

Christmas in Zion

2020





ARTWORK: PEG GLYNN

Christmas in Zion

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Behold the Lamb of God

Jim Frantti

◆ *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

John 1:29

GOD'S TIME HAD COME to send His Son, the Redeemer, into the world to save the people from their sin. It was a fulfillment of His promise made long before and repeated through the centuries. John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness that had been prophesied, was sent to prepare the way for the Savior (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Matt. 3:3; Luke 3:4).

The Lamb of God

Jesus approached the place where John was baptizing and preaching of the kingdom of God and repentance. There were undoubtedly those there to whom Jesus was another person who had come to see John. Perhaps some even knew Him as the son of the carpenter Joseph. However, when John saw Jesus, he saw someone entirely different. He saw the promised Savior – his Savior – and he also saw the mission on which Jesus had been sent: to offer Himself as the innocent sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the people. This did not come from John's wisdom or discernment, but rather God had revealed it through His Spirit.

When Jesus asked, "Whom say ye that I am?" the Apostle Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15,16). Jesus told Peter, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). Later Peter wrote that we have not been redeemed with corruptible things, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18,19).

Christmas Message

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we remember the message of the angels on that first Christmas night. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The Christmas message remains the same today. It is a message of a Savior, sent to save the people from their sins. It is the message of the gospel. The core of this message is the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus entrusted the duty of proclaiming the message of the gospel to His disciples, His witnesses. When He appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem after His resurrection, He opened their understanding of the scriptures and said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46-48).

The Work of the Gospel

The work of the gospel continues today. The message of repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all people as God opens the possibilities. This work begins in God's kingdom. It is the true message of Christmas and Easter and is a message of good tidings.

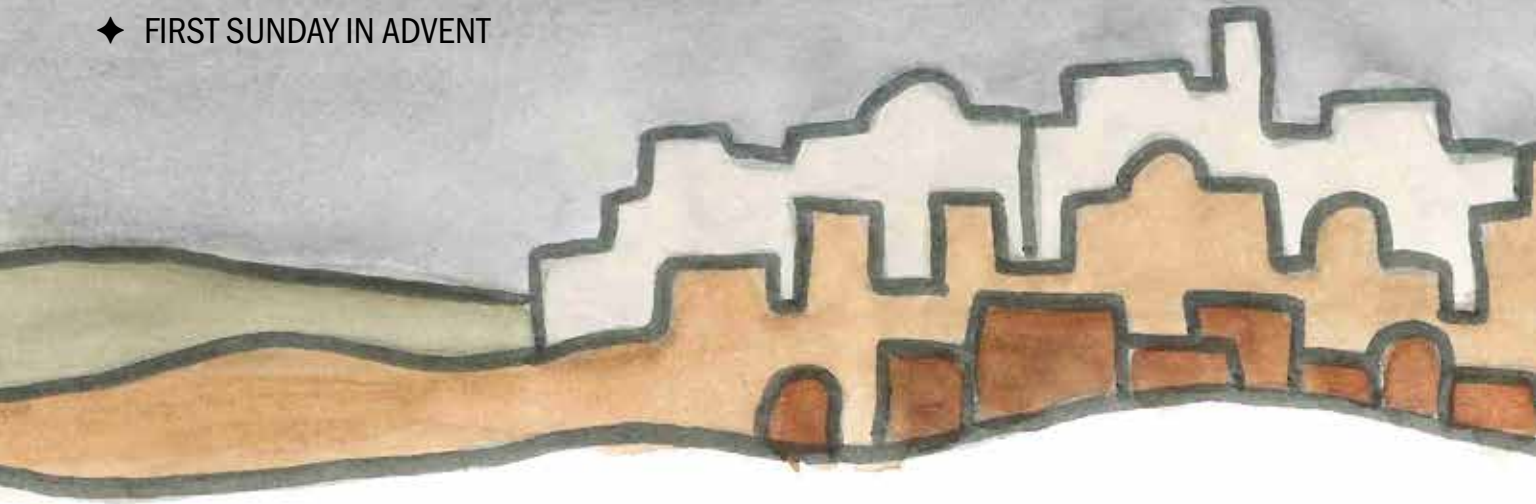
This is the core of the work of God's kingdom. In this work, the role of our central organization, the Laestadian Lutheran Church, is to serve believers and support the work that is done in our congregations. In all areas of work, the focus is the duty that Jesus entrusted to His own, the mission of proclaiming God's Word. We pray that God yet would give a time of grace to do His work and bring the message of the gospel unto this world.

God Still Brings His Word

In this time of uncertainty, we have experienced that God still opens ways to bring His Word to His own and into the world. He remains with His own and provides for our needs. He leads and guides the work and finds those souls that are lost and seeking.

We celebrate Christmas with thankfulness to God that He has once sent His Son into this world to redeem us from our sins and that He has given us the grace gift of living faith.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the Laestadian Lutheran Church, I wish you the blessings of God now at Christmastime and in the New Year 2021. ◆



Not an Earthly King

Joe Ojalehto

IN THIS TIME OF ADVENT, we pause to remember the birth of our Lord and Savior in the stable of Bethlehem long ago. Advent is a time of waiting. We wait for Christmas, and more importantly we await the eternal Christmas.

The theme for the First Advent Sunday is “Your King comes in humility.” One text for this day is from the book of Psalms, which speaks of the King of Glory.

◆ *Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.*

Psalm 24:7-10

The word *humility* does not seem to apply to an earthly king. In our time, world leaders, kings or presidents are honored and treated in a noble manner. Often large crowds gather to see and hear them and there is excitement, cheering and applause after their speeches.

The birth of Jesus was quite different. Jesus was the son of God. Although He is the King of glory, as our text relates, He came in a lowly way. Jesus was born in a stable, because there was no room

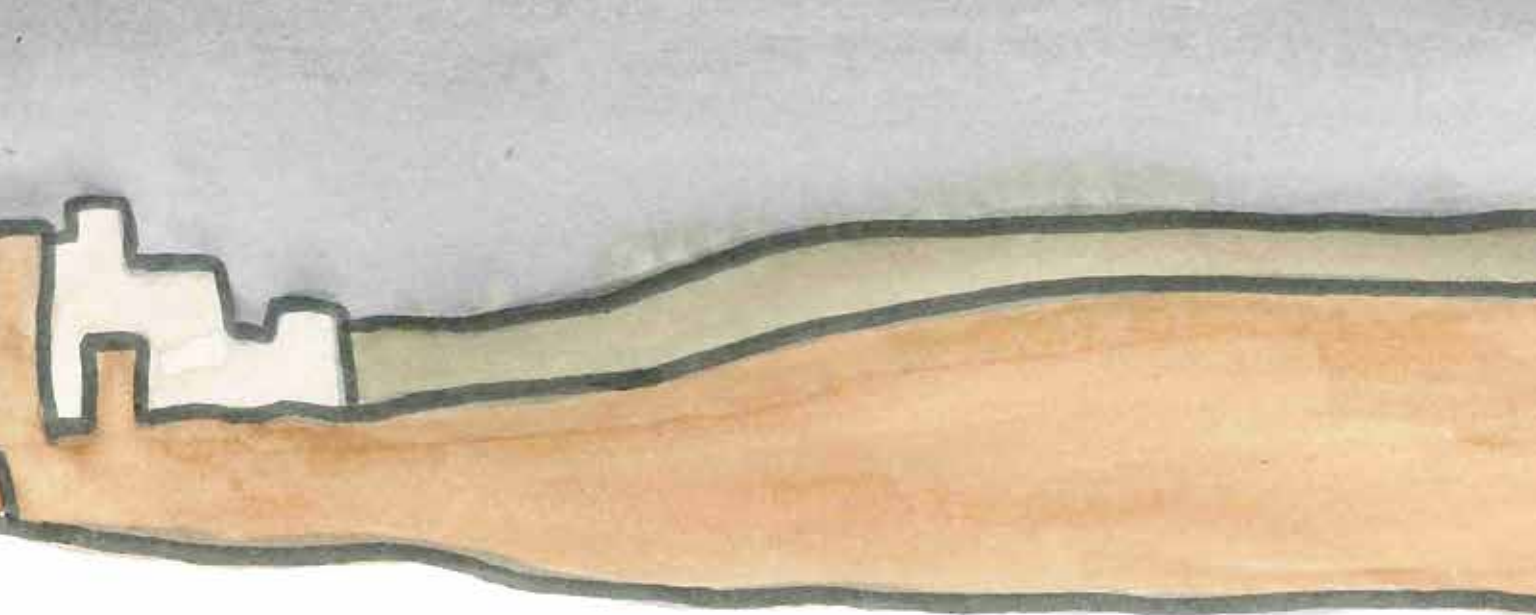
in the inn for Mary and Joseph when they arrived in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph certainly would have had questions and doubts, but through faith they accepted that this was God’s will. The Bible tells that when baby Jesus was born, “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

The Birth Foretold

We remember how the angels appeared, and the glory of God shone round about them. The Old Testament promise of Jesus’ birth was fulfilled:



ARTWORK: SOILI HUHTA



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

God allowed His Son to be born in this lowly and humble way so that all could approach Him, even the weakest ones. God sent His Son, who was perfect, into this cold, dark world to preach the message of salvation to all people. However, not all people accepted this message. Only those with believing hearts received it.

In God’s kingdom the message of the angels sounds yet today. It goes forth the same as during the time of Jesus. This message of salvation, the gospel of glad tidings, is preached through the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.

He Lives and Walks among His Own

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Jesus has promised that the Holy Spirit will be with His own until the end (Matt. 28:20). “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

God still dwells with His own in His kingdom here on earth. Through His Holy Spirit, He guides and leads His children. Our text reminds us, “The Lord is strong



and mighty in battle.” We can, with full assurance of faith, put all our trust in God. We can trust that He will provide for His own and the battle is His.

When we are able to gather around the Word of God at services, we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:14).

Remain Believing

This Advent season, we can rejoice and give thanks that God sent His Son into this world. We are the most fortunate of all people when we have the peace of God in our hearts. Let us continue to endeavor in living faith, trusting and believing God’s promises. We travel here below with childlike faith, awaiting that moment when the King of glory shall come. Then we can rejoice in the glory of that eternal Christmas in heaven! ♦



ARTWORK: SOILI HUHTA

Your King Comes in Glory

Randy Herrala

◆ *Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

Psalm 80:14-19

ADVENT IS A FESTIVE TIME of preparing and waiting. In the Old Testament times, the children of God awaited the birth of the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Today God's children celebrate Advent as they prepare to commemorate the birth of Christ at Christmas. The season begins by remembering how Jesus, the newborn King, came in a humble, lowly form, a babe born in the manger of Bethlehem. The Second Sunday in Advent, meanwhile, reminds us that when God's Son comes again at the end of time, He will come in great glory. God's children live a continual time of Advent, also preparing for and awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The World Is Close

Psalm 80 is noted in Scripture as a psalm of Asaph, a chief musician in the courts of King David. The psalm writer begins by beseeching the Heavenly Father, "O Shepherd of Israel," to hear. The psalm then depicts the endeavor of a child of God, often beset with doubts, worries and trials on this earthly journey. Temptations, sin and the attractions of the world are so close. In times of distress, one begins to wonder, does God still remember me and have mercy upon me? (v. 4). In the battle of faith, oppression and mockery of the sinful world are felt (v. 5,6).

The psalm writer, however, remembers that God has placed His kingdom on earth. It is as a living vine, the children of God that have been led out of bondage in Egypt. This vine has taken root, and God has nurtured it to fill the land. Its boughs and branches have bountifully spread (v. 8-11). Nevertheless, the writer worries, have the borders of this kingdom become dim with onslaughts of the enemy? (v. 12,13).

God's Protecting Hand

Out of this distress and worry comes a plea to God for help and protection. "Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine... Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself." The prayer of the psalm writer was answered and the prophecy was fulfilled when Christ, the Son of God, was born in the flesh, died on the cross, arose victorious from the grave, and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God (Heb. 12:2).

As a chorus, three times the psalm writer repeats, "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (v. 3,7,19). Similar to the Lord's Benediction, one prays for God's grace and mercy, that the Lord would make His face shine upon us. From God, through His Son, love is shown to sinful man. From the face of Christ, the light of the gospel shines. The prayer is for God's blessing and the forgiveness of all sins.

Let Us Be Ready for the Wondrous Day

As we approach the time of Jesus' second coming, we wish to be ready. Before that time perilous times will come (2 Tim. 3:1) and the days will be shortened for the sake of the elect (Matt. 24:22). We do not know when that time will come (Matt 24:36), but for a child of God, it will be a wondrous day when our King comes in glory and gathers His own. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with a great sound of a trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16,17; Matt. 24:30,31).

Be comforted this season, dear journey friend. By keeping faith and a good conscience, believing all sins forgiven in the name and blood of Jesus, a child of God celebrates Advent and awaits the glorious coming of our Lord. ◆

Evankeliumissa on voimamme uskon kilvoituksessa

Aimo Koskelo

- ◆ *Mutta hänelle, joka voi teitä vahvistaa minun evankeliumini ja Jeesuksen Kristuksen saarnan jälkeen, sen salaisuuden ilmestyksen jälkeen, joka iäsiin aikoihin on salattu ollut. Mutta nyt ilmoitettu ja tiettäväksi tehty profetain Raamatuin kautta, iankaikkisen Jumalan käskyin jälkeen, uskon kuuliaisuudeksi kaikkein pakanain seassa. Jumalalle, joka yksinänsä viisas on, olkoon kunnia Jeesuksen Kristuksen kautta ijankaikkisesti Amen!*

Room. 16:25-27

PAAVALI OLI KORINTISSA ja lähetti kirjeen Rooman Jumalan lapsille. Tuohon aikaan lähetettiin usein kirjeitä ja niiden välityksellä tervehdittiin ja rohkaistiin toisia uskovaisia. Matkustaminen oli vaivalloista, se tapahtui yleensä joko laivalla tai jalkaisin. Ei ollut autoja tai lentokoneita, ei ollut edes teitä. Kun kirje saapui seurakunnalle, sen lukivat ensin seurakunnan vanhimmat, sitten se luettiin koko seurakunnalle ja lopulta sen pohjalta käytiin yhteinen keskustelu. Kirjeistä iloittiin. Ne vahvistivat yhteistä uskoa ja loivat toivon näköalaa.

