have I surely obtained forgiveness for my sins.” It is God’s mercy that has saved me.

How could I have made my way to Him? And where could I have found Him? Unfortunately, hundreds of millions are still trying to find the way to a gracious God. They struggle, they make great

sacrifices; yet they never reach that goal. Through the Bible, we know that God deserves our unceasing gratitude for coming to us and seeking us. We should also not stop sharing the good news of His coming with those who may have already heard it, but not yet accepted it in faith.

Jesus Is Coming Now

The wonderful promise of the coming Savior, first spoken by a prophet in the Old Testament and later repeated by Matthew when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, is not in the past tense. It says, “Behold, your King is coming to you.” He is coming now. He is at your door now. He is the ever-present Lord and Savior.

Therefore, He said, “I am with you always.” No one has to endlessly search for Him because He is there, He is with us. We are the ones who run away, who forget Him, who ignore Him. But when we notice we can’t manage alone anymore, and become ready to listen to His voice and open the door of our hearts to Him, then we may also know that He is there to make His promise come true: “I will dine with him.” Surely this means, “I will be with you and abide with you; I will have true fellowship with you.”

If a follower of Christ can stand firm in severe trials, doesn’t despair in tribulations, and doesn’t become

overconfident on good days, then it is because he knows he is secure in the omnipresent Christ and allows himself to be guided and preserved by Him.

Dear Reader, believe it. Jesus is coming to you now. He is standing at your door now. He wants to be your Helper, Advisor, Protector, Guide, and Redeemer. Entrust yourself into His care. You will never regret it.

Jesus Will Come Again

Many times the Bible confirms the certainty of His return. He will come again as the Lord of glory and as the Judge of mankind. The first time, He came to redeem humanity from Satan’s power through His holy blood. Now, He comes through the Holy Spirit to offer full salvation to every single person. But then He will come to pass judgment on all, where it will be revealed whether we have listened to His voice and opened the doors of our hearts to Him. That is why it is so important for us to pay attention now, to open the door now to receive Him.

Advent means “arrival.” We are in the season of Advent. The Advent season of the church year spans the four Sundays before Christmas. The true season of Advent lasts throughout the year and will continue until it comes to an end at the second coming of Jesus.

O. M.

And Then Came Love

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

For such a long time, the world remained in night, darkness, hatred, and strife. For thousands of years, evil raged, while humanity longed for freedom, redemption, and love. Instead, most knew only distress, burdens, and sin. Pagan gods offered only wrath to mankind and demanded endless sacrifices. But even satisfying the requirements of the one true God could seem impossible. Despite many attempts, they were often discouraged in their failures. Only the anticipation of a coming Messiah allowed a ray of light to glimmer through the darkness.

Then God revealed himself as Love—not a certain measure of love, not as possessing love, not only giving love, but as Love itself. This holy God, before Whom no sin can exist, is Love, and this Love came to us! “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). “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

How does one perceive love? The words “I love you,” however soothing, are often misused. They can easily be spoken with hidden selfishness. I will show you love because I want something myself. However, true love is giving, even

sacrificing. God has shown His love in such a measure that no one can say, “You do not love me.” “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God could not do any more to prove to you and me that He is Love and that He loves us personally, beyond all tangible limits.

If we humans could only grasp how much God loves us, the great desire to be masters of our own destiny would surely cease. God desires to pour out loving-kindness and goodness on our lives. Just think of how much we enjoy doing good things for our loved ones . . . and God loves to a far greater degree than we are capable of. Recently, I was in conversation with someone about the love we have for our children. When they suffer, we as parents immediately want to free them from suffering. The other person said, “How difficult it must be for God to let us endure suffering, because He sees that it is best for us. Surely He would want to immediately end our suffering too, but His love won’t allow that because He could harm us by it. God certainly loves us beyond measure.

How the heart of God must bleed when He sees His children suffering—but not these alone. He goes after all the lost “to seek and to save” from the ruin of sin and

their own way. Too often, however, humans lash out against every intervention of God. Love wants to alleviate the misery of man, but man resists it. He is just as a little child who tries to do things on his own, persisting even if it tires and bruises him. But finally, when Love finds entrance, when God’s love finds room in a human heart, then everything becomes new. Night and darkness are transformed into light. Loneliness and coldness are replaced with warmth. Despair and hopelessness are replaced with life. Hatred, rebellion, and stubbornness are replaced with love. When Love comes, everything is different. When Love comes, the dear Father comes. When Love comes, heaven comes. And when Love comes, reciprocal love is evoked, a love that fills the heart and then flows on so that other dying, cold hearts are also warmed and revived.

Christmas is the celebration of Love, a day of remembrance that Love came. Most certainly, it has come to you as well. Have you claimed it for yourself? It is offered without any conditions. But if you accept it, it will lead you to repentance, then to salvation and God’s favor. It will also become a source of eternal life in you.

“And then Love came.” I pray this testimony would be the most important event of your life’s story!

R. Taron

God's Message from Heaven

Since the earth's creation there have been many messages. Some were warnings, others resulted in a turning to God, and still others were only for special circles and certain people. We know of messages of sorrow and of joy, of devastating news, and also of uplifting declarations of victory.

But the most glorious of all messages, the most precious proclamation did not come from a mortal but from heaven itself. It came from the Creator of the world and from the dear Father of mankind. It was at a special point in time, because it was during the night when this message sounded, as opposed to the day when less important things might have been done. But that night in Bethlehem's fields, the greatest message of joy ever heard by human ears resounded: the message of grace, of eternal love, and eternal mercy to a world sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, to humanity languishing in chains of sin. What a thought! God communicated to us what He wanted to do out of love and eternal mercy, that He Himself bowed down and descended to earth!

The Sender

Who sends us this message of joy? Truly, it is the eternal God, our Father in heaven. "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16), and "in this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).

Do we remember that this message comes from the One against Whom we have sinned so often and so much? We have caused Him much trouble and toil with our sin and iniquities. We have disregarded His commandments and requests and turned our faces, hearts, and backs to Him.

Dear Reader, do you recognize the deep essence of His being? O, worship Him, fall down before Him. Praise Him without ceasing for the saving grace that has appeared to all.

The Messenger

We also see the greatness of the messenger in the message. Even in the world, important messages are not

proclaimed by just any person, but by those with office and dignity. In the same way, the Almighty God did not entrust His messages for mankind to just anyone, but it was an angel who announced His decree to the shepherds in the company of heavenly hosts.

The messenger was given the name "the angel of the Lord," and he was endowed and honored to act as the empowered one in God's affairs. The glory of the Lord clothed this angel, and he was surrounded by radiant splendor.

The Recipients

But who were the recipients of this message? Not the great ones of this world. Not Herod, not the scribes, not even those respected among the people, and certainly not those who spent their time in pleasure and lust.

This most important message was entrusted to the simple and lowly. They were the chosen recipients. Why those who are foolish in the eyes of the world? God chose the common and lowly, the despised. Why, do you think? We find an answer in Luke 2:38: "to all those who looked for redemption."

This is also true today; everyone who longs for the Savior and salvation may still receive this redeeming message. There is no respect of person and no exception. Those who are poor in themselves can come, hear, and accept.

The Content of the Divine Message

"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 a sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10-12).

What joyful news for lost souls! What an offer for sinners! A Savior, a Redeemer for all people! "He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Yes, rejoice, you people of God. Rejoice, Zion, you Church, you Bride of the Blessed One! But you who still lie bound with your chains of sin and chained to the ground of destruction should also rejoice. This



message of peace is also for you. This message includes you: “There is born to you this day . . . a Savior.” Christ, the Savior, is here. He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He also desires to become your Savior.

The Answer

Such marvelous news requires a response. What did the astonished shepherds say? This is important for us because they model the correct response. The answer of the shepherds there in Bethlehem’s fields was simple and clear: “Let us now go.”

When they had heard and understood the divine message, they did not do as many do today and first discuss it with all kinds of people. That is when people often start to think, What will my enemies or my friends and relatives say if I obey God’s voice? The devil whispers in some ears, “Don’t spoil your relationship with the world.” Temporal desires dissuade so many souls. Whoever you are, this message is for you. You must know that your unbelief and disobedience are to blame for your eternal destruction. The proclamation of the Savior is also for you today, and with Him you shall live forever.

Look at the shepherds. Immediately after hearing the divine word—it was still the middle of the night—they set out for Bethlehem, leaving their occupation behind, and following the divine instructions. They

considered the flocks entrusted to them as less important. One thing filled their hearts: they wanted to see the Savior.

Learn from the shepherds if you still hesitate. God immediately had the message proclaimed to the shepherds at the appearance of His Son. The angel obeyed instantly and did God’s will, just as we should. It is the only way to full victory and salvation.

The Result of Obedience

Just as the angel had announced to them, the shepherds found what they were looking for, and experienced immense joy, as they found the Lamb of God. Those who obey God’s divine command will never be put to shame. Instead, their souls will be completely refreshed.

Joseph and Mary and all the saints in heaven cannot satisfy the longing of the heart. But when the shepherds saw the Child, light shone in their souls. They saw and experienced what prophets had been proclaiming for thousands of years. With overflowing hearts, they returned to their flocks. Never had they experienced such joy, and therefore told others what they had heard and seen.

He is “Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and the same forever.” If you believe the Word and trust your Savior, your soul will experience grace, blessing, and abundance.

Jakob Bechthold

A Precious Savior

*“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious”
(1 Peter 2:7a).*

He is precious to me because of His manger. You may ask, “Why? What does that mean?” The manger of Bethlehem tells the story of our Lord and Savior’s wonderful love and of how the Son of God became man.

He was the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. He gave up Heaven’s glory, coming to Earth with all its sin and guilt. Was that not proof of His wonderful love? As we read in Hebrews 12:2, He could have had joy but instead chose to endure the cross and disregard the shame. He knew what He was facing, what people would do to Him. He knew that they would execute Him, and yet, He came to us. He saw how people lived and died in sin, and He felt compassion.

He came to us to become our Savior and Redeemer. Instead of being surrounded by holy angels, He lived in the midst of sinful humanity. Instead of being with the Father, Who loved and lived in wonderful harmony with Him, He was at the mercy of earthly leaders who persecuted Him all the way to the cross. What a difference!

What love! And for whom was this love? For the lost world—for you and me. I do not know who you are, dear Reader. I do not know the life you have lived. I do not know what sin and shame you may have in your past. But I know who you are: You are someone loved by God. The Lord came to Earth for you. His love was and is meant for you. Whoever you have been, whatever you have done—you are beloved by God. Is this clear to you? Have you truly grasped this point? Let me say to you today, you are loved by the Lord. Yes, you!

When I think about how I spent years of my life not wanting anything to do with Him, not concerned with His Word, and even intentionally going against His will, I say to myself, loved by the Lord nonetheless! Yes, the manger in Bethlehem speaks to me of the wonderful love of our Savior, Who so loved the world that He left His place in heaven to come to Earth and save us.

But it also tells me something else. It tells me that the Son of God became a person like you and I in every respect. Jesus walked on Earth as a true human being. No aspect of being human is foreign to Him. It is impossible for us to get into a situation that He did not experience Himself.

Here are a few examples. Let us start with someone who is the only believer in the family. Nobody in his family understands him. They laugh and make fun of him. It causes him a lot of pain and loneliness to be so misunderstood by his loved ones. His heart grows heavy when he considers that nobody wants to join him in following Jesus.

When we look at Jesus, we see that He went through the same thing. There was a time in His life, too, when His brothers didn’t believe in Him and even His mother didn’t understand Him. Mark, one of the gospel writers, tells us in chapter 3 of his gospel that His loved ones went out to stop Him, saying, “He is out of His mind.” Is that not the same accusation that many a believer still hears from the people around him today? It must have been difficult for the Lord Jesus as well, but



He told His Father about His troubles, and His loved ones all came. Even His brothers began believing in Him, albeit only after His resurrection.

In another example, someone may have been betrayed by a trusted friend, crying, “He broke my heart.” Anyone who has experienced this knows how difficult and painful it is. Jesus certainly knows the feeling, having to say of Judas, “He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me” (John 13:18).