Tällä kirjeellä Paavali tahtoi vahvistaa Rooman Jumalan lapsia ja myös meitä, tänä päivänä uskon osallisuudessa kilvoittelevia lapsiaan. Hän muistuttaa kirjeessään kuinka evankeliumi ja Jumalan sanan saarna vahvistaa uskon kilvoituksessa. Me tarvitsemme raamatun mukaista opetusta, evankeliumin saarnaa, syntien anteeksiantamista ja armoa. Tämän Jumala on lahjoittanut meille seurakuntansa kautta ja siitä me saamme iloa.



Eikö tämä ole meille hyvin tuttua ja itse koettua? Kun olemme saaneet kuulla Jumalan sanaa ja meille on julistettu vapauttava evankeliumi Jeesuksen nimessä ja veressä, sydämellemme on syttynyt ilo ja toivo. Ilo siitä, että armo kuuluu minullekin ja minä saan omistaa julistetun evankeliumin omalle kohdalleni ja uskoa sen syntieni anteeksiantamiseksi. "Sillä en minä häpee Kristuksen evankeliumia, sillä se on Jumalan voima itse kullekin uskovaiselle autuudeksi. Ensin Juudalaisille ja sitten Grekiläisille. Sillä siinä se vanhurskaus, joka Jumalan edessä kelpaa, ilmoitetaan uskosta uskoon, niinkuin kirjoitettu on, vanhurskaan pitää elämän uskosta!" (Room. 1:16–17).

Evankeliumi avaa meille uskon näköalan ja antaa meidän sydämeemme rauhan, Jumalan rauhan! Evankeliumi tuo myös sydämelleni toivon. Toivon siitä, että kerran pääsen taivaaseen kun varjellun uskomassa, ja toivon iankaikkisesta elämästä ja ilosta. Jumalan lapsen toivo on Jumalan antama lahja, joka kiinnittyy elävään uskoon ja Jumalan antamaan armoon.

Tämä Jumalan sovintotyö, jonka osallisuuteen hän on meidät luonut, on ilmoitettu halki Raamatun. "Sillä niin on Jumala maailmaa rakastanut, että hän antoi ainoan Poikansa, että jokainen, joka uskoo hänen päällensä, ei pidä hukkuman, mutta ijankaikkisen elämän saaman" (Joh. 3:16).

Kuuliaisuus Jumalan sanalle ja Jumalan seurakunnalle

Me saamme jälleen käydä viettämään Vapahtajamme syntymäjuhlaa. Me saamme kiittää Jumalaa, kun Hänen rakkautensa on meitä kohtaan ollut runsas, Hän uhrasi oman poikansa meidän syntiemme edestä. Hän on varjellut jälleen tänäkin vuonna uskomassa.

Jumalan sana opettaa meitä uskon kuuliaisuuteen, kuuntelemaan sitä mitä "henki sanoo seurakunnalle." Jumalan kuuliaisuus ei ole kuuliaisuutta omalle mielelle ja mieltymyksille, ei omille ajatuksille eikä sielunvihollisen opetuksille, vaan kuuliaisuutta Jumalan sanan neuvoille ja Jumalan sanalle. Sen perustana

on pyhä Raamattu, Jumalan sana. Kannattaa käydä seuroissa ja pyytää Jumalalta, että Hän saisi sanallaan ruokkia juuri sinua ja sinun kuolematonta sieluasi.

Elävän uskon hedelmä on kuuliaisuus Pyhälle Sanalle, Jumalan seurakunnalle, tuolle seurakuntaäidille, joka meitä hoitaa armolla ja totuudella. Kotisiioni tuntee meidät puutteinemme ja lahjoinemme, siellä meitä hoidetaan, siellä meitä rakastetaan ja siellä meitä ohjataan, ettemme eksyisi taivaantieltä tämän maailman synkkään korpeen. Me tarvitsemme evankeliumia, että emme eksyisi ja meillä olisi voimaa kilvoitella kiusausten kohdatessa.

Paavali toteaa kirjeensä lopussa Jumalasta, että Hän on yksin viisas ja Hänelle kuuluu kaikesta kiitos ja kunnia Jeesuksen Kristuksen kautta iankaikkisesti. Jumala on luonut ja lunastanut meidät, Hän on säätänyt koko meidän elämämme, kaikki elämämme vaiheet. Hän on laupias ja armahtava. Jumalan valtakunnasta julistettu evankeliumin siunaus kaikuu kutsuvana ja armahtavana ja se tulisi jokaisen ihmisen omistaa tässä maailmassa. Kyseessä on valtava lahja, lahjavanhurskaus, jonka Jumala on poikansa kautta meitä varten valmistanut meidän uskottavaksemme, että me pelastuisimme.

Me saamme tänäkin jouluna nöyryyttää sydämemme Jumalan väkevän käden alle ja ottaa vastaan sen korkeimman siunauksen, joka maanpäällä on tarjolla. "Poikani ja tyttäreni ole hyvässä turvassa, sinun syntisi annetaan sinulle anteeksi Jeesuksen nimessä ja veressä."

Siunattua Joulua rakkaat ystävät Herrassa! ♦

The Gospel Is Our Strength in the Endeavor of Faith

Aimo Koskelo

- ◆ *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.*

Rom. 16:25-27

PAUL WAS IN CORINTH and sent a letter to the children of God in Rome. In those days people often sent letters with which they greeted and encouraged other believers. Travel was difficult and it happened either by boat or on foot. There weren't cars or planes, not even roads. When a letter was delivered to the congregation, the elders of the congregation read it first. Then it was read to the whole congregation, after which a discussion took place based on the letter. There was much joy over these letters. They strengthened mutual faith and created a prospect of hope.

With this letter, Paul wished to strengthen the children of God in Rome, and he also wished to strengthen us, God's children who today endeavor in the fellowship of faith. Paul reminds in this letter how the gospel and the sermon of God's Word strengthen us in the endeavor of faith. We need biblical instruction, the preaching of the gospel, the forgiveness of sins and grace. God has bestowed this upon us through His congregation, and we can rejoice over this.

Isn't this familiar to us, something we ourselves have experienced? When we have been able to hear God's Word and the liberating gospel has been preached to us in Jesus' name and blood, joy and hope ignite in our hearts. I am joyful that



ARTWORK: SOILI HUHTA



grace belongs even to me, and I for my own part can own the proclaimed gospel and believe it for the forgiveness of sins. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16–17).

The gospel opens for us the prospect of faith and gives us peace in our hearts, the peace of God! The gospel also brings hope to my heart – hope that I will one day get to heaven when I am protected in faith, hope of everlasting life and joy. The hope of a child of God is a gift from God that attaches to living faith and God-given grace.

God’s reconciliation work, into the fellowship of which He has created us, is revealed throughout the Bible. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Obedience to the Word of God and to God’s Congregation

Once again we are able to celebrate the birth of our Savior. We can thank God for the love that He has so abundantly shown to us when He sacrificed His own Son for our sins. He has protected us in faith again this year.

The Word of God teaches us obedience of faith, to listen to what “the Spirit saith unto the churches.” This obedience is not obedience to one’s own mind and preferences, nor to one’s own thoughts or the teachings of the enemy of souls, but rather obedience to God’s Word and the advice found in God’s Word. It is based on the holy Bible, God’s Word. It pays to go to services and ask God that He with His Word would feed you and your undying soul.

A fruit of living faith is obedience to the holy Word, God’s congregation and the congregation Mother, who cares for us in grace and truth. Our home Zion knows us with our shortcomings and our gifts, and it is there that we are cared for, loved and guided so that we would not stray from the path to heaven into the gloomy wilderness of this world. We need the gospel to avoid getting lost and so that we would have strength to endeavor when we encounter temptations.

At the end of his letter, Paul notes that God alone is wise and all glory and honor belong to Him, through Jesus Christ forever. God has created and redeemed us, He has ordained our whole life, all the phases of our life. He is gracious and merciful toward us. The gospel blessing preached in God’s kingdom sounds forth invitingly and full of mercy – each person in this world should own it. It is a tremendous gift, the gift of righteousness that God has prepared for us in His Son, to be believed by us so that we may be saved.

Again this Christmas we can humble our hearts beneath the mighty hand of God and receive the greatest blessing that is offered here on earth. “My son and daughter, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven in Jesus’ name and blood.”

Wishing all you dear friends in the Lord a blessed Christmas! ♦

Translation: Matthew Keranen

Puer Natus: A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem

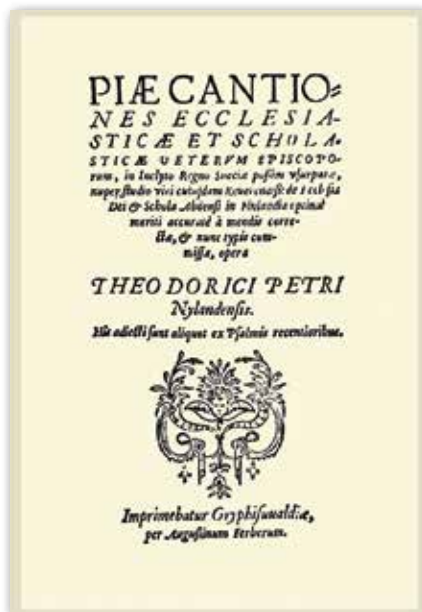
Jane Alanen

SONGS AND HYMNS OF ZION (SHZ) contains seven songs from a medieval collection of music called *Piae Cantiones*. One particular song, SHZ 35 – *A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem*, originally had 14 verses, each with a short phrase followed by the refrain "Hallelujah." In *Songs and Hymns of Zion* today, the song has seven verses, basically describing the birth of the Messiah, and ending with two verses about His final sacrifice of death on the cross. Every verse ends with "Hallelujah." This song has warmed human hearts with the Christmas message for about seven hundred years.

A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem rings with the attributes common to medieval church music: a pronounced steady beat that congregations could feel and follow, short phrasing, accessible range of notes, simple rhyme, and repetition of key words such as "Hallelujah." It is likely that these characteristics are tied to literacy: few people in medieval Europe could read,

and those people were mainly clergy and nobility. Therefore, congregational songs should be easy to follow, musically appealing and accessible, and simple to memorize. Strong beats, such as the half notes and quarter notes alternating, create emphasis that keeps congregations together, even without accompaniment. However, *A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem* may have been accompanied by lute and perhaps timbrel, a delightful combination to teach and lead singers without any written words or notes.

Many of the melodies in *Piae Cantiones* derive from Central Europe but some have been composed in Nordic countries. Music was an important part of education in Scandinavia, as well as elsewhere on the Continent. Students were required to practice daily, and often participated in religious services at their schools. *Piae Cantiones* would be one source for the songs that the students would employ in these studies and practices.



This familiar song of Zion first appeared in the collection *Piae Cantiones* in 1582. The image on the left shows how choral parts for this song were notated in that collection, the cover of which is shown above (center). In later centuries, the hymn has appeared in various hymnals (right), including our own *Songs and Hymns of Zion* (far right).

The historical background to *A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem* highlights the work of scholars of the Middle Ages. Jacobus Petri Finno, Principal of the Turku Cathedral School, also known as Jaakko Pietarinoika Suomalainen (ca. 1540–88) compiled the Latin song collection *Piae Cantiones*. The collection consists of 74 songs, all in Latin. Finno was a contemporary to Mikael Agricola who composed early Finnish texts and a translation of the Bible.

A Finnish translation from Latin of *Piae Cantiones* (1616) was done by Hemminki of Masku, who in 1605 had published a remarkable Finnish hymnal. Many of Hemming’s translations are present (with some modernization) in the official book of anthems of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. In 1616, translation work would have been a value of the Reformation; Martin Luther encouraged bringing information to people in their own language. A translation into Finnish in 1616 also implies that the Finnish people were increasingly able and desiring to read, especially religious texts.

There are six other songs from *Piae Cantiones* in the *Songs and Hymns of Zion*: 13, 36, 64, 109, 310 and 329. They all share the same origins as *Puer Natus: A Babe Is born in Bethlehem*. As we sing and contemplate Christmas and the miracle of the Savior’s birth, we can also feel a musical connection to medieval Sweden and Finland, to the time before Luther and the Reformation. ♦



ARTWORK: BRADLEY GRANGROTH



ARTWORK: WIKIMEDIA

1. A BABE IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM,
Bethlehem;
rejoice, rejoice Jerusalem.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
2. Within a manger He doth lie,
He doth lie,
whose throne is set above the sky.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
3. The wise men came, led by the star,
by the star,
gold, myrrh, and incense brought from far.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
4. His mother is the virgin mild,
virgin mild,
and He the Father’s only Child.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
5. The serpent’s wound He beareth not,
beareth not,
yet takes our form and shares our lot.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
6. He bowed himself and shed His blood,
shed His blood,
that He might lift us up to God.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
7. All this He did to make us free,
make us free.
All glory be, O God, to Thee.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

W: Latin ‘Puer natus’ 1300s

E: Composite

Celebrating Christmas in Life's Many Seasons

Brittany Laulainen

- ◆ *Christmas comes, with its blessings, warmth and many emotions, to people everywhere. In Alaska's LLC congregation, teens, single adults, married couples and children of all ages experience Christmas in different yet meaningful ways. Here, contributors share their experiences with the blessings and occasional challenges of Christmas, finding that the meaning of the season is most important.*

Happiness and Love All Around

Leah Maki, Tiel Maki

CHRISTMAS IS A FUN TIME of year. We usually get together with family and friends – there's happiness and love all around. Favorite traditions are singing Christmas songs, exchanging gifts, playing games and eating good food. We have also learned to bake Christmas goodies.

We like to put up a real tree that we cut down from our woods. A new tradition is that the kids put the ornaments and lights on the tree while Mom and Dad go Christmas shopping. It's exciting to get ready for Christmas.

The true meaning of Christmas is not about the gifts we receive – it's about the greatest gift, our Lord Jesus. We go to church and listen to sermons about Jesus' birth. Our congregation also has a Sunday school program. It's comforting and makes us feel joyful to be around other believers at this special time. ♦



PHOTOS: RIITA MAKI

Leah and Tiel (on the left) with their siblings.



Tiel, in the driver's seat with sister Leah behind her, with friends at a Christmas party.

May the True Meaning of Christmas Always Be in My Heart

Ramona Laulainen

ADVENT IS A TIME OF REFLECTION and togetherness. Despite how busy life can be with work and spending time with family, living as a believer and maintaining a healthy lifestyle while preparing for the holiday is important to me. I create and send cards to those who have been with me along my life's journey, showing gratitude for the special place they hold in my heart.