We may encounter someone else at the edge of a fresh grave. Her life has suddenly become empty and sad, her heart suffering a bleeding wound that cannot seem to heal. The Lord understands this as well, having stood at the grave of Lazarus, seen the suffering brought on by death, and experienced the devastation of the bereaved sisters. He cried in heartfelt empathy, feeling the people’s pain and grief.

See, the Lord has gone through every situation and every problem we could face in our lives. Nothing human is foreign to Him. He knows us and all of our trials and tribulations. That is why we read in Hebrews, “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

He is such a precious Savior to me because He was human. Now, I can turn to Him in any situation and know that He understands. He knows me and all my needs and circumstances, and nothing is too small or

inconsequential for Him. He knows first hand how someone in my situation feels.

That is why the Father has appointed the Son as the Judge. According to the Scriptures, the Son will be presiding over Judgment Day, not the Father. In John 5:27, we read, “and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” What does that mean? If the Father were to hold judgment Himself, I think some people would say, “Sure, but what does God know about how someone in this situation would feel? God can’t understand us.” But nobody will be able to say this when Jesus holds judgment because

Jesus experienced the same temptations we do, being “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

He can assess how heavy our hearts may be in various situations, but He also knows that God’s grace is sufficient for every problem and sorrow.

Jesus will one day be your judge, so make sure the Judge is on your side. Give Jesus your heart and your life. I can tell you how precious it is to have a Savior you can turn to in every situation, never having to fear that you are coming to Him too often or that He will not empathize with your suffering. No, never!

The manger makes Jesus precious to me because I now know that He was fully God, and like me, fully human and that I can completely trust Him. How I wish you would get to know Him in the same way and that He could become a precious Savior to you, too! ■

**You are loved by the Lord.
Yes, you!**

What Would the World Be Like without Christ?

A World without Light

John writes and refers to Jesus the Son of God, as “the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9).

Not only is there so much darkness in heathenism, but also in our modern world; so much has become cold and dark because of people’s sin and unbelief. In John 1:5, we read, “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Yes, so many have closed their hearts and are dissatisfied and unhappy. A life and a world without light, without Christ, is also without hope and on the way to damnation. Yes, a life and a world without the light of Christmas and Easter is truly dark.

However, the sun of truth has risen for the world in Christ. Without rising from above, without the incarnation of “the Word,” which revealed the depths of the Godhead to us, the world would lie in indescribable inner darkness. It would need to despair and perish in spite of human wisdom and science. Christ had to come to this world, for “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

A World without Comfort

One does not like to speak of the suffering of the world, especially on celebratory days. But how can we remain silent about it, especially in such gloomy days as in our present time? There is much external hardship, but how much greater is the inner hardship! Where do people find comfort in these hard times? Some seek it in work, others in pleasure or in the decision to forget everything. But if they do not know the comfort of Christmas, if they do not have a divine Helper and Savior, all this is of no use to them. The greatest misery lies in sin, and the guilt that inevitably follows.

For nights on end, Luther paced up and down in his monk’s cell without eating or drinking, crying out in despair over and over again, “My sins, my sins!”

Years ago, in the interior of Africa, there was a tribe that dragged a man once a year from their midst to a river, threw him in, and let him drown with the cry, “Take our sins with you!”

The bitterest tears are the tears of regret. O, who can really help? Only the person who comes to Jesus can find help, He who was born for us at Christmas to die for us on the cross as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (see John 1:29). Those who have deeply felt their sin and guilt can joyfully accept the comfort of the Gospel.

At some point, everybody finds themselves in a situation where they have to say, “Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness.” But good for those who can look to the heavenly Comforter: “But you have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption” (Isaiah 38:17). Who else is the just Comforter than the great “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), Whose coming reminds us of Christmas! He can then really comfort us because He has the power to help, to turn everything difficult into a blessing, to replace in abundance everything that has been taken from us, because He can strengthen us wonderfully and, in addition, give the promise of eternal bliss to those who have endured suffering, and give it to them after this temporal earthly life.

This is the consolation of the Christmas Gospel. Woe to those without Christ! We are glad He has come, the Savior and Redeemer, the One without Whom the world would be hopelessly lost, but He of Whom faith sings:

*My heart in joy uleapeth, grief cannot linger there
While singing high in glory amidst the sunshine fair;
The source of all my singing is high in Heaven above;
The Sun that shines upon me is Jesus and His Love.*

The Significance of Christ's Birth

The birth of Christ is the miracle of Christmas. Many Christians sing about it on Christmas Day, but only few understand and truly believe. Christmas is not found in focusing on outward trappings and seasonal traditions. Rather, it is found where people of genuine faith live every day of their lives in a blessed relationship with Christ. There are people who study the great significance of the birth of Jesus Christ and gain an ever deeper understanding.

Prophets have spoken of and longed for the day of the birth of the Savior of the world. A brand new star signaled His birth. Angels came with a glorious chorus. Shepherds, the wise men, and men of power came to see, knelt in the dust, and worshiped. Truly, the day of Jesus' incarnation is a great day! Great because the significance of this day would be so important and almost incomprehensible to human reason if it were not for the Word of God shedding light on it. Let us highlight some important truths closely related to Christ's birth, His first coming:

With His birth, a New Era Dawned

The birth of our Lord and Savior was the start of our present era. However, we do not merely think of our calendar, because that is obvious to anyone. But with His birth, our Lord ushers in an age in which swords were to be made into plowshares, wolves were to dwell with lambs, and leopards were to lie down with goats (see Isaiah 2:4; 11:6). It is the era of peace.

"Peace on earth," the angels proclaimed. God wants to grant peace to every heart, the peace that surpasses all understanding. Whoever has Jesus Christ has peace, because He, Jesus, is our peace, even in a world of strife.

With His birth, the gospel age has dawned, the age of the good news of full redemption from sin, the age of salvation. It is the age of blessedness, to which every person is also summoned and called. It is the time of forgiving and protecting grace, that everyone who will ask can receive abundantly. With this new era, however, the last period of time has also dawned. Scripture speaks of it as the last days and times (see Acts 2:17; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18).

With His Birth, the Kingdom of God Came to Earth

The nature of this kingdom is not an earthly one, as is still anticipated by many sincere Christians. It is the kingdom of our God, which is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is truly the kingdom of peace on earth. It embodies all the children of God. All who are born again are citizens of this kingdom of peace. Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

In His kingdom, we also recognize His church, of which He alone is the reigning head. Jesus, our Lord, is the King of His kingdom. He is and remains the eternal King. He lives and triumphs.

With His Birth, a New Law Was Instituted

He fulfilled the old law of Sinai and thus revoked it. The new law is called by His name, "the law of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). It is the law of love, anchored in His gospel. It is the only standard of our faith unto eternal life.

With His Birth, Salvation Came for the Entire World

The Child lying in the manger is the only hope for our salvation. He is the Lamb Who bears the sins of the world. He would drink the cup of suffering; He would die for us as the only sacrifice valid before God. But He would also rise from the grave, thereby taking away death's sting and hell's victory.

With His Birth, Great Possibilities Arose

Through Him alone. How lost was the world! God's best creation was destroyed by sin. Paradise was closed to man. Sin triumphed. Man was lost. But Jesus, our Savior, restored what was destroyed. The Lion of Judah broke the bonds of Satan, the chains of sin. He brought complete redemption, peace, true joy, happiness, bliss, and eternal life.

When we recognize this Jesus, Whom we want to honor not only at Christmas but as the God He truly is, we cannot help but fall down before Him. We worship Him while thanking the Father in heaven for His indescribable gift in His Son. ■

The Pinnacle of Love

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

*“O message deep and true!
A Son is given to us,
and His name is Wonderful!”*

Let this resound jubilantly in all of us. Such great things happened in Bethlehem for mankind, just like someone said: “The angels have no need of a Savior; the devils do not want Him. He has come for our sake, and we need Him.” Therefore, let us read with renewed attention the account of the birth of Jesus from Luke 2, and it will become great to us anew: Christmas is the pinnacle of God’s love.

The Savior Sent into the World

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4). The annals of salvation occurred within the framework of world history. God does everything in due time. The Romans, rulers of the land, helped carry out God’s plan. Their command led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Luke begins his report, “It came to pass.” God makes history. It segues into the fundamental turning point of all time. The word of the prophet Micah (chapter 5:1) is fulfilled; salvation begins in Bethlehem.

The Savior was born, sent for all the world. Yes, “God so loved the world that He gave His only be-

gotten Son” (John 3:16). This is an incomprehensible love, a love that mankind does not deserve. When we understand that God loves us, then we actually see the culmination of this love in the giving of His Son.

Not Received by the People

The Son of God, sent into the world as a helpless child, found no room in the inn, no room in His own creation. “There was no room for them.” We can also express it like this: “There was no room for the great love of God.” Jesus came into His own, but they did not receive Him; they refused to give Him shelter.

The Savior came when the time was fulfilled. But according to the people, He came inopportunistically then, and for many also today. How often Jesus comes inopportunistically; we take little time for reflection, for silence, for contemplation of the Word.

What can Christmas mean to us then? We like to sing the song, “’Tis the Most Silent Time of Year,” but we do not take the time to meet God through His Son. Yet Christmas has so much to say to us, because “this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). It

is not enough to just sing, “Christ, the Savior is born.” We must also allow ourselves to be saved. Whoever sets out in his heart to walk in the Spirit to the manger in sincere repentance and penitence finds not only the child; he finds the salvation of God, and he experiences the pinnacle of love.

The Great Message of God’s Love

“Gloria in Excelsis Deo” resounded the angels’ praise over the shepherds’ field in Bethlehem. The appearance of the angelic hosts on earth points to the destiny of Christ: Heaven and earth will find each other; the love of God builds the bridge. God’s holiness is revealed in love, and the small planet Earth will receive the Lord of the world. “For there is born to you . . . a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

This is good news for our sick world. Into the midst of our life, God’s salvation comes. He becomes our Friend, and He wants to heal us. All that is broken by sin, all disharmony, now comes to Him. This Lord wants to be our Savior out of love.

The heavenly world rejoiced, “Glory to God in the highest!” They praised God Who revealed Himself in great love through the Son. So we, too, should consider



praising the Lord our privileged task.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1), is made possible by giving His Son. The birth of Jesus is a divine mystery, a fact that must be accepted and believed if we are to experience the love of God in our own hearts. Must God still wait for our gratitude? What else should He do to make our hearts free and joyful? He already gave Himself through Jesus Christ, the pinnacle of love.

But the message of the angels also says, “Peace” on earth! Only

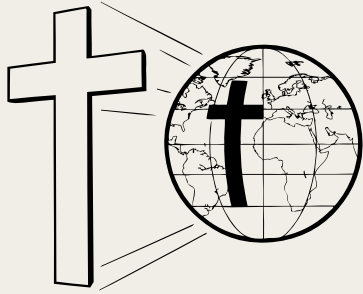
He, Who is peace Himself, can offer peace. Let us not look for peace in the world, nor in our surroundings, nor in ourselves, but only in the Savior of the world. Only through Him will there truly be peace on earth among those who want peace.

The Love of God— Believed by the Shepherds

The shepherds obediently took the road to Bethlehem and found what they were looking for. They were convinced of what they had heard. What good are a thousand Christmas celebrations and gifts? What matters is seeking and finding. The shepherds found the love of God physically in the Child in the

manger. Thus, they became messengers of His love. They told the good news, the message of joy and peace. Therefore they became the first Christian missionaries. They praised and glorified God. Their situation had not changed; they remained shepherds and often had difficult days, but their hearts were filled with great joy. They also offered up worship to the child in the manger. They deeply understood that God became Man for our benefit.

Once we become introspective about the fact of God’s love in the birth of His Son, our lives are transformed, and we can heartily join in the Christmas hymn of praise, “Christ the Savior is born!” ■



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, ON

What Does Jesus Teach Us about His Coming?

| *“Behold, your King is coming to you” (Zechariah 9:9).*

What a noteworthy statement! When a monarch wants to visit a city, announcements of his arrival are made long before that day. His visit causes a great deal of excitement. The streets are decorated, people come together, music is played, and flags go up in his honor.

Jesus’ entrance was different. He came quietly, hidden, and in the form of a poor, helpless baby. Nevertheless, it was said, “Behold,” admonishing us to, “Open our eyes.” For this King we must have open eyes of spiritual understanding, eyes to see divine things. Although He came poor and simple, He is the King of all kings, and He came personally to you.

Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an appropriate, reverent attitude. If this King wants to personally come to you and me, He also wants to change something in us. May God give us open eyes for His grace and glory and for His divine benevolence.

So many things capture our attention during the Christmas season. The bright colors, the beautiful lights, the many things to buy, the festive events to attend, the loud noise, all this captures our attention and threatens to distract us from the King of the world and from His great glory. That is why a song says, “Lord, give me eyes suitable to see. Touch them, for it is the greatest despair unable to see the light.” “Behold!” is therefore just as important and decisive today as it was then, for until His return, it remains Jesus’ way to encounter an individual simply and covertly.

One day, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). This man had his eyes wide open and immediately grasped Who Jesus really was. John probably had seen “Jesus of Nazareth” before, but the way he saw Him now had not occurred before. Twice, he confesses, “I did not know Him” (verse 31), but now he saw the deeper realities of Christ and said, “And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (verse 34).

The way Jesus came into the world and personally approaches us should impress us deeply. Not only His Person, but His coming also teaches us valuable lessons of how to approach Him, and draw near to Him.

Jesus teaches us to refrain from elevating ourselves. Paul writes to the church at Philippi that He “made Himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). This could mean a voluntary resignation or the voluntary leaving of a position. Jesus was willing to leave the glory of heaven and come into this cold, hostile, dark world. He wanted to be considered for a time as less than the angels, who were otherwise subject to Him. It teaches us that we also should be willing to give up the illusory glories of this world and even give up certain positions in order to come to Him and establish a covenant of peace with Him.

Jesus’ Coming Teaches us Humility

Jesus proved His humility by His absolute obedience. Paul says, He was “obedient to the point of death” on



the cross. His path led Him from the glory of heaven to the small town of Bethlehem and into a manger. From the heavenly splendor of light, He entered into human servitude, from the prosperous Father's house into the homelessness of this world. Every human being, even the poorest, can find access to Him. Can we humble ourselves? Can we demonstrate humility by assuming a lower position? Whoever can do that will not find it difficult to find his way to Jesus. This is how He came to us, and that is how we can come to Him!

Jesus' Coming Teaches Deprivation

Deprivation means a lack. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). Jesus chose this for Himself because He wanted to become like us. He wanted to voluntarily enter into our deepest impoverishment

and become the means to our freedom and salvation. A disciple has to share this aspect with his master. Many Christians suffer deprivation in this world. Are we ready to suffer for Christ's sake, just as He was willing to suffer for us?

Jesus' Coming Teaches Us Selflessness

With His coming, Jesus showed us His sense of sacrifice, His self-renunciation. Such selflessness is the fruit of love and is characteristic of contentment. This was the condition for His coming, for the beginnings of His mission, for His tireless ministry doing good, and for His sacrifice on the cross.

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" This is the unspeakable gift of God for the world. Jesus came to us as Savior and Helper, and now we can come to Him. May we all recognize this anew, and may God give us a blessed Christmas! ■



Edmonton Youth Christmas Mission Project Report

When it comes to Christmas, there are so many wonderful traditions, customs and memories that we cherish. We enjoy spending time with family and friends, eating good food, and of course, exchanging gifts. We often don't think twice about giving a present to our children or about the many fun things we receive at Christmas-time. Unfortunately, many children around the world have never received a Christmas present before. I don't just mean the gift of toys. Many have never heard about the real gift, the real reason why we celebrate Christmas. Many have never heard about Jesus Christ and His incredible gift to us.

At the Edmonton Church of God we enjoy many special Christmas activities like sing-alongs, a ladies brunch and a children's program for Christmas Eve. One thing I am very passionate about is the mission project, Operation Christmas Child.

It all started with our Sunday school children packing shoe boxes for children in need. These boxes are filled with hygiene products, school supplies, toys, clothing and many other gifts. Our Sunday school children have been packing these boxes for many years. About five years ago, we decided to make this a full church event, led by our youth. Every year we now collect monetary donations and physical items to fill shoe boxes. The work begins early in October when we purchase items bought with donations, and then sort and prepare them to be packed. We have had many donations, especially when working together with

other congregations. We started with around 100 boxes a year and have had years in which we packed more than 300 boxes. Often I found myself thinking about the number of boxes, and then tried to pack more and more. But I caught myself being too concerned about the number rather than the meaning and opportunity behind these shoe boxes.

This isn't about the box, or the hygiene items the kids may need, or the toys, or even about the children receiving their first Christmas present ever. This is about Jesus Christ and His love for them. When the shoe boxes are delivered to children in need, the joy is great. But what comes along with their delivery is a twelve-lesson Bible program. The children are able to attend lessons where they hear about Jesus Christ and His loving sacrifice for us. The shoe boxes are used to reach the children's hearts and many children commit their lives to Christ. God uses these children to spread the good news to their families, who may then also receive Christ.

Yes, we want to pack as many boxes as possible and give more children the opportunity of receiving a Christmas gift. This year especially, we want to pray for each box and the eternal impact it can have on the souls of these children. The items in their boxes will not last forever, but the impact of our love for the children and most of all, the great news they will hear about Jesus will have a greater impact still for all eternity.

Melissa Mackesy, Edmonton (CA)







Singing During The Advent Season

During the Christmas season, we consistently uphold the greatest gift God has ever given to man, Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, it is possible for us to live in fellowship with God. This is our inspiration every year for gift-giving. In our communities today, many presents tend to be motivated by materialism. Yet for those of us who celebrate Jesus' coming to earth, sharing this good news should be the focus of our celebrations.

As a youth group from the Church of God in Herford, Germany, we have made it our mission to sing about this good news on St. Martin's Day. St. Martin's Day singing occurs every year on the evening of November 10 and is a custom of specific German regions. Usually, children with lanterns go from house to house, sing a song, and receive candy as a small reward. Our congregation has a "Music in the Advent Season" event on the first Advent, which is geared towards those who don't regularly attend services. We see this singing on St. Martin's Day as an opportunity to hand out invitations to this music event. Before we go out, though, we gather together to warm up our voices and to pray for God's blessing.