Although Christmas is not just about gifting, it's naturally a part of giving for family and godchildren. As I've gotten older, I think less about gift-giving and try to think of other ways to give special memories to my family and godchildren.

Throughout the season I work to maintain a balance between work, church and home life. As part of that balance, I like to decorate my home for Christmas and stay active, both indoors and outdoors. Relaxing my mind while being active or while listening to services brings true perspective and the meaning of Christmas to the fore, reminding me to thank the Heavenly Father for His greatest gift to us all.

Since I live by myself, most of my time in the Advent season is spent alone. I spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with my family, singing songs of Zion and reading the Christmas gospel and articles from the *Christmas in Zion*. We play games and Santa comes to visit. On Christmas Day we take the day to reflect and relax, enjoying one another's company. These activities and moments bind us together in love and thankfulness.

I pray that the true meaning of Christmas will always be in my heart and that I will remain a believer with meekness and gratitude. ♦



PHOTOS: RAMONA LAULAINEN

Being outdoors in nature is important to Ramona Laulainen, also at Christmastime. This is the view from Lazy Mountain.



Goddaughter Evelynn adds a special touch to Ramona's Christmas season.

The Most Important

Brittany Laulainen

SINCE GETTING MARRIED, my home is in Alaska with my spouse Russell. *Remembering this allows me to open my heart to celebrate Jesus' birth with my Laulainen family.*

Jesus is the perfect gift that keeps on giving, given to us from God. *Remembering this removes gift-giving pressure I put on myself.*

It's special to make our home festive with a mix of the decorations we each had as singles. *Remembering this encourages to ask my dear spouse if he would like to decorate with me. I'm happy when Russell surprises me with a real tree!*

Sometimes I shed tears over not being able to spend time with our godchildren, nieces and nephews, family and friends across the globe. *Allowing tears gives pause to send a prayer to the Heavenly Father, that loved ones know how much my heart aches to be with them.*

Traditions, such as gingerbread house decorating, can happen with others too. *Inviting others to join in these traditions begins a bond that strengthens with time.*

The Christmas gospel from Luke 2 and songs of Zion are special no matter the gathering. *Dear Heavenly Father, You thaw the frost of my cold and empty heart. Through Your Word and the gift of beautiful songs of Zion, You tell of Jesus' birth and the forgiveness of sins. May I always be reminded of the most important matter in life, to keep faith and a clean conscience. Amen. ♦*



PHOTO: LACEY BYKKONEN

Brittany Laulainen and her husband Russell, in Montana with niece and nephew Skylar and Clayton.



PHOTO: ANALISE RAISANEN

Brittany and Russell take part in an early Christmas gathering at Tenelle and Jeremy Honga's home in Corcoran, Minn.



PHOTO: CHARLENE PARKS

Jay and Joann Laulainen and family

A Blend of Traditions

Joann Laulainen

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME of special family traditions and memories. Now that I am married and have children, it can be a balancing act to try to merge all family traditions with the needs of my own family. When I was single, I spent all the holidays with my family, and now I always feel a little lonesome at holiday-time. My husband Jay was used to being with his family and doing special traditions, such as singing at his grandpa's grave.

Over time, it has been fun to develop our own blend of traditions and focus on spending time with dear ones, enjoying each other's company and celebrating Jesus' birth. It doesn't matter what food is made or whether stockings are filled Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Everyone can enjoy these holidays and each other just the same.

It can be easy to grumble about all the decorating and baking that the kids want to do at Christmas time. The traditions that surround Christmas take effort, but they make the season special and memorable to children. We want them to grow up and remember Christmas and that we celebrate it because Jesus was born for us! If we treat it like just another day, will they grow up thinking Christmas is important? ♦



PHOTO: JOANN LAULAINEN

Gingerbread house decorating is a favorite!
Arianna, Dane and Jake

Christmas with Loved Ones Near and Far

Dave and Karen Raisanen

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON brings joy to our family. We have blended our family traditions together to create our own. Now that our children have all left home things have changed, as we have children in Alaska and Colorado.

The season begins with our Raisanen and Johnson family Christmas gatherings. On Christmas Eve we go to afternoon church services and then home for the evening to celebrate with kids and grandchildren. We sing Christmas songs and read the Christmas gospel; it always refreshes to hear year after year of our Lord Jesus' birth.

Santa shows up with a surprise visit and gifts for the children. They look on in awe – some get scared and cry. But Santa is welcome with his merry *Ho-Ho-Ho!*

Christmas supper is enjoyed with all the special dishes that everyone shares. Opening gifts, singing, eating, visiting, assembling toys and playing games fill our evening.

Phone calls and video calls with our Alaska and Colorado families connect us with them and their Christmas. Seeing their tree and decorations is special! We have even had Christmas in the summer when we've been in Alaska. In 2019, we had a second Christmas gathering a few days later in Colorado with our families there.

On Christmas Day we prepare a traditional ham dinner and celebrate with family who can come. We end the day with evening Christmas church services, reflecting on the many blessings we've received. ♦

Dave and Karen live in Dassel, Minnesota, and spend time each summer in Alaska.



Santa came to visit the Raisanen's Minnesota grandchildren.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAREN RAISANEN

Dave and Karen Raisanen with all their Alaskan grandchildren.

Walerius Kero: He Spoke of Living Water

Paul Waaraniemi



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTER ÖBERG

Walerius and Emilia (Hakala) Kero on their wedding day October 28, 1916.

JOHAN WALLERIUS KERO'S life began in Ohtanjärvi, Korbilombolo, in the cradle of the Laestadian awakening in Pajala Parish, Sweden. This is where Lars Levi Laestadius spread the gospel in his latter years and where he died some 34 years before Kero's birth.

As a nineteen-year-old, Kero sailed to America and settled in Hancock in Michigan's Copper Country, a center of North American Laestadianism. In immigration, his first name was recorded as John and his middle name, by which he was called, lost an l.

Kero's cousin Walter had already settled in Hancock and the newcomer lodged with him at first and began to work in the Keweenaw Peninsula's copper mines, as did many other Finnish-speaking immigrant men. Although Kero was from Sweden, Kero's home area was largely Finnish-speaking. In 1916, Walerius Kero married Emilia Hakala, an immigrant from Vaasa, Finland. The young couple purchased a farm three years later in rural Alston, Michigan, about ten miles southwest of Pelkie. There they raised a family of four sons and eleven daughters.

While the exact year is not clear, by the early 1950s Kero was called as a preacher in the Pelkie congregation. He was one of fourteen speakers serving in North American Zion when the 1973 schism occurred. He was the only local Pelkie speaker when the congregation hosted the 1973 Summer Services in the Pelkie school, where the Association of American Laestadian Congregations (AALC, later called LLC) was formed. Kero was a member of the new organization's interim board when its constitution and bylaws were drafted.

Kero's sermons were preached in the Finnish language, as his English was heavily accented, and he may have been more comfortable preaching in Finnish. Local believers likely all spoke or understood Finnish when Kero began serving. Donald Lahti, who grew up in Pelkie, recalls that Kero was his Sunday school teacher in 1945 and kept lessons in Finnish.

In a recorded, translated sermon that Kero preached in Detroit one Pentecost Sunday, Kero spoke from Ezekiel 47. He likened the water described as flowing from the temple into the desert to the living waters of the gospel of Christ. He spoke of the first Pentecost from the New



PHOTO: LLC ARCHIVES

Testament and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when the listeners were all able to hear the preached Word of God in their own language. When those awakened listeners asked what they must do, Peter instructed them to repent and believe the gospel.

Both Kero's way of preaching and the message in the accompanying note he sent to his granddaughter Jean Koistinen of Phoenix, Arizona, evoke the fervent and picturesque speech of decades past. Kero's language carries the influence of his youth in Swedish Lapland and years lived in the Copper Country - years when Finnish was the language of believers' services. Clearly, Kero's sermon also mirrors the devotional writings and letters in old issues of the *Greetings of Peace/Rauhan Tervehdys* and *Siionin Lähetyslehti* papers.

Kero served for some years after the 1973 schism. He mostly preached locally in Michigan, but some people recall him serving in Minneapolis and Detroit congregations.

Kero's first wife Emilia died in 1952. Kero married a second time to Phoebe Miettunen, who had worked as a cook for wealthy McCormick family members in Illinois. Phoebe Miettunen Kero died in 1969. Wallerius Kero continued living in Alston, Michigan, and did his own logging for firewood. Jim Frantti recalls that Kero, already past 80, was felling and cutting up a tree when his chainsaw kicked back and struck him in the face. "Alone and relying on sisu, he grabbed a rag and applied pressure to the wound. He drove his pickup some twenty miles to the hospital in L'Anse, where they patched him up," says Frantti.

Walerius Kero passed away at the age of 85 in 1980. He left the testimony of a child of God. ♦



PHOTO: LLC ARCHIVES

Walerius Kero gathered with other ministers at an AALC organizational meeting in Minneapolis church on October 27, 1973. From left, Ruben Alajoki, Elmer Alajoki, Peter Nevala, Lauri Hakso, Melvin Pirness, Walerius Kero, Arthur Forstie, Nathan Ruonavaara, Albert Aho, Peter Nordstrom, John Waaraniemi.



In 1974, Walerius Kero sent this letter, translated below, to his granddaughter Jean Koistinen in Arizona.

31-1-1974 Pelkie, Mich.

Dear brother and sister in the Lord,
God's peace!

It was so nice to get a letter in which I saw that you dear children are remembering me, an old one. I am doing well, and I have endeavored to preserve faith in my heart so that I would be ready and watching when God wishes to call me away from here. Nevertheless, my own sinfulness always wearies me and weighs me down, and for that reason I fall into temptation and doubt wondering if I will be saved. But for that very reason Jesus suffered and died so that we great sinners can in His blood believe all sins forgiven. And we can be happy that we have that kind of bloody Bridegroom who is able to carry us weak ones and forgive us. So let us be secure and blessed – the Father will take us home for the glory of His name.

Remain in God's peace, Walerius Kero

Margin notes, page 1: Greetings to all brothers and sisters in the Lord. God bless you.

Margin notes, page 2: I haven't known that you know how to read Finnish, so I await an answer.

Note from the editors: This article shares what is known about Walerius Kero's life as a servant of the Word. He was an immigrant, a family man, a worker in the forest and in the kingdom of God. If anyone has information about this interesting man, please contact the editors at fromthereader@llchurch.org

When in the Moon of Wintertide

Aaron Wuollet

When in the moon of wintertide,
when cold and dark and death allied,
when laid in hay, of mortal clay
the age-old Promise vivified.

Where did the Christ-child make His bed?
Where lately sheep and oxen fed,
where in my breast I bid He rest
to salve and save as was foresaid.

Why does He stoop, me to release,
why leave His heav'n, my woe to cease?
Why me, as I His cause belie?
In love He bends to buy my peace.

How dare I mouth this mystery?
How dare I sip His sanctity?
How, as His child by sin beguiled,
dare I mistrust His mercy free?

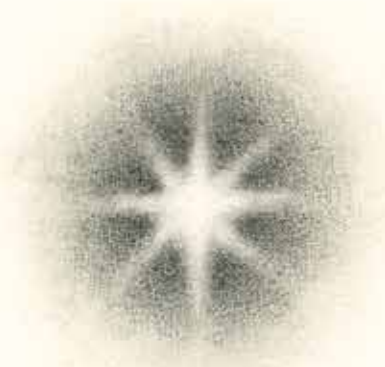
What sweeter message can we say?
What finer grace mere words convey?
What greater joy than this fair boy
whose birth we hail on Christmas Day?

Who hear His gospel and believe,
who meekly trust and Him receive,
who seek to walk amid His flock
find help and hope, and gain reprieve.



*Scan this code or go to
<https://bit.ly/32Zs9yA>
to watch a video that
features this song.*

ARTWORK: JANE WITTENBERG



When in the moon of win - ter - tide, when cold and

dark and death al - lied, when laid in hay, of mor - tal

clay the age - old Pro - mise viv - i - fied.

Aaron Wuollet 2020
arr. Liisa Keranen

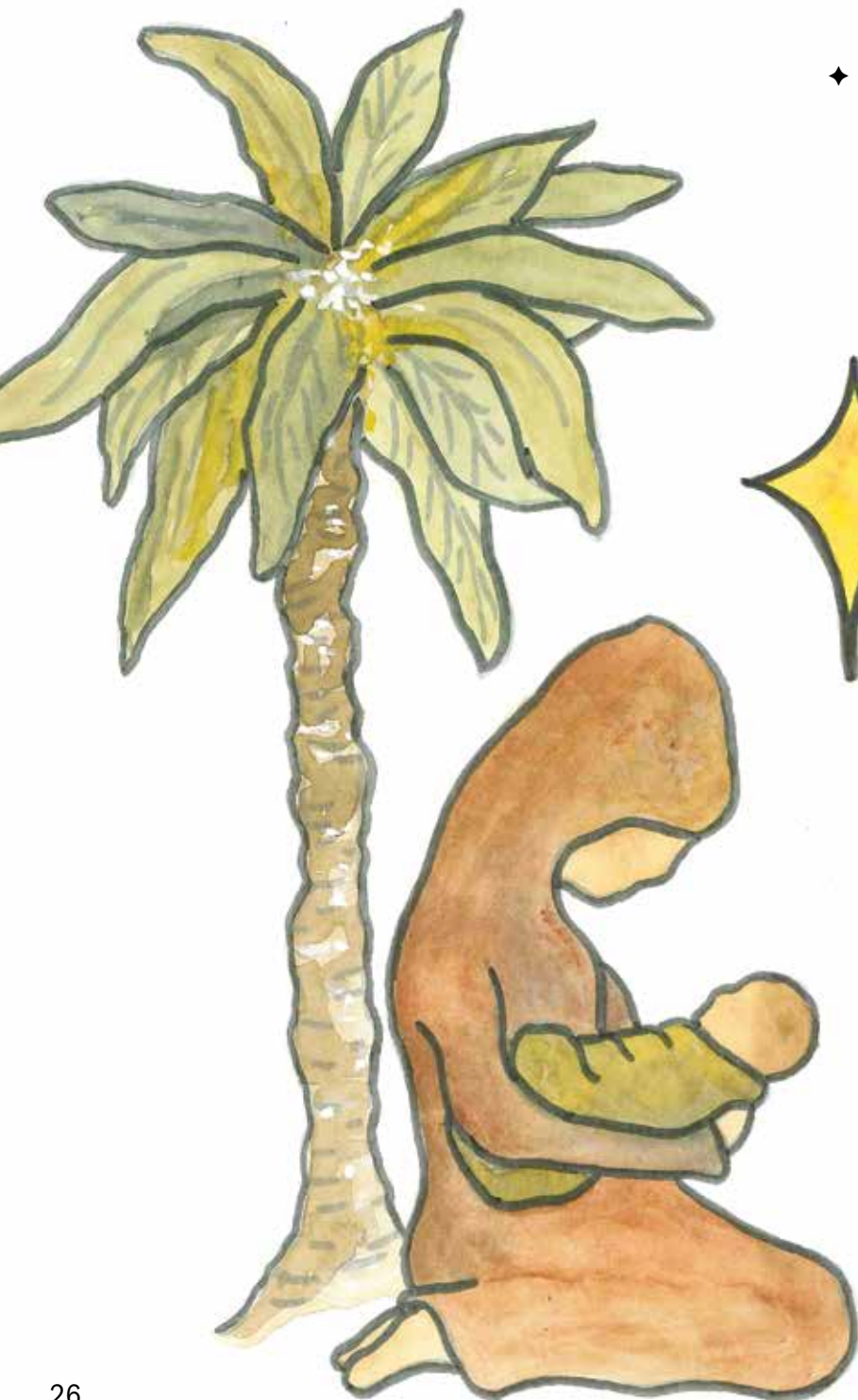


The Birth of the Lord Is Nigh

Jeremy Honga

- ◆ *I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

Psalm 130:5-8



CHRISTMAS IS A SPECIAL SEASON during which we remember the lowly birth of baby Jesus. We also think of His glorious second coming. The Advent weeks which precede Christmas Day teach us that His coming is near and remind us to be prepared for it. The words of Jesus say, “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (Rev. 16:15). Thus, in soberness of faith we watch and wait, having the hope of heaven in our hearts.