In order not to overwhelm the listeners, we separate into two or three smaller groups and sing fitting songs like "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam" or "Take Joy into each New Day, Open your Heart for God's Love." Most people look at us with surprise. You can see others enjoying the singing, and that encourages us to keep singing. When we finish a verse,

people often say things like "You are big children!" "Would you like some candy?" or "Why are you doing this?" We try to briefly explain, "This year, we would like to give back. We would like to invite you to our event, 'Music in the Advent season.' By attending, you will have the opportunity to listen to similar songs." As a little foretaste, we also hand out a CD with songs of our youth choir or Christmas songs. At some doors, we are asked which church we are from, and a little conversation opens up.

What do we achieve by doing this? First, it provides an opportunity for our congregation to be known on a personal level in our city and to leave a positive impact. Often in life, the gift of giving turns into receiving at the same time, and receiving largely outweighs the giving. As young people we can learn from this. It is an opportunity to openly declare Jesus, in most cases with positive responses. This encourages us as young Christians.

Lastly, I want to point to an event that happened to Paul "in the midst of the Areopagus" in Athens. By proclaiming the "unknown God," Paul teaches us to use familiar objects, ideas, and customs to point people to Jesus (Acts 17:22-34). Certainly, there are many other opportunities to share the good news. We look at this initiative as a small tool of practical evangelism in today's time and in this way hope to bring a little more light into our city.

Adrian Freiter
Herford, Germany





Report from Mexico: Joy in the Christmas season

Last Christmas, our church school, Escuela “La Esperanza” (“School of Hope”), decided to help those in need during the Christmas season. We collected non-perishable food items. When everything was gathered, the boys packed the food hampers, and the girls baked Christmas treats. Next, we all wrote a personalized Christmas card for every senior living in the senior homes in our community.

A few days before Christmas, we divided into small groups and went to visit the senior homes and other families in need. In total, we visited over 100 families plus the senior homes in our surrounding communities.

During this project we encountered hundreds of people in desperate need of money and food. We also saw many homes affected by illness and homes that were in great need of repair. We experienced happy

tears and grateful hearts, which made us realize how much the gifts were appreciated, and how grateful we should be for what we have.

The greatest impact it had on us is that we discovered our mission field is right next to us. We don’t need to travel the world to help others. When we returned to school after passing out the food hampers, we prayed for the people we visited and thanked God for what we have. We hope to make this a new tradition in the future, since it is a great help to the people in need around us and a blessing to us. We will continue to pray for each other and help one another wherever we can. As we continue doing good deeds for others, God is with us and blesses us, “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7b).

Grade 9 Class, Escuela “La Esperanza,” Mexico



Light In a Dreary Time

“For the Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended” (Isaiah 60:20).

We sat together in a small circle and discussed an Advent music concert. One of the women present said, “For me, there is only one Advent song, and that is the song ‘O How Shall I Receive Thee?’ by Paul Gerhardt.”

The woman looked pale and somewhat overworked. We all knew of her difficult circumstance. Her husband had been killed in the war (World War 2), and her only son was considered missing. Only her twelve-year-old daughter Erika, and elderly mother, whose own house had been bombed, were at home with her. Would she now tell us something of the strength with which she was able to make a fresh start in her life? Quietly, she began to speak:

“It was the first Advent season after the war. I had reached the lowest point of my physical and mental strength. Because my electricity had been cut off, it became very cold, which condemned me to complete inactivity. Erika was sitting in the dark in the next room, picking out the notes to the Advent song, “O How Shall I Receive Thee?” on the grand piano. She had come to me so tenderly in the morning and had asked, “Mother, we are celebrating a bit of Advent, aren’t we?” But I could only shake my head silently.

My mother sat next to me in the dark and talked about times past. Again, the notes of the song sounded. Then Erika began to sing, “O How Shall I Receive Thee?” Almost somewhat reluctantly, and yet inwardly curious, I listened.

Among the festive Advent wreaths, had I ever thought of receiving Him Who came to me? Had I not always received only myself in the festive Advent atmosphere and had met only me? The magic of the Ad-

vent evenings was only a splendor that I prepared for myself and my family. How superficially I used to sing, “O All the World’s Desire.” Now, in the ruins of my life, I felt the longing of my heart for the nearness of the Savior. Jesus, the Lord of Advent, should be the deepest desire of the whole world. My soul had to slowly waste away; it was dead when it knew only itself. How appropriately Paul Gerhardt used the word from a heart brought to life again from its decay, in order to now “honor Jesus’ name.”

Finally, after many years, I could cry again. I laid my head in my mother’s lap; her dear hands caressed me. I was her child again when I knelt before her, but I also knelt before my Savior and asked Him for forgiveness of my sins. He forgave me, and in those moments I also found good standing with my heavenly Father. The paralyzing darkness left my heart; light and joy returned.

From the next room, my child’s voice, which had now become quite confident, sang,

Why, Lord, did you despise me,
My joy and comforts take;
And in the flesh chastised me
For none but my soul’s sake?
Your kingdom’s peace and pleasures
I did no longer see
Until You brought Your treasures,
Bestowed Your joy on me.

That is my Advent experience: Jesus, my Lord, came and brought me joy.”

H. G.

God Turns My Darkness into Light

Last year on Christmas Eve, the power went out just as I was in the kitchen at supper time. While I was waiting in the darkness that evening, hoping the problem would be fixed, I was reminded of two things.

One was a Bible verse, and the other was another Christmas Eve from long ago.

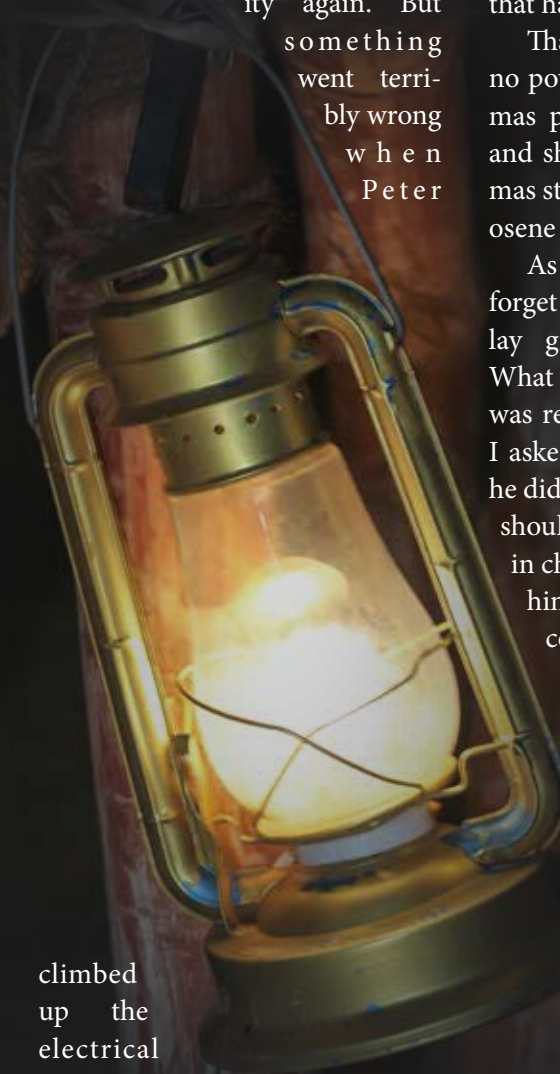
The Bible verse that popped into my head was something David from the Bible experienced when he was hiding from King Saul who wanted to kill him: "Oh Lord, you are my Lamp. The Lord lights up my darkness" (2 Samuel 22:29, NLT).

The other thing I remembered as I was waiting in the darkness was another Christmas Eve that happened when I was a little girl. It was a sad day for me, but God turned it into something wonderful.

At the time, my family was living in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico. It was Christmas, and I was really looking forward to the Christmas Eve program. The children would be performing a program with songs and poems for their parents and visitors. One of the visitors was a young man named Peter.

But then something happened that afternoon that caused a commotion. The transformer on our church property broke, which meant there was no electricity for all the buildings on the property, including our church. How would the children be able to present the Christmas Program? Thankfully, our visitor, Peter, said he could fix the transformer for us so we

could have electricity again. But something went terribly wrong when Peter



climbed up the electrical tower! The high electrical current entered Peter's body and threw him down onto the ground right beside the cement blocks. Yet God's hand was still protecting him!

The way I remember it, they carried the young man Peter to our house and laid him on a mattress in my brother's bedroom. When the doctor came and examined him, he was surprised the young man had survived the electric shock, but he did not know if his heart was strong enough to survive the

damage caused by the electricity that had passed through his body.

That evening, though there was no power, we still had our Christmas program. The children sang and shared the wonderful Christmas story in a church lit up by kerosene lanterns.

As I sat in the church, I couldn't forget the picture of Peter as he lay groaning on the mattress. What worried me most was if he was ready to go to heaven. When I asked my papa about it, he said he didn't know for sure but that we should pray for him. The people in church also helped us pray for him. I don't think any of them could imagine in what wonderful way God would turn the sad darkness of that night into light. Peter did get well again! But God not only answered those prayers by healing his body; God also forgave the sinful things in his life and healed his soul. Although it was dark, God's light brought forgiveness and peace.

Most likely, no one could have imagined that many years later, God would send Peter Ens to be the pastor right there in that same place where they prayed for him on Christmas Eve.

It is a wonderful reminder that when dark days come our way, we can trust God. He can change our darkness into His wonderful light! Jesus, our Lord, is wonderful!

*Bettina Taron
Steinbach, Manitoba*

New Year's Eve Reflections

We are about to exit the old year and enter a new one. For me, it is certainly only through God's grace and goodness. For you too, my dear readers! The Lord's grace and goodness have carried us, helped us, and guided us to this very moment together. As if on eagles' wings, He has carried you and me over the cliffs of this life and throughout this past year. With Samuel we can say, "Thus far the Lord has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12).

Yes, praise and thanks be to our heavenly Father for His gracious help, for the infinite love and mercy He has bestowed upon us each day and hour. He has fed us, clothed us, and kept us alive. How often we forget and take these things for granted, neglecting to thank the Lord for them. Many people feel entitled to these things as if God were obligated to provide them. But they are all gracious gifts from God for which we owe Him our thanks.

God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Had He withdrawn His hand from us, we would have been doomed. Thousands of people are dying of hunger in our time. War is raging in some countries. How grateful we should be for the many privileges we have: for food and shelter, for peace in our country, and for the freedom we still have to gather to hear God's Word.

Let us all learn to be more grateful, for these great blessings. We will be much happier and more content. The more gratitude we have in our hearts toward our Heavenly Father, the more we will be encouraged to do something for Him. As we do more for Him, greater blessings will flow from us, and we will be blessed even more.

But New Year's Eve brings something else to our attention. Every wise business-

man reviews the balance sheet at least once a year. He wants to find out if he has earned a profit, how much he has earned, or whether he has suffered a loss.

We should also take stock of our lives at the end of the year and ask ourselves some questions: How have I lived this past year? Have I served God or the devil? Have I sinned and done wrong, or have I always done what is right and pleasing to God? Is my life right with God?

Dear Friend, these are very serious questions that must not be taken lightly. If there is evidence of deficits in our life, then we have lived for ourself and for Satan. If we continue in this manner, we will be lost. On the other hand, were any gains evident in our life? That can only happen if we have lived for God wholeheartedly. If we persevere in this, we will inherit eternal life one day.

If you are a child of God, ask yourself now: What have I done for Jesus in the past year? How have I lived? Did I place the light God gave me on the lamp stand so others could see in me the Savior of my soul? Or did I put the light under a basket and therefore hide it?

Now let's ask ourselves, what do we want to do in the new year? If we have sinned and erred in the past year, we should turn to Jesus and ask Him for forgiveness. He wants to forgive us and give us the strength to live in the new year in a way that is pleasing to Him, bringing honor and glory to His name. Yes, He wants to help all of us to be His true followers day by day and to do His will at all times. Then the new year will be a truly happy one for us.

H. Dornhöfer

A New Year?

I stand in thought upon the New Year's threshold
And ponder how the year may be for me.
What will it bring? What secrets may it harbor?
Will it be hard as the past year seemed to be?

Will the year bring sorrow and disappointments?
Will I have worries and troubles to bear?
Will trauma, pain, or illness be my portion?
Will I come close to death or need urgent care?