There Is Forgiveness with Thee

Just prior to our text, the psalmist asks and then answers a certain question: “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord,

ARTWORK: SOILI HUHTA

who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Ps. 130:3,4).

Recall the happenings in the Garden of Eden, after God created the heavens and earth by His Word. God created man in His own image. Initially Adam and Eve experienced perfect peace and protection. They were without want or need. There was no sin. All of this was from God. God also gave loving and safe instruction: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16,17).

However, the temptation of Satan was both subtle and great. He said, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4,5). Falling prey to the tempter, Adam and Eve were disobedient to God and ate of the forbidden tree. This original sin was inherited by all of us and validates the truth of the psalmist’s aforementioned question. Paul’s writing to the Romans also attests, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

God Promised a Savior

With His Word, God promised forgiveness through a Savior, when He said to Satan, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This promise was not only for Adam and Eve, but for all people. God’s love toward sin-fallen humankind is such that “He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Acknowledging wretchedness, this psalmist seeks mercy and forgiveness and looks forward with a prayerful and hopeful heart of faith, waiting for the Lord. We can see how believers throughout all time have known and experienced burdens of sin, prayed for help, sought forgiveness and have continued by faith with peace and hope through the promised Savior. The message of the Old Testament prophets as revealed throughout Scriptures, proclaimed this theme which we ponder now, “The Birth of the Lord is Nigh.”

In Isaiah it is written, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). This message was the same promising

message of God, and given by Him, delivered through man by way of the Holy Spirit. It is evident the writer of Psalm 130 comprehended and cherished the gift in the promised Lord Jesus Christ. There are many gifts which we receive in this life, but the forgiveness and salvation a sinner receives through the Christ child is above all others.

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

Nonetheless, gifts other than the Christ child can and often do come close. I think of the abundance of material treasures and wealth of this life and also the gifts of knowledge, wisdom and reason. Too often it seems that we easily take credit for God’s goodness ourselves. Bit by bit, we take the glory due to God. Selfishness and pride are part of human nature and evident in the world today. All of these can come close to a child of God, dimming the way of faith. This is why Jesus taught to “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19-21). Jesus wishes to be the treasure of our heart.

Jesus also speaks of His kingdom as being a treasure. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field” (Matt. 13:44). God has given His own a safe place to dwell, led by His living Spirit. The psalmist writes of the kingdom, Israel, as a place of hope where there is “plenteous redemption.” The Good Shepherd is there, teaching, helping and forgiving, thus it truly is a great treasure here on earth.

Wait with Hope

Being able to wait with hope and peace is a special gift from God. It comes with a heart of faith. We should cherish this gift and pray that God would always grant it on our journey. When we are able to journey as God’s children do, caring for sin with the gospel as it burdens and besets, we will find that this hope and peace remains sure.

This Christmas season and always, remember that our Lord’s coming is nigh. Remain watchful in faith and securely believe sins forgiven in His name and blood. With joy we can look toward our heavenly home. ♦

The Promises Are Fulfilled

Ray Waaraniemi

- ◆ *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness.*

Jeremiah 23:5,6

JEREMIAH PROPHESED about the coming of Christ during the reign of the last five kings of Judah. Josiah was king when Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. Four of Josiah's sons reigned after him in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Josiah was a godly king; He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left (2 Kings 22:2).



ARTWORK: KATHI AHO

Josiah became king at the age of eight. At the age of sixteen, he began to seek after God whom his father, King David, worshiped. When he was twenty years old, he ordered the purge of false gods from Judah and Jerusalem. After this purge, he set out to repair and restore the temple. During the repair a book of the law of the Lord, given by Moses, was found. When this book was read to Josiah, he rent his clothes and made a covenant to walk after the Lord and to keep His covenants (2 Chron. 34, 2 Kings 22-23). Because of Josiah's obedience, God preserved Judah during his reign of thirty-one years. Unfortunately, Josiah's sons were ungodly kings and returned to the wicked ways that prevailed before Josiah's reign. They persecuted Jeremiah and the believers.

A Message of Warning, A Message of Hope

Through Jeremiah, God wielded the two-edged sword of his Word – the law and the gospel. God's Word is a sword metaphorically in both of the following passages: "He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword" (Isa. 49:2), "and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. 1:16). Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God's Word in the face of severe opposition. He made known God's displeasure with the false prophets who scattered and destroyed the sheep. He also warned of Judah's imminent fall and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Despite the message of the law that Jeremiah had to deliver, he also spoke with the gospel edge of the sword. This was a message of hope, the same good news and glad tidings of salvation which God promised to the first human pair after the fall into sin, and the same promise that God made to the patriarchs and that other prophets also proclaimed. His message to the people was that even though Judah, their temporal kingdom, would be overthrown by a foreign power and that they would be taken captive to dwell in a foreign land, a time would come, when from the tribe of David, a king would be born (Matt. 1:6-17).

A King Will Be Born

This Savior would be a "righteous branch, a just king, whose judgment would be blameless." He would "save Judah and Israel," thus bringing salvation for

all who would believe upon Him (John 3:16). We also heard the angel Gabriel describe this king to Mary: "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

The people of Jeremiah's time probably had difficulty understanding what kind of king was in question. Perhaps they, as some of the people who followed Jesus, hoped for a king who would deliver them from the oppression of foreign powers and provide temporal security. Jesus was not an earthly king, and when Pilate asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews He answered: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36).

Faith in the Promise Brings Salvation

When the people of the Old Testament believed that the promised righteous branch was their Lord and righteousness, it was saving faith for them. The writer to the Hebrews confirms: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

We, the people of the New Testament, believe upon the fulfillment of the promise. The core message of the promise is that we can believe our sins forgiven in His name and blood. Paul writes to the Galatians: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4,5). Our faith rests in the same Redeemer in whom the old covenant believers also trusted.

As it is written, Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (Rom. 4:3). We too can rest our hope on God's promises. Let us remain yet this Christmas Eve believing upon the Lord our Righteousness until faith changes to seeing. ♦

The Christmas Gospel

LUKE 2:1-20



ARTWORK: BRADLEY GRANGROTH

AND IT CAME TO PASS in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

So it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall

be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

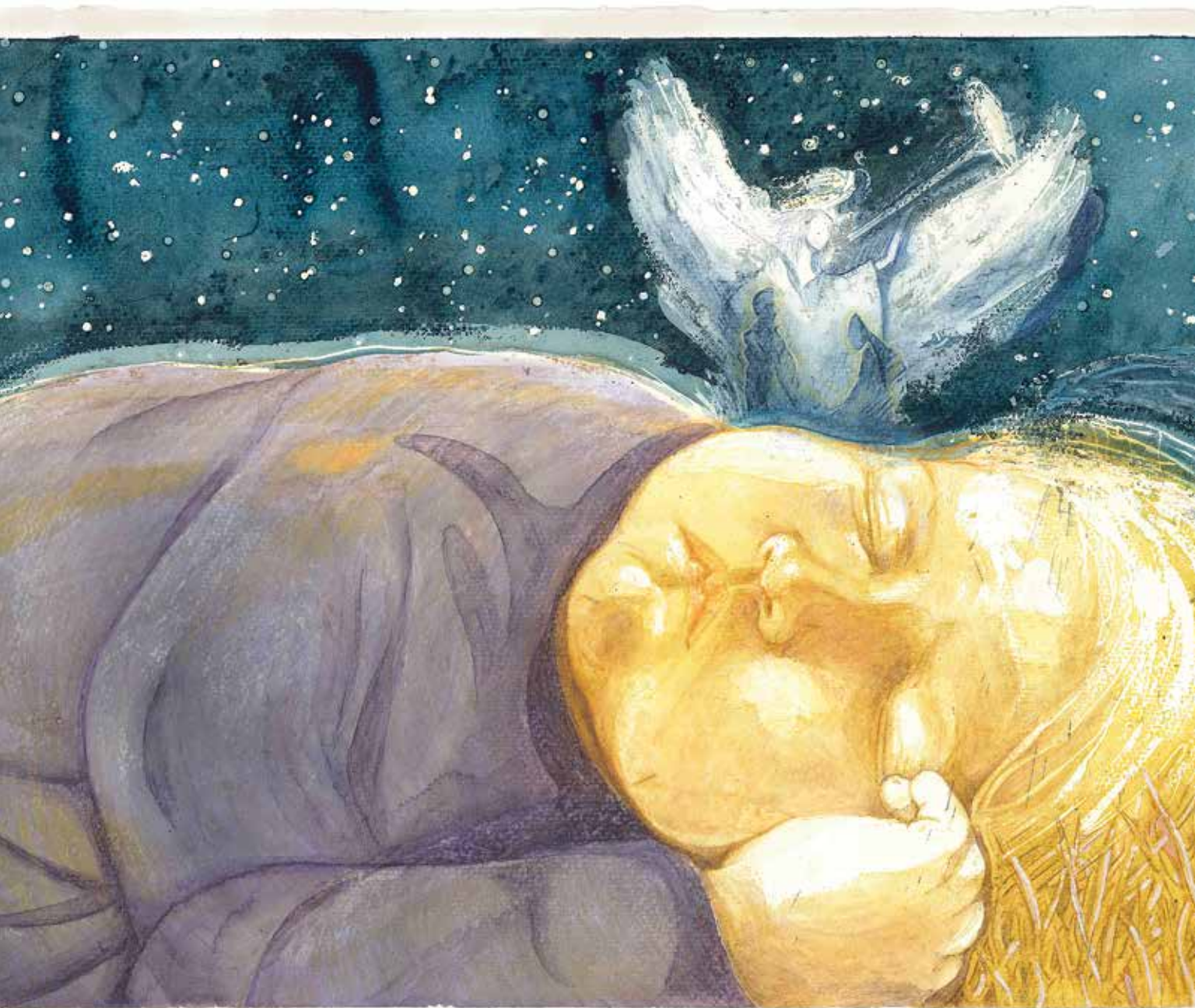
Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. ◆

Let Us Go unto Bethlehem

Mel Kallio



ARTWORK: KATHI AHO

- ◆ *This devotional writing is based on the Christmas gospel text, Luke 2:1-20. You can read this text on the previous pages, 30-31.*

SO, SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS in our land in 2020? an acquaintance asked. *The times have changed and are so different. Maybe it would be more meaningful if we were in Bethlehem*, someone else said. Wouldn't it be nice if we could say, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass" as the shepherds did, I pondered. Who else went there, we can ask, and why?

In the Manger of Our Hearts

Mary and Joseph went there to be part of the census, but God saw a greater purpose for their journey. It was the fulfillment of Scripture concerning Bethlehem Ephratah (Mic. 5:2) and the lineage of David (Jer. 23:5,6) foretold in Old Testament Scripture. Well then, "Let us go even unto Bethlehem."

Bethlehem in the Hebrew language means "house of bread." Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," and we are abundantly fed with this living bread that came down from heaven, in God's kingdom. As you read or listen to this Scripture portion, often called the Christmas gospel, you can picture Bethlehem and the things that took place. This scene is also an image of God's kingdom, which beckons us toward the true peace and joy of Christmas.

By faith, my dear friends, we can go to Bethlehem wherever we live. We can open a manger in our hearts to make room for the Lord Jesus to come in and dwell there. He will show us that place where He was born, God's house.

All Are Welcome

Perhaps you were able to see a Christmas pageant or program, which enacts the things that took place in Bethlehem. The lowly shepherds watching over their sheep were invited to come see Jesus in a lowly manger in a stable. Even so, God's house of

bread is still a lowly place where all are welcome to open their hearts unto Jesus the promised Messiah (Savior) and receive the greatest gift of living faith through the forgiveness of all their sins.

As the shepherds returned to their place of watching they glorified and praised God for all they had seen and heard. Have we not also felt like that at the end of special service moments, as we have left for our place of watching?

Joseph and Mary, the father and mother, cared for this child with the help of God because they were obedient to the message of angels. They didn't understand all that was going to take place, yet they trusted in God. Our Heavenly Father and our congregation Mother care for us also. The messengers of God's Word encourage us to trust and believe, and God will help us and provide a way.

We Can Find Peace

Jesus is the light of this world that guides those who seek to God's kingdom where they find new life and receive willing hearts to journey a new way, avoiding the call and temptations of the world.

Those who seek peace may also be represented by the wisemen who later followed the star to find Jesus. They had much worldly wisdom, but now they found the source of wisdom, peace and joy in living faith and – receiving it – they avoided the ways of Herod and chose a new way to journey.