So I stand with trepidation as I go
To start the unknown path that lies before.
Will there be many struggles, yet still unknown?
I know not what the future holds in store.

But as I lift my eyes up unto the hills
And do realize that my help comes from God,
A ray of light bursts through the clouds so dreary
And brings hope for the way that I must I trod.

And a gentle voice speaks comfort to my heart,
A voice of hope that gives me strength anew.
My heavenly Father's voice says full of love,
"Fear not, My child, for I will go with you!

In the year that's passed I gave sufficient strength
To you to bear whatever came your way.
My rod and My staff were there to comfort you
And to keep you safe from going astray.

And this next year, I'll be faithful once again
And be with you in all you need to do.
Like an eagle on wings, you will rise on up
And know that I am God Who strengthens you."

No longer tense on the threshold of the year,
I now go on with joy and confidence.
He will lead onwards to that heav'nly home.
I praise His holy name with reverence.

Rita Henschel





The Pilgrim Entering the New Year

Sentimental thoughts fill our hearts as we enter the new year. Besides thoughts of joy and thankfulness, there are also sorrowful and sad thoughts we must contend with. We must say goodbye to an old year in which we experienced God's love and faithfulness. In the old year, we sensed God's presence, goodness, and blessings.

The Holy Spirit's gentle voice lets us understand that we are also on the threshold of eternity. From this vantage point, the things of this world seem so temporary and lacking in endurance. We realize we are only pilgrims on earth and are rapidly approaching eternity. Therefore, we should examine ourselves and take

inventory. What should a God-fearing pilgrim do on the threshold of a new year?

Look Back with Thankfulness

People usually do not want to be still and contemplative. They want to keep up with the times and forget their past. They do not wish to be reminded of what troubles them deep inside and makes them sad. Yet God's people can take time to look back and review the path of faith that lies behind them. When they see where they have failed and not followed in the Master's footsteps, but have gone their own way, they repent and ask God for forgiveness.

By looking back, they also see the goodness of God and the many blessings granted. Looking back over the last year, we too can set up an Ebenezer—a stone of remembrance that God has been faithful—and thank Him for the way He has led us. We cannot count all the physical and spiritual blessings the Lord has given us. Humbly, we can cry out, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:2).

God has been merciful, showered us with undeserved benefits, protected us, and has promised us His mercy and help for the coming year as well. How can we thank God for all this? Making well-intended resolutions we do not keep is a worthless endeavor. Yet, we want to dedicate ourselves anew to the Lord. Our whole heart, our life, our time and effort, everything we are and have we want to put into His service and live to His glory alone.

Look Inside

Let us look into our hearts and examine our lives. In general, people do not wish to do this either. They would rather look at the lives of others and blame them for their situation. If non-believers examine themselves, what they discover will be unpleasant. Therefore, they have no desire to listen to sermons, which only tend to trouble their conscience and show them their true spiritual state. They prefer sin not to be labeled for what it is, and they do not want to think about their past. Yet in the face of death, many a conscience is awakened. But for many it may then be too late to grasp the lifeline of God’s grace.

A look inside our own heart leads to self-examination that can foster true repentance and bring us into the presence of God. We are shown the right path and can walk the narrow way that leads to life and peace with God. That is the purpose of self-examination.

Look Around with Love

Be aware of what is going on around us. True Christians do not close their eyes and are not uncaring. They are aware of the needs of others. Many people live in sin, and when they die, they enter eternity without having found peace with God. There is much nominal and superficial Christianity found even among those who profess to be believers.

A person who is born again cannot be uncaring about the plight of others. Through their witness in word and lifestyle, they show what it means to be a Christian. They pray for lost souls. They seek to win

others for Christ. They try to invite and encourage others to realize the one thing that is most important.

Look Ahead with Confidence

A Christian should not worry and fear for the future. In faith, Christians can confidently step into the future because they know their time is in God’s hands. Nothing will come their way that God has not permitted to happen. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.” When Satan tempts the believer and the heavens seem dreary and dark, then with God’s help they know that Jesus is with them and helps them overcome all hardship.

Look Upwards

When believers find that their souls are weary and no one can comfort them, then the longing for heaven grows especially strong. They look upwards and see the loving heart of the Father. There they find new strength and courage to continue with joy. Without looking up, a pilgrim on the way to heaven will not succeed. We must look up if we want to be prepared for the glory to come.

Finally, Joyfully Look Homewards

On New Year’s Eve and other times in life, Christians can look ahead beyond the temporary shores of this world to the land of glory. They know every day brings them nearer to the land of heavenly bliss. There, the pilgrims are no longer strangers in a foreign land, but at home as citizens in the city of God, their eternal home. They know it is only the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross that makes the entry into this city possible. It is for those who are looking forward to Christ’s return. They know they will be welcomed by Jesus Himself, Whom they served in this life. By faith, they will also meet their loved ones who have preceded them to this eternal home.

Dear Reader, are you on the narrow road to this heavenly home, or are you still on the broad path of sin that leads to destruction? Turn to the Savior. He is waiting for you and has long been looking for you. Do not let this year come to an end before you find peace through His precious blood. Seek the Lord before it is too late. He loves you and wishes to pardon all of your transgressions. Lay your burden of sin at His feet and seek His redeeming grace that is there for you as well. May God give you the grace and resolve to take this step now, before it is too late. ■

If Jesus Had Not Come

*If Jesus had not come to earth,
To Bethlehem in humble birth,
Into our darkness bringing light,
Salvation, peace, and precious life,
Our outlook would be hopeless.*

*All heaven's splendor, it was His.
A manger poor came after this.
His birth was one of poverty,
And who can grasp the mystery
That nothing else could sufficient be?*

*In Mary's lap the baby rests,
The One through whom the saints are blessed.
The greatest wonder of all time
-A baby small and yet divine-
Who can such mystery fathom?*

*But is this joy for me as well,
This story that the angels tell?
Of course! To me was mercy shown
When Jesus came unto His own
To save from sin His people.*

*Praise God, the Savior came for me
To live and die and set me free!
O precious gift from God divine,
This precious Savior, He is mine.
That is my Christmas glory!*