This is why we can celebrate and find peace and joy in this year of grace. We have found the Christ child in Bethlehem right where we live and hear God's Word. The Scriptures are being fulfilled, as God's Word continues to find seeking hearts. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad. We can still go to Bethlehem and behold the wonders of faith that we, as David said, "may dwell in the house of the Lord" (Ps. 23:6). ◆

God's Perfect Love

Olli Vanska

◆ *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

1 John 4:9-16

ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT a sudden heavenly brightness shone over the calm fields. The shepherds who were watching their sheep in the darkness were frightened and did not understand what was happening. The calming message of the angels soothed them: Fear not, for a Savior is born! They wondered what this heavenly proclamation meant, but having been encouraged by the angels, they went to meet their promised Savior. A divine miracle had occurred: the Son of God, a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ had been born to the virgin Mary. The Word, which was since the beginning, had become flesh, a manifestation of God's love.

God Sent His Son

In His love for us, God sent His Son according to His promise to redeem the fallen from their sins with Jesus' pure and blameless atonement blood. God did not reject the sin-fallen, but through His love sacrificed His own Son. You, dear child of God, have been called to be a partaker of this love. John has written: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (v. 10).

This love that we have experienced through our heavenly Father also knits the hearts and souls of believers together: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (v. 11).



Jesus reminded His own how they are known to be His disciples in that they have love for one another.

Apostle John had a special gift to speak about love. Through faith he understood how important love is. The first love is that God loved us first, as John writes. We have not deserved His love, but in the same way that God loved the first human pair in Paradise when they had fallen into sin, He also loves us today.

Love Has a Special Meaning Among Believers

Paul writes: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). The love between believers is something that we cannot fully comprehend. The Spirit of God binds us together. John has written: "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (v. 13).

The Spirit of God ignites in us the desire to be with other believers, to hear God's living Word and to preach the gospel of forgiveness of sins to one another. The greatest love is when we love each other's undying soul. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.

The shepherds marveled at the heavenly light on the first Christmas night and were among the first to testify of Christ's birth. That same glorious, heavenly light still shines in God's kingdom today. Humankind had to be redeemed through God becoming flesh. God sacrificed His only Son to free those who believe upon Him from death, through His redemption work and victorious resurrection. Whoever wishes to receive this holy and heavenly message is taken into the kingdom of God, to be God's own child. God sheds His Holy Spirit as a teacher into the hearts of all who believe.

The light of the Holy Spirit has always led the people of God. In the Old Testament our sisters

and brothers in faith beheld the pillar of fire in the darkness of the night and a pillar of cloud in the daytime. God's spirit has never disappeared, nor will it ever disappear from the living congregation of God. Paul and Peter remind us in their letters how the essence of the gospel is to remain unchanging. The Holy Spirit of God led the apostles to know the entire truth of Christ, not only a part of it (John 16:12-16). Due to our corrupted nature, we will never become unerring. Led by His Spirit, we are comforted and guided on this journey.

The Word Was Made Flesh

God's love was also revealed to Simeon. Old Simeon was led to the temple by the Holy Spirit. When Simeon saw his Savior, it was revealed to him through the Holy Spirit that he held in his arms his Savior, the Savior of the entire world. Simeon's heart rang out in praise to God. Obedience of faith to the guidance of the Holy Spirit filled his heart with joy, the peace of God and thankfulness to the Heavenly Father for fulfilling His promise. Simeon was ready to leave this world, for he knew that his Savior had become flesh and would carry his sin burden. John writes, "The Word was made 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).

For a child of God, the loving miracle of Christmas night is evident daily and momentarily. May the heavenly message of the kingdom of God be the most precious gift even this Christmas, one that we can swaddle and keep in our hearts as the Christmas child, as our Lord and our Savior. May we too hasten to the manger to behold that a Savior has been born for us, for God is love. ♦





PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARK AND BECKY YOUNG

Finding Grace in the Kingdom

Mark and Becky Young

◆ *“Let us endeavor on the way to that eternal wedding day” – SHZ 142:1*

WITH THANKFUL HEARTS we are living in the autumn of our lives. There is so much to look back upon, and the moments and events that have been pivotal to our life of faith seem most significant to us now. God in His love and mercy has kept us as His children, even through the days of heresy in the 1970s. For this we give thanks to Him alone. With His care we have been preserved in this most precious faith and were granted the grace to endure life’s difficulties within the care of His kingdom.

Mark and I met in Cokato at the ice-skating rink. Mark was from south of town and as a youth attended the Stockholm Lutheran Church next to the church which the believers purchased after the heresy. I was from north of town by Temperance Corner and lived in the parsonage. Church services were in the old brick church near the current LLC church in Cokato.

Precious Instruction

During our high school years some of our unbelieving school friends came to our gatherings with the believers and Mark was one of them. There were many discussions of faith. We discussed that there is only one living congregation of believers, and the only way to enter God’s kingdom is through repentance and hearing and believing the gospel message: thy sins are forgiven and washed away in the blood of the Lamb.

One evening service, God’s Word focused on “what fellowship hath the light with darkness?” I felt the sermon was directly spoken to me, and I thought that Mark surely would never return to services. Yet it happened that God had other plans. God’s Word revealed to Mark that he was on the outside of God’s kingdom and was in darkness. He was given the grace of repentance that night.

We were married September 2, 1961, in the Cokato church. We were given precious instructions to use the gospel freely and frequently in our home. It has been this gospel message which has given us strength to continue the journey.

A Heavenly Gift

Our first home was in Minneapolis and we attended services at the Newton Avenue church. Four of our children were born there: Jackie, Kim, John and Tara. We lost our first son John in 1964. It was a sorrowful time but now as I reflect, what a blessing it was – a heavenly gift, an innocent babe taken from us to the glory of heaven. John lived only a few hours, and I was concerned and troubled that he was not baptized. My dad Peter Nordstrom was on his way from Cokato to the hospital when John took his final breath. When dad arrived, he assured me that his living soul was resting in the bosom of Abraham. When the disciples asked, “Who is the greatest in God’s kingdom?” Jesus took a small child and said he is the greatest.

After living in Minneapolis, we moved to Phoenix, Ariz., where Mark attended computer school and another son, Mark, was born. In the fall of 1967, we moved to the Los Angeles area of California where Mark found a job. During this time, our small congregation held Sunday school and services at homes; Rovalas and Sorvalas were our neighbors. When visiting ministers

came, we attended services in a rented church. But lonesome for family, we looked for work in Minnesota and eventually settled in Michigan.

Spiritually Sleepy

We moved to Detroit and lived there for eleven years. Our sons Peter and David were born there. In the Detroit congregation, we had many cousins, friends and a full schedule of social gatherings. At that time, we attended services and brought our children to Sunday school at the Halstead Road church, the largest congregation of believers in America. Our lives were busy raising our family, working and gathering with our friends. Seldom were matters of faith discussed. We didn’t realize that spiritually we were falling asleep.

After a number of years, we started to hear from our friends and relatives in Minnesota that a wrong spirit was becoming evident. Some of the discussions surrounded the fall of King David and Peter’s denial. Questions arose: “If I died after committing a certain sin, certainly God would save me as He would have saved David and Peter if they had died when they fell.” These hypothetical questions brought confusion and doubts. Another question raised was “Who is the Mother?” Then, some people began to claim that the Mother can err. They lost the Holy Spirit which is God speaking through the congregation Mother here on earth.



Mark and Becky were married in 1961. Attendants were (from left) Helen (Greku) Mytty, Lavona Keskey, Chrystine (Seiter) Nordstrom, Ben Wuollet, Brad Young and Del Young.



The Youngs, shown (on the right) with Chet and Kirsti Lodge, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary at the Pinchot Church in Phoenix.



The Youngs celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in Seattle with their children. Peter (left) and David are in the back. In front (from left) are Jackie, Tara, Kim, Becky and Mark.

In those days, there were many ways in which the leniency was evident, such as attending worldly events, acceptance of birth control, lack of rebuke and instruction, acceptance of other faiths – including those lost in former heresies – and a lack of hunger for the Word of God. There was also a group of those who became weary and dried up fighting the leniency.

We Found Grace Again

Spiritual unrest brought conflict over the use of ministers. Love and unity of God’s spirit were missing. After the formal division came to Minnesota, it was decided by the Mission Board not to use Eino Vaherijoki, who had been called to speak by the Mission Board. In turn, the Halstead Road church also canceled his speaking turn.

At this time, there was a small number of believers who rented a church and hosted his speaking visit. At the outset, we were instructed by our friends not to go there. However, Pearl Greku Johnson and I discussed attending the Vaherijoki service, and we were encouraged by our families in Minnesota to go.

Mark and I went with Peter and Pearl Johnson to the service and there we heard God’s living Word. All four of us were given the grace of repentance, each in his or her own time, as God revealed our condition lost in the darkness of heresy.

After the heresy, believers in Detroit had a small and close congregation with home services and later

a rented church. Every one of us was thankful and rejoiced that He had saved us from the deceitfulness of heresy. Our God is a loving God.

Who Can Understand This?

In 1981, we moved back to Arizona and have lived here since. We have been carried in faith by this living congregation for over 40 years. We have so much to be thankful for – children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, home and country. However, we are thankful first and foremost that God has protected us along this journey through grace and truth by many escorts who have preached that blessed gospel message, “Thy sins are all forgiven.”

Although we do not view our trials and difficulties as blessings, they have reminded us about the most important matter in our lives: living faith, a gift so precious we cannot comprehend it with our carnal mind.

By His grace we hope to receive the reward which Christ has won for us. Our life experiences have shown that His mercies are from everlasting to everlasting. Who can understand this but pardoned sinners? He lifted us up over and over again, teaching us not to despair. Grace has been the best teacher. Along with the Patriarch Jacob we must say that the days and the years of our journey have been few and evil, but thanks be to God who has endured us unto this moment. Unto Him be glory and honor. ♦

Last Christmas in Kuusamo

Sandra Pylvainen

Kuusamo, Grand Duchy of Finland 1888

EARLIER, TUOMAS HAD THOUGHT to keep the children home on Christmas, just to avoid the cold ride to Kuusamo. But despite the very cold temperatures, he determined to go. This Christmas service felt urgent for him. Yes, they would pack the sledge with cow hides on the bottom and the thickest reindeer hides from the house, then Valborg and the little ones would be warm. The Christmas service was not to be missed this year.

On Christmas Eve, after sauna, hair was combed out and dried near the brick oven, and Valborg braided Eriika's and Kaisa's hair into long ropes. Usually, she left the braids to hang free, her fingers gliding over the silk, and plaiting them loosely. Tonight, the braids were tight and wrapped over the tops of their heads, like wreaths.

"Can you get Äiti's hair things from the back room?" she asked. "Isä won't mind if we use them on Christmas." Valborg selected straight hair pins for the little girls' hair. For Anna, she braided and twisted the braids into a coil; then she chose the bronze comb from Äiti's box, just two fingers wide, but with long, pliable tines. Valborg's hands touched Anna's hair and face like a sculptor, checking the symmetry of her art. With confidence, she inserted the comb. The girls gasped, and the boys came from the back room to check on the excitement.

"How is it?" Valborg asked, since she was almost completely blind.

"Anna looks like Äiti now," Eriika said. "So pretty."

Anna smiled, but only thanked Valborg quietly. Eriika's voice was a child's honesty. Anna and Valborg didn't speak so openly about their mother. Instead, their memories were in the hairpin box, the big trunk full of Äiti's clothing – skirts, shawls, a wool coat and even a wolf-fur collar. No one wore any of the clothing, though they might have fit. These were things they could hold and feel, piled heavily on their laps. With her coat and dresses around them, they could smell and feel her warmth. Then, after smelling and feeling and remembering, they would pack the clothing into layers and lower the heavy lid of the wooden trunk, safe.





A T FIVE O'CLOCK on Christmas morning, Anna added more wood to the stove and boiled water for breakfast porridge. Valborg had awakened with her, having listened for Isä's customary morning noises. He opened the heavy iron stove door and tended the fire till it snapped. Then minutes later, the front door opened and closed with an assuring clump, like a howl was slapped away. He had left for the barn.

Anna waited till the oatmeal produced hot bubbles, then called the little ones, Kaisa, Thomas, Juho, Eriika and Herman from the back room, where they slept in a warm pile on the biggest bed. Valborg waited at the long table, ready to fill the bowls with puuro.

"Hurry and eat. We don't want to be late for the service on Christmas," Valborg pushed bowls down the table, in front of each.

"Will there be instruments?" Herman asked at her elbow.

"Hmm. Probably. It is Christmas," Valborg affirmed.

"And will everyone be there? Sami too, with reindeer?"

"Let's hurry and we'll go see who makes it this year," Valborg's voice was pinched with excitement. She,

who had never seen Sami people or reindeer felt just as expectant as the rest. She knew well the sounds of their language, and she ran her fingers through reindeer fur every day. However, she longed to hear the familiar sounds of Christmas, the Sami voices included. The sounds of Christmas were tied to the Christmas service, the gospel preached, singing of hundreds in the domed church, and the Sami language mixing with Finnish in the aisles after the service. These would be the contours of her memories of Kuusamo.

Tuomas' lantern swayed in the darkness as he led the horses, sledge behind, up to door of the farmhouse. "Into the sledge!" he cheered after they had eaten the puuro cooled with milk. Tuomas led them out into the darkness with Herman in his arms. The cold bit at them like an animal when they first stepped out onto the crisp snow. Juho and Thomas each taking a hand, led Valborg to the long wooden sledge, usually used for hauling logs to the mill. Now the load was lighter and livelier, a half circle of laughter, all tucking Valborg and little ones under the thickest reindeer furs. The fierce cold had stepped back.

When the horses began pulling, Tuomas attached the lantern to the pole and took the reins. Into the darkness of Christmas morning, the family hushed as the sledge entered a tunnel of forest. They watched how light from the lantern warmed off the snow-heavy pines, and they listened for wolves. Once a pack of wolves had scared Pappa's horses and the sledge lost the track.

"The horses know the road," Anna affirmed to the children, guessing their thoughts.

"Yes, and so do I," tested Valborg. She was the witty one of the family.

"I don't even!" Herman, at five years old, would not accept Valborg's claim. Laughter froze in the cold air.

Ten minutes later, they broke from the forest into a clearing. The sky brightened then pulsed. Even the lantern was overwhelmed. "Revontulet!" the children's wonder lifted in full-throated whispers. Valborg squinted towards the sky.

"Tell them to me," she implored, "I can only see lights swaying like spirits."

Anna began, "Well, tonight the sky is a living thing and it breathes colors, Valpuri, like when your heart

beats after we carry waterpails to the cattle. The colors are changing now, and they are like happiness, then sadness, then just thinking"

"Ohhhh," Valborg exhaled. "Beautiful on Christmas morning"

Tuomas heard them discuss the colors and the movements. He looked up continually himself, not wanting to miss any fringe of color. He was glad the children could witness such a sight from their fur-lined box - it's too cold to stand outside long. And so many are watching them now on their way to Christmas church. He thought about how far the lights might stretch. To what land? What other nation is looking up?

The sky still waved its colors as they pulled along the colonnade of bare winter birches that led to the Kuusamo Church. Tuomas reined to the right and steered them to an outer lane that skirted the cemetery. They stopped at a crossroads among the tombstones, then Tuomas came back to lift Herman from the sledge, while the others piled out, again guiding Valborg's steps.



“Äiti’s grave is here,” Tuomas told Herman and lowered him to stand beside the stone, now only half exposed above the snow but still almost as tall as Herman. The children circled the grave and Tuomas kneeled down and dug a wide hole in the snow in front of the stone. Eriika read aloud:

Reeta Jaakkola
1838-1888
“Herran Haltuun”

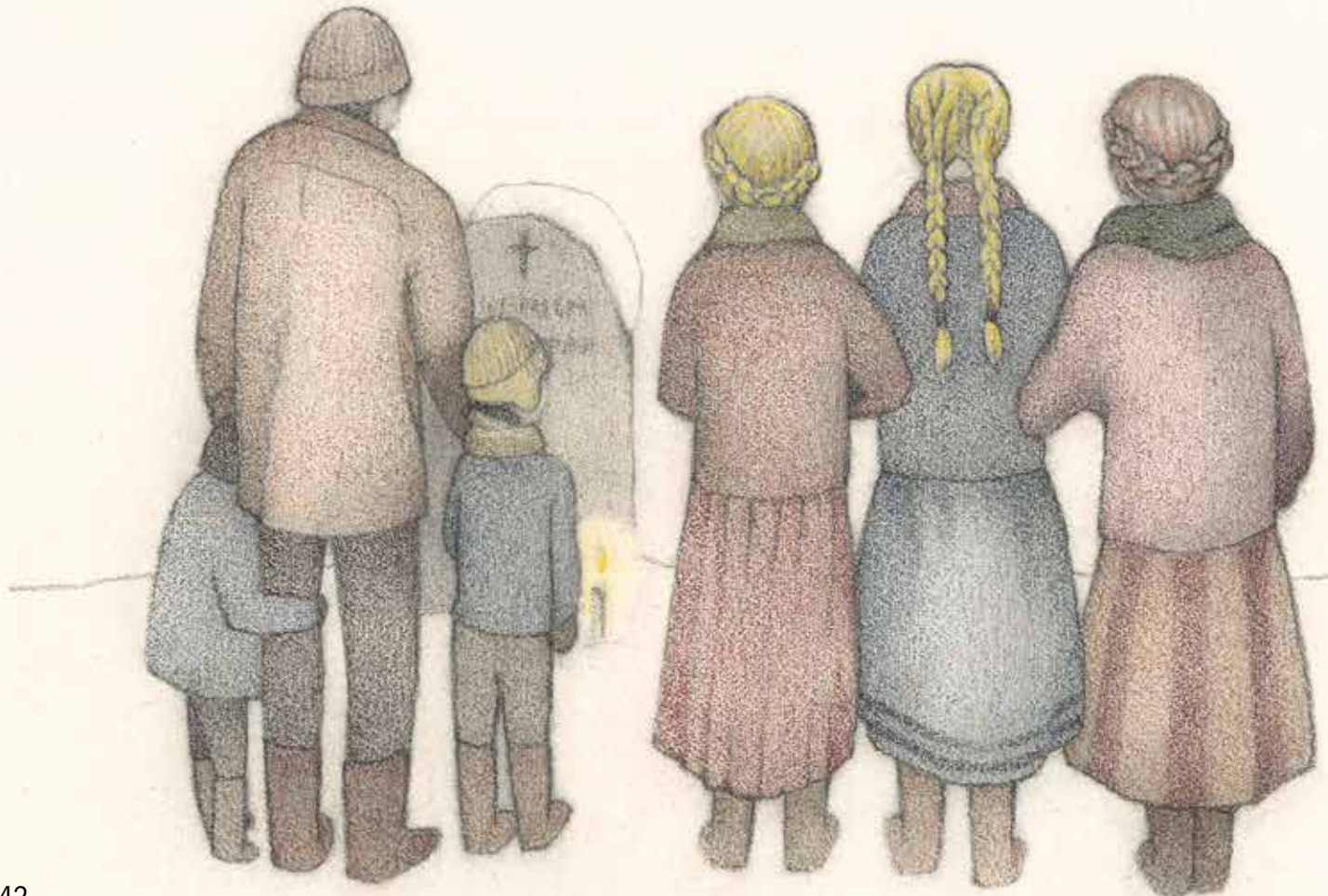
Silence swept through the entire cemetery and the family stood still for a long minute. Then Tuomas took a candle stub from his pocket and walked back to the lantern for a flame. Once lit, he placed the candle in a metal dish at the bottom of the snow bowl where it glowed like an orb.

Tuomas’ lips formed “You are safe, dear Reeta” but no sound came. His thoughts moved to summer, when at Reeta’s bedside, he had kneeled and blessed her. Reeta squeezed his hand and returned the blessing.

“Jeesus,” was all he heard as she moved her lips over the familiar words. She died that night.

Now he wondered what she would think of his latest decision. America was so far – and this land was dear to him. Why leave now when Finland was feeling its wind? Taking little ones on such a journey was unsafe – and risky crossing the Atlantic. Why leave? He had no answer for the question, except that the heavy stone that had pressed his chest since Reeta died, shifted a bit when he thought of America. When his son Matti, fresh back from America, described the logging work and clearing the land for farming, and when both Anna and Valborg vowed to go back to America with Matti, Tuomas nodded assent, almost reflexively. America. A different forest, different fields, same sky. Yet here before Reeta’s grave, Tuomas’ body ached with sorrow and loss. Would leaving bring more loss? Reeta’s snow candle flickered but kept its tiny flame.

“To the service before we freeze!” Tuomas directed. And since the path was cleared to the big church,



Anna led the procession to the front doors, while Tuomas brought the sledge to the horse stable.

In the church, the freezing air was tempered to a mere chill. Candles blinked at every window and in tall candelabra lining the aisles. Like the angels, the organ proclaimed the Savior's birth. Anna led Valborg and the little ones to their familiar pew in the center of the large church. Tuomas joined them as a trumpet played "In Dulci Jubilo," and the congregation stood to sing "Nyt ilovirttä veisaten." Bright, clear notes shattered the chill, and the congregation's response was full and awake at this hour, this holy morning. Then from his raised pulpit lit with candles on either side, the pappi read the words that opened each ear: "Ja niin tapahtui näinä päivinä, että ..." The Christmas gospel filled the air of the church like breath into lungs. Cold receded, the whole room felt warmer. Children near the candlelight tested to see their breath. Not visible any more, only the word of God hung in the air before them. *The cold and the darkness can not keep the powerful message away, Tuomas thought. God is powerful. Surely God will watch over us in America, too.*

The service closed with the pump organ introducing "Tulemme, Jeesus, pienoises," then overtaken by the full thousand voices pouring the sorrows and hopes

into the familiar song. Valborg sang intently, and tears washed her eyes, now for an instant seeing everything. Kaisa reached Valborg's hand and squeezed, while Valborg returned a hug to Kaisa, to Eriika, and she reached farther to touch the little boys, Juho and Thomas. They put their mittened hands on her hand in answer. The song ended and the service was complete, gospel blessing and worship. Sins were forgiven and Jesus was born for this. Families stood to gather themselves for departure into the cold darkness outside.

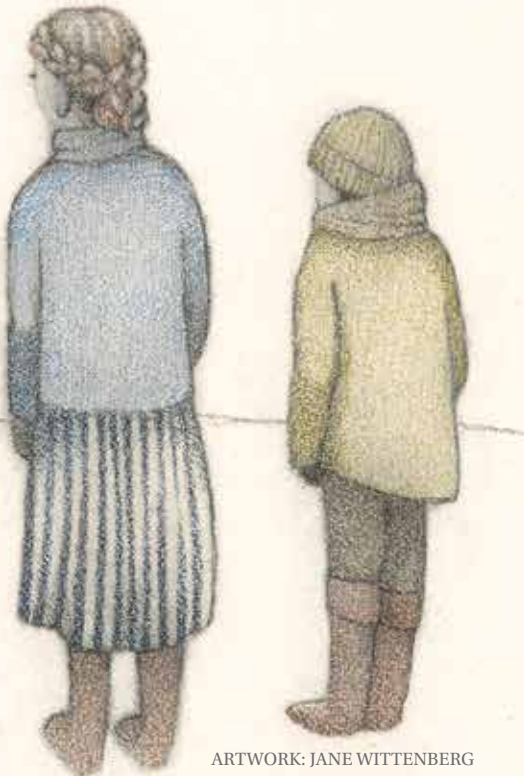
The church aisle was full, movement slow. And as the Jaakkolas reached the lantern-lit front step, they found a lively group gathered around the Sami families, who were wearing their Christmas finery - reindeer fur tied with red belts, felt and fur caps, boots of reindeer skin, furry and pointed. They packed their children into the low sleds that were pulled by a bell-strewn line of reindeer. The children pushed to the front of the crowd to watch each sled sprint into the darkness, while Anna described details into Valborg's ear. As the Sami sleds left, the line of horse-drawn sledges pulled up to the church door, Tuomas' sledge among them.

When the sledges exited the churchyard, the world was darkness still. The revontulet had gone out, and now the morning stars moved into place. The Jaakkola family, arranged once again in the furs of the sledge, with Valborg and Herman in the middle, watched the clearing, then the forest glide past them as they rode through. This would be their last Christmas in Kuusamo. ♦

**Note about the story:*

The Tuomas Jaakkola family immigrated to America in 1889, from Kuusamo, Finland (then the Grand Duchy of Finland, an autonomous part of the Russian Empire) to Liminga, Michigan. In Michigan, they logged and cleared farmland to establish a family farm that operated until the mid 1900s. From this family, Olga Eriika Lampinen was born to daughter Eriika Jaakkola Lampinen, the Eriika in this story. Eriika Lampinen was mother to Olga Eriika (Euphemia)Lampinen, who was mother to Thomas, Nancy, Marlene and Julie Maatta, and from a second marriage, Paul and Martin Pylvainen.

The narrative of this Christmas in Kuusamo is fiction, based on factual framework from family historians and Finnish historical accounts.



ARTWORK: JANE WITTENBERG

Where Is Home?

Emma Byman

IN JULY 2019 my parents, Karla and Jared Juusola, moved from Minnesota to North Carolina, along with the seven youngest in our family. We older ones were left in Minnesota, feeling a bit abandoned. Many questions pressed. How will the kids do at a new school? How long until we can visit? How will we survive without our parents close by? How will our family survive, living so far from the believers? Nonetheless, the move went smoothly, and they quickly settled into their new home.

In Minnesota, the first weeks after my family's move were difficult. Although I was living with wonderful friends, there was a gaping hole left behind, in lieu of my parents and siblings. My sister Kate, another of the "adult kids," was able to visit Mom and Dad in North Carolina shortly after the move. She helped unpack and organize their new home. I couldn't visit until Christmas time, so their new place of watching in Charlotte, North Carolina, was murky in my mind's eye.

It was hard to call any one place home. Mom and Dad's new place was home, but not *home* home. North Carolina was not home; neither Kate nor I had ever lived there. Our Minnesota house was no longer home, though we visited there several times. The house didn't sell right away, so while our brief stops there were comforting, the empty rooms of our childhood home were void of the people and things that made that place home. Where was home?

Luckily, December came quickly. As we prepared for our holiday trip, neither Kate nor I felt that we were going home. In one sense we were, of course, because all of our family would be there. Yet in another sense, our destination was foreign to us both, despite Kate's short visit in the summer. How could you call a place you've never been home? Would we be lonesome, missing the celebrations with our extended family? How would it be, to celebrate Christmas without going to church? Would online services truly be the same?



Markus Juusola (right) enjoyed having his nephew Leo and niece Eloise home for Christmas.



PHOTOS: KATE JUUSOLA

Emma's siblings sing Christmas songs as she accompanies and Tim listens. Emma and Tim were married in July 2020.



PHOTO: ANNETTE JOHNSON



PHOTO: KARLA JUUSOLA

The Juusola family enjoys the warm weather together during the holidays near their home in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Even musings of a warm, green Christmas crossed our minds; would Christmas be the same without snow?

Kate flew south a few days before me, leaving me in anticipation for our coming Christmas celebrations. I had another aspect to ponder, since my boyfriend of just a few months, Tim, was coming as well, excited to finally meet my family. How strange it was to bring him to a place that was home and not home, all in one. His own family's home had quickly become a second home to me, and I hoped he would feel the same there.

Kate had settled in, feeling at home, when I arrived, and warm hugs and delighted smiles surrounded us. How normal it was to be there! How good it felt, to finally be home.

Christmas was a mixture of new and old traditions. Certain aspects, like our traditional Christmas Day breakfast, reminded of Christmases past. Other parts, such as listening to online services, reminded us of where we were. One special moment was the Sunday School program the kids presented. They had continued Sunday school there in North Carolina; Mom, Dad, and my two teenage brothers taught the lessons to the five younger ones. Now, the girls had planned their own program, carefully choosing songs and drawing up programs for the audience. It was good to see how our siblings clung to their faith.

The excitement for the program was contagious, and we all enjoyed it.

Other special moments were found in the hours spent singing around the piano. My family had missed the comfort of singing in church, and I had missed my piano. Familiar songs of Zion filled our hearts with gratitude that our family still had a home Zion, even there in North Carolina, so far from other believers.

After the solemn Christmas festivities, we spent Christmas day outside in the warm weather, playing games and remarking how lucky we were to have such a beautiful Christmas.

As always, the trip home was too short. Days flew by in a blur of laughter, conversation and the simple, pure joy of being home. Our skin was warmed from the sunshine, and our hearts were warmed from the fellowship. My hopes that Tim would feel at home there were quickly fulfilled, making that Christmas extra special for the two of us. The question of home no longer bounced in our minds.

Home is, to put it simply, where our loved ones are. For Kate and me, that is both in Minnesota and in North Carolina, and for that we are fortunate. We pray that God will continue to take care of our family in North Carolina and one day bring them home to Minnesota. ♦



Saved by Faith

Steven Kallinen

- ◆ *He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God.*

Acts 7:55

Read the entire Bible portion for this article in the Book of Acts 6:8,11-15; 7:51-60.

ARTWORK: KATHI AHO

SOON AFTER WE CELEBRATE Jesus' birth on our church calendar, we remember the first martyr of the New Testament time, Stephen. In that era the church was growing and more workers were needed. Stephen and six others were called to serve in God's kingdom because they were known from the heart by the other believers at the time. Luke relates that many of these men serving in the kingdom were obedient in faith.

He Spoke Powerfully

Despite opposition, Stephen faithfully served in his community. As he spoke with the power of the Holy Spirit, many were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke, and they believed. However, others were offended by the Word and rose up in anger against Stephen. The truth angers hearts of those that have turned away from God. This happened in our text when anger stirred up fruits of the flesh, even violence.

Throughout history, when people lose the sight of God because of sin on the heart, they then turn against God and His kingdom. Scripture says that it would have been better had they never known faith, because of what happens when the heart becomes corrupt and rebels against God and His children (2 Pet. 2:21,22). Some people of Stephen's time were like this.

He Served Despite Opposition to the Word

Luther aptly described the trials that Stephen endured. "A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty Shield and Weapon, He helps us in our ev'ry need that hath us now o'ertaken" (SHZ 181:1). Stephen experienced God's great love with the treasure of faith in his heart. "The Word they still shall let remain nor any thanks have for it; He's by our side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit. Take they, then, what they will - our life, our goods; and still, e'en when their worst is done, they yet have nothing won; the kingdom ours remaineth" (SHZ 181:4).

Stephen served in the kingdom despite fierce opposition. He confessed his faith and hope of heaven through the redeeming blood of Christ. Like King David, Stephen too could rejoice that although the table of the Lord

is set in the presence of enemies, "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (Ps. 23:5). God's goodness and mercy give strength and comfort on the narrow way toward heaven.

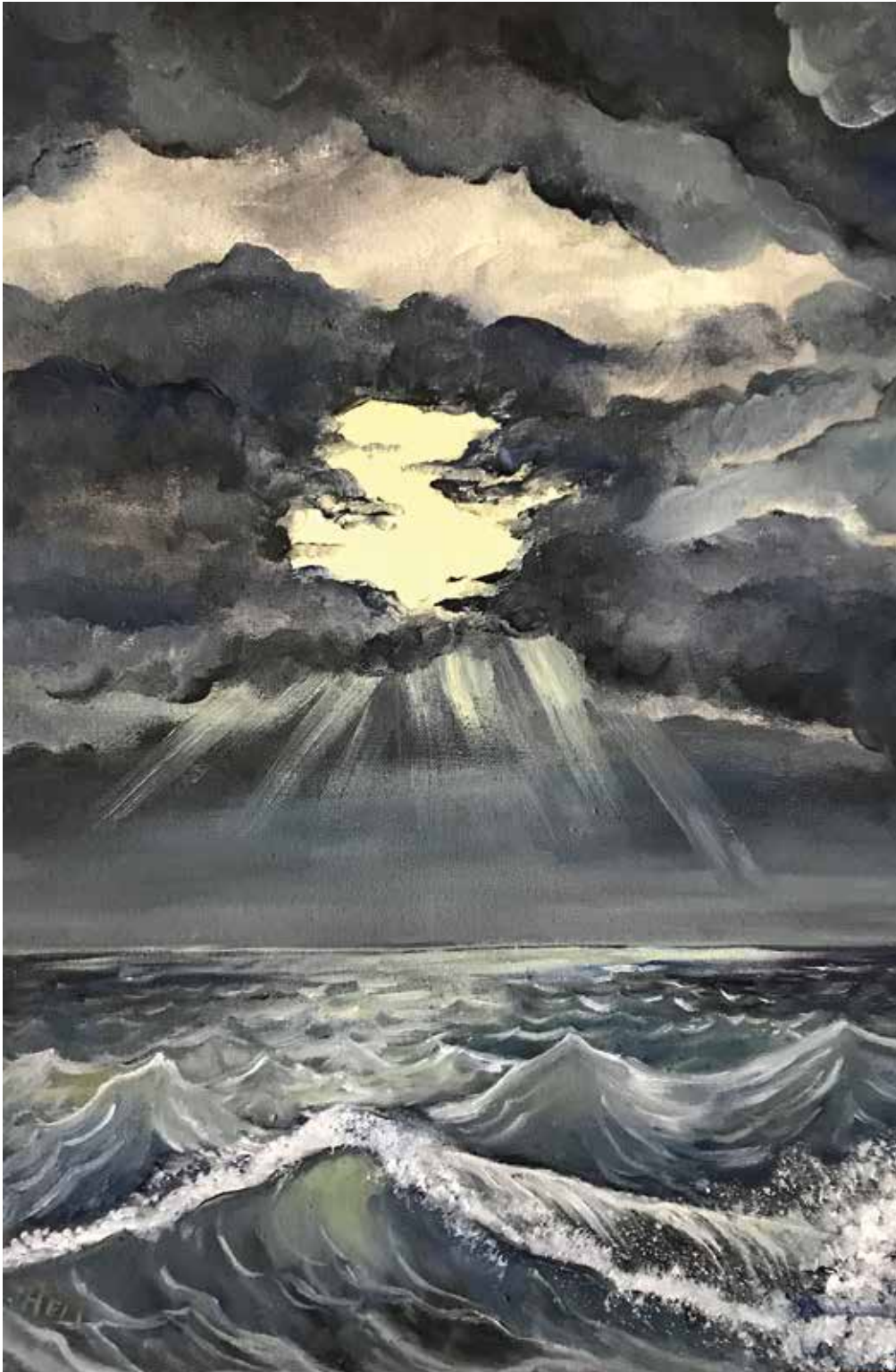
Stephen spoke the truth of God's Word and people rose up against him. They instigated opposition to falsely accuse him of blasphemy. He was taken before the council with such accusations. Those that sat on the council saw his face as it had been the face of an angel! Even with such a sign from God, they still did not see or hear the calling voice. Dear Father, "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word" (Ps. 119:41,42).

In confessing his faith to the council Stephen boldly said, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." As your forefathers resisted the prophets and were the betrayers and murderers of Christ, so are you. Then with fierce anger and gnashing of teeth they turned to condemn him.

He Looked Steadfastly toward Heaven

As a believer, as a child of God, "being full of the Holy Ghost" Stephen looked toward heaven and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. He saw the heavens opened as the people closed their ears from God and stoned him to death. Stephen called upon God saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then with great love for those who turned so violently against him, he prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." This world condemned him to death, but God prepared a place in heaven for the sinner saved by grace!

The enemy of souls is never idle. Temptations and obstacles try our faith. May God give to each of us such a heart of faith that regardless what the enemy does, we could look steadfastly toward heaven and be able to say, "Lay not this sin to their charge." This is love beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Come, put sin away in the blood of the Lamb and preserve faith and good conscience, living with hope of heaven. There will be everlasting joy when faith is changed to seeing. ♦



Fear Thou Not

Pete Lever

- ◆ *Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.*

Isaiah 42:5-8

ARTWORK: HELI JURMU

TIME PASSES BY, and one year changes to the next. Considering our past year, many times we wish we would have acted differently. Many times we have needed to confess our faults one to another as James instructs. It can sometimes be difficult to remember the completeness of God's forgiveness and grace. It is good for us to remember that all of those past sins are forgiven and forgotten by God himself.

It is also good for us to remember the countless blessings we have received. Apostle Paul put it this way in his letter to the Philippians: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It is good for us to remember that God has not forgotten us up to today and He will not in the future.

The year ahead is unknown. We know dangers may lie ahead. We pray for strength and that God would continue to help in the future. Yes, it really is true, when faith is the most important matter in our life, God blesses, even in the midst of trials. We can also trust that blessings lie ahead.

God Holds Our Hands

We know that God created the heavens and the earth and everything we receive from them. We also know that He created every human in perfection. He gave them a living and undying soul. Every child is born as one of God's own. Each child has been given the Holy Spirit to teach and to guide. God has given us His kingdom and righteousness. We can do nothing to earn or deserve this great blessing. However, the devil, the world, and our own flesh want us to discard this great gift. Our text reminds us that God is with us and is holding our hand, even this moment as you read this. In numerous places we are reminded "do not fear".

In the chapter prior to this one, Isaiah records: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee" (41:10,13). We can cling to these words even as we ponder what the new year might hold for us.

God Hears Our Sighs

Moses also reminded the children of Israel, "Do not fear, the Lord shall fight for you." God has created us and has redeemed us. We tire and waver along the way as the songwriter says, but God doesn't. We sleep, He watches. We have battles, doubts and fears, yet has not God protected you unto this day? He protects His sheep.

Let us remember to pray. God hears even our sighs and will help in time of need (Rom. 8:26). God has given a promise of everlasting peace, joy and happiness. He has given the light of the Holy Spirit to show us the way so that we can remain on this narrow pathway to heaven.

To all that would be seeking this true peace of God, this light shines for you too. This light of the Holy Spirit will open blinded eyes and release from the shackles of sin and death. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25).

God's Light Still Shines

Let us remember that we have a God that loves us and will never forget us. We have been given more blessings than we can count. The psalmist writes, "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee" (Ps. 139:17,18).

God is calling those that sit in the prison of darkness, as this text tells us. Cast away the gods of this world. The light of God's kingdom still shines in the world. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isa. 9:2).

This flickering candle of faith still burns in God's children. Continue believing your sins forgiven in the name and blood of Jesus. This gospel is the source of our strength in this New Year and days after. It is the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes" (Rom. 1:16). May God bless you and strengthen you in the coming year! ♦



PHOTO: JOHN STEWART

Ina and Tom Stewart, called Mormor and Bups by their grandchildren, often played piano and violin together.

MUSIC HAS PLAYED A SPECIAL PART in our family's story, providing a spiritual and cultural connection to God's kingdom. Our Stone great-grandparents played and sang, and great-grandpa Stewart played the cornet professionally. Since Grandmother Ina Stone Stewart and grandfather Tom Stewart both played instruments, they encouraged the love of music. They learned early on that music is therapy, builds bonds and teaches cultural values.

Our grandmother Ina grew up in a believing home, and music was special to her Swedish-immigrant parents. When Ina was a young girl, her mother held a family vote on whether to spend money they had saved on a car or on a piano. They decided to go without a car and bring a piano into their home.

The Gift of Music Brings Joy throughout Generations

Sonja Ojala, Ingrid Ojala

Teaching of Faith through Songs of Zion

When Ina was later raising her own children, she thought it was important for each of her six children to learn about living faith through singing and playing the songs of Zion. Now decades later, our mother Marleigh Stewart Lang and her brothers find comfort and joy singing and playing instruments together. Our mother remembers singing in the church bench with her father. She cherishes this memory since her father did not grow up in living faith.

On their family's summer holidays on Vancouver Island, Ina gathered the family to sing songs of Zion and to discuss faith. Marleigh recalls that this was comforting, bringing faith close while they were far from home.

When Finnish SRK minister Eino Kimpimäki visited the Stewart home, he commented on how strong their bond seemed and how sharing music played a part in it. He related that singing sacred songs had helped to bring him to faith later in his life.

Music Brings Warmth and Unity to Family Gatherings

On Christmas Eve, after reading the Christmas story from Luke, our parents, siblings and children sing together in harmony about this gift of Jesus, accompanied by the piano, guitar and other instruments. The beauty of the music and the hopeful message of the words unites and uplifts our hearts. A tradition that our grandparents Ina and Tom Stewart carried continues on through their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This bond of music has grown in our extended family, comforting us on the journey and connecting us in faith.

Seeing that the newest generation, our children, have joined us in the love of singing and playing is heartwarming. They also bond through music. Often if one person is playing the piano and one is singing, another voice or instrument joins in. During times of difficulty in this world, we have watched our teens gather at the piano to sing the songs of Zion.

At dinner time one particular child will often remind us to sing a grace prayer. We choose between *Praise God* variations in harmony or a short song of thanks that our mother Marleigh composed when we were young.

Music Connects People

Creating music together connects people: every voice and instrument is a valuable part, using the gift of music that God has given to make a beautiful sound. In the Seattle church choir each fall, leading up to Christmas time, we feel the therapeutic comfort of this music and also the healing bond of fellowship with other choir members. In choir, adults and children find fellow believers who also appreciate singing and playing instruments, and we have developed friendships through this shared interest.

This love of music has withstood the test of time, being nurtured and shared in many of our families. Through music, we also have shared our joy of faith at church events and in the community. At Christmas-time, music is one of the things that helps to bring the meaning and preciousness of faith close to our hearts. We feel the unity of family and faith when we gather to sing and harmonize around the piano, sing for the congregation at our annual recital, or carol in our community. May music continue to bring God's Word to each heart and uplift us on the journey to heaven. ♦



PHOTO: MARLEIGH LANG

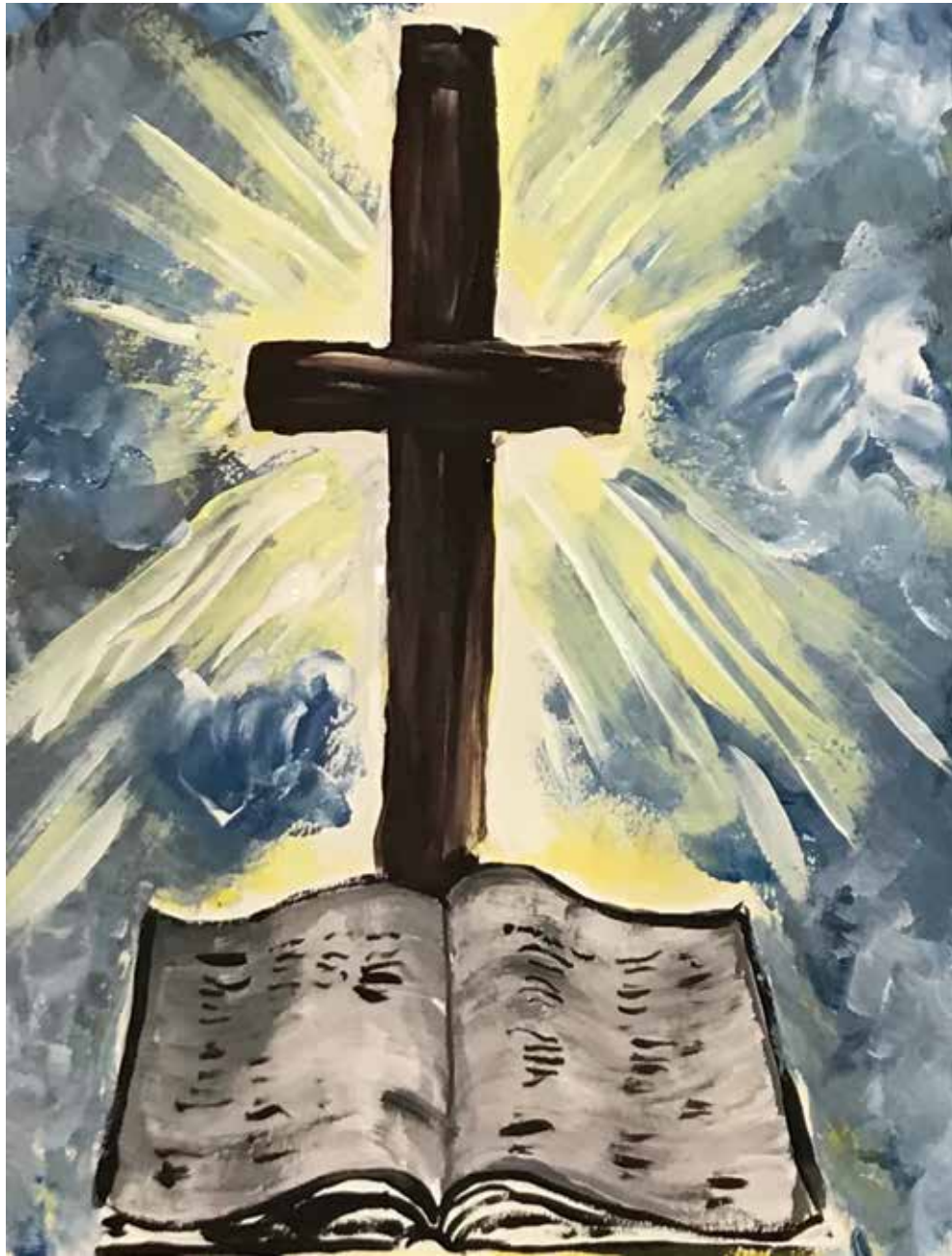
Thank you, Father,
for loving care,
for food to eat
and clothes to wear.
Amen.

Words by Marleigh Lang
Melody: first two lines of
"I Am Jesus' Little Lamb"

Left to right are Tomm Stewart on string bass, his wife Boukje and his brother John on guitar, Christmastime in 2019.

The Promise of Christmas in the Old Testament

Duane Pirness



Scripture, already in the beginning pages of Genesis, emphasized that salvation is possible only by faith upon the Messiah.



ARTWORK: HELI JURMU

SCRIPTURE, ALREADY IN THE BEGINNING pages of Genesis, emphasized that salvation is possible only by faith upon the Messiah. God promised the Savior after the fall into sin (Gen. 3:15). Adam and Eve believed, and their faith made them acceptable to God. This promise of Christ is evident throughout the Old Testament.

Abraham received and believed this promise, and God's blessing came upon him and his spiritual descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). God renewed this promise to Abraham when he asked him to sacrifice his only son Isaac but stopped him and provided a ram for the sacrifice instead (Gen. 22:15-18). God, however, did not spare His own Son when the time was fulfilled for Him to be sacrificed. Paul writes to the Romans, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). Through faith on that promise, we like the Old Testament believers before us, have the hope of salvation.

The Sacrificial Lamb

Since the promised Messiah, whom the Old Testament believers awaited, had not yet been born, God established laws concerning sacrificial animals and sacrificial worship, and their faith upon Him was evident in this worship. John the Baptist rejoiced in the fulfillment of this promise saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," when he saw Jesus coming toward him (John 1:29). In Hebrews 9:11-12, we read how Jesus, through His own blood obtained eternal redemption for us, so that the blood of animals was no longer required as a sacrifice to atone for sin.

God gave the same promises of His blessing through faith upon Him to Isaac, Abraham's son, as He had given to his father (Gen. 26:4). God also renewed this promise to Jacob, Isaac's son (Gen. 28:14). These promises belong to believers this Christmas and always, since we are the spiritual descendants of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Son of Judah

When Jacob gathered all of his sons together and instructed them of what was to come just before he died, he prophesied that the Messiah will come from the lineage of his son Judah (Gen. 49:10–12). God revealed to the prophet Jeremiah that Jesus will be born to the lineage of Judah through David, who will be the salvation of the people and will be called, “the Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:5,6).

The prophecy concerning the Great Prophet, Jesus, is given in Deuteronomy 18:15–19. In addition, as a “man with a drawn sword” Jesus appeared onto Joshua when they were encamped on the plains of Jericho at Gilgal where they kept the Passover, telling him that He had come as the “captain of the host of the Lord” (Josh. 5:13–15).

When King David began to plan to build a permanent temple to God, feeling troubled that he lived in a house of cedar himself, while God’s people worshipped in

When God’s people in the Old Testament heard and read these prophecies, they were assured of God’s promises to them concerning the birth of their Savior.

a tabernacle, or tent, God sent the prophet Nathan to speak to him. Nathan reminded David how God had cared for him and His people and allowed them to be victorious over their enemies. In 2 Samuel 7:8–17, when he is reminded of this, God makes promises to David concerning Christ: “I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.”

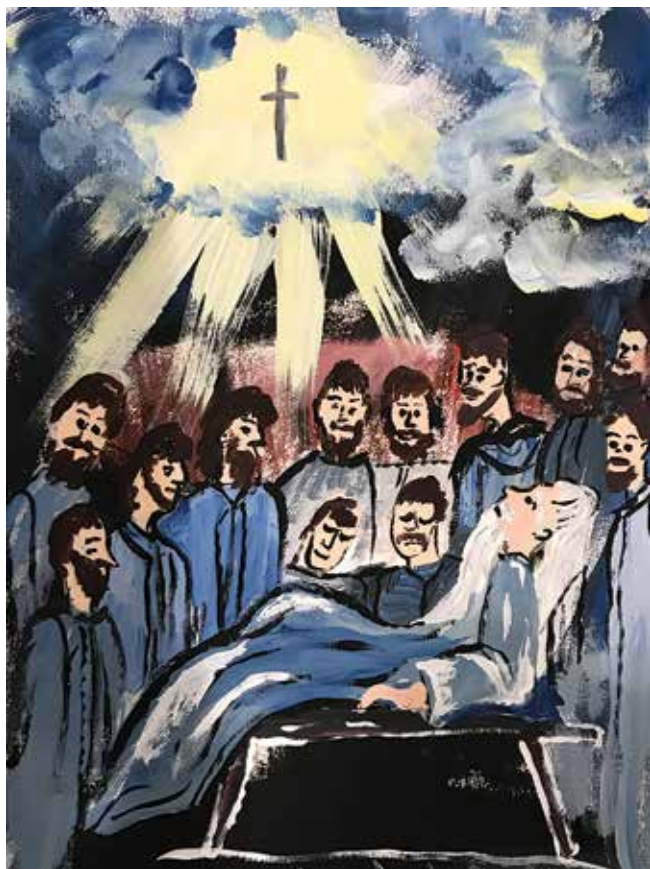
The Prophets Spoke of Him

The prophets, especially Isaiah made many prophecies concerning Jesus. When God’s people in the Old Testament heard and read these prophecies, they were assured of God’s promises to them concerning the birth of their Savior. If they believed these promises, this was counted to them for salvation. Scripture reveals that many had fallen away and no longer believed on the Savior when He was born. Simeon and Anna believed and rejoiced to see their Savior when Mary and Joseph brought Him to the temple to present Him to the Lord (Luke 2).

In Isaiah 7:14, we read, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Mary, the mother of Jesus, was able to accept and believe the angel when he brought her the news that she would give birth to the Savior (Luke 1:35,38).

The prophet Micah prophesied where Jesus would be born. In Micah 5:2 it is written, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” When Herod heard that the King of the Jews had been born and asked the chief priests and scribes where He would be born, they quoted Micah (Matt. 2:4–6).

The prophet Hosea predicted that the Messiah will have to go to Egypt for a time. We read in Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” In fulfillment of Hosea’s



ARTWORK: HELI JURMU



Many did not understand that it was their Savior who was born in Bethlehem and who had to be taken to Egypt since Herod sought to murder Him.

prophesy, Matthew 2:14,15 reveals that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Egypt until Herod, who desired to kill Him, had died.

He Will Fulfill All Prophecies

When we read these prophecies which were preached to the people of the Old Testament, we may wonder why so many did not believe them. Many did not understand that it was their Savior who was born in Bethlehem and who had to be taken to Egypt since Herod sought to murder Him. They couldn't believe the prophets even though they

could hear these prophecies and relate to them as the events occurred.

God's children also marvel now, during this Advent and Christmas season that so many people in the world ignore the prophecies of Scripture reminding us that in God's time, Jesus will come again. He will come as the Righteous Judge to take all who have believed upon Him; believed upon His gospel Word to their eternal reward in heaven, while those who have not believed will receive eternal condemnation (Matt. 25:32-46).

It is worthwhile to believe now and always. ♦

The Light of God's Word

Martin Pylvainen

- ◆ *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.*

Matthew 2:1-11

MATTHEW RECORDS FOR US in this Gospel text the wonder of those who saw and realized that baby Jesus is the Savior of all humankind: the light of the world. This story is known as Epiphany, a word that means the appearance or revealing of Jesus to the Gentiles, people who are not Jewish. Jewish people are descendants of the Old Testament Israelites and generally thought to be descended from two of the sons of Jacob, Benjamin and Judah. People who follow Judaism are also considered to be Jewish today. However, they do not traditionally recognize Jesus as the Messiah or Savior.

The coming of the Savior to earth was foretold by prophets. The Old Testament prophesies, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17) and "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1) trace the family line of Jesus to Jacob and King David, the son of Jesse. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, the surrounding area known as Judaea was ruled by King Herod. Herod was appointed by the Roman Senate as King of the Jews, and Herod had fought a war and political rivals to become the ruler of Judaea.

Wise Men Come to Jerusalem

We might ask who these wise men were. Where did they come from? How many were there? Matthew tells little of their background. They saw a star from their land in the east. We understand that God revealed the meaning of the star to the wise men, and they followed it and came to Jerusalem thinking it the likely place where a king would be born. They asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him." Herod was troubled by this question, "Where is he the King of the Jews?" for he saw his rule threatened. The people of Jerusalem were "also troubled with him." Since Herod was known for fiercely removing any opposition to his rule, the people of Jerusalem feared the news of a new king, and their fears were confirmed by later events.

Herod needed to find this new king. He gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together and demanded they tell him where Christ should be born. "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

After the priests and scribes found these words of the prophet Micah, Herod called the wise men to him privately. He wanted to find out when the star appeared and told the wise men to send word when they found the new king. But Herod did not want to worship this new king; he wanted to kill the baby Jesus. It is notable that neither Herod nor the priests searched for the baby Jesus themselves – it would have been easy since Bethlehem is only six miles and a two hour walk from Jerusalem. Unlike the priests and Herod, the wise men believed the Word of God written by the prophet Micah.

The Star Leads Wise Men to Bethlehem

The psalmist tells us that God's Word is a light unto our journey. The wise men believed the Word of God as told by Micah. For when the wise men left Jerusalem, the star again appeared and "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." The star went before them right to the stable where Jesus was lying.


Similarly, there is great joy in finding the kingdom of God today. It is like a treasure in a field as Jesus taught in one of His parables. When people are seeking God's kingdom today, God also leads them out of the darkness of sin. Jesus says, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). Furthermore, the songwriter states, "As a star, God's holy Word, leads us to our King and Lord" (SHZ 66:6). In this way, we are like the wise men, finding Christ our source of light.

Our Everlasting Treasure

In finding Christ, the epiphany is realized. The wise men entered the stable, where "they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh." Yet, bringing treasures, the wise men had been led to a greater treasure, the Savior of the world who had come to save all humankind from their sins.

Through the light of the Holy Spirit that resides in our hearts, we through faith also see the baby Jesus and know He was born to die for our sins. The light of God's kingdom shines unto the world from hearts that believe the Word. The light shines when we speak the gospel message of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name and blood.

"And being warned of God they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way." God protected the baby Jesus and the wise men from Herod as He protects us today in living faith. May His Son abide in our hearts as an everlasting treasure. ♦



My Christmastime Diary



Sara Aho

DECEMBER 6-29, 2019



THE SCANDINAVIAN CHRISTMAS

Bazaar in Cokato is here! This event begins a series of congregational Christmas choir programs and festive craft and baked good sales that I look forward to each year. It's peaceful to sit and be enveloped by the beautiful voices and songs. I'm able to stock up on wonderful goodies and purchase handmade gifts as well as visit with believing friends from near and far.

IN THE EVENING I MEET my youngest sister, who will soon be moving out of state. Together we go to visit our mother. There we make a mini-Christmas meal to enjoy together and then set up and decorate mom's Christmas tree. We enjoy the cozy scene while listening online to the Seattle congregation's Christmas recital, which is especially meaningful since another sister and several of her children are in the choir. We are far away yet feel as though we are there with them!



MY HOME SERVICES GROUP gathers at the Pylvainens for a *pikkujoulu*. We sing Christmas songs, visit and enjoy festive treats. Little did we know that this would be the last time our dear

brother in faith, Karl Seppala would join our gatherings. He was called to his eternal Christmas on January 5. I especially drew comfort from the wisdom of this elder - he will be missed.

I receive a text message from my niece that her children have gotten their Advent calendar that I sent and are excited to open it! It's a shared pleasure - I delighted in opening one as a child too!



Sara's 2019 Christmas card.

A CHRISTMAS PACKAGE of American treats and socks is mailed to my nephew Zeke, who is attending Ranua Opisto in Finland. I miss him but am so happy for his experience.

I am excited to pick up canvas prints of photos taken this past summer on a vacation with my sisters. I will give the prints as gifts to them. The photos bring back warm memories of a carefree time together.



THIS IS THE DAY my youngest sister leaves to move back East. It's bitter-sweet, knowing she won't be here with our family for Christmas.

I start to write out Christmas cards - it seems the list is longer with many new friendships made this past year while being involved on the Summer Services planning committee. I reflect on the blessing of believing escorts and sharing Christmas greetings during this joyous season.

I ENJOY LISTENING via Whatsapp to my nephew Zeke's video of *Joulumatinea*, a Christmas musical performance he is participating in at opisto, while I write out more cards. It's so fun to be able to keep up with him in real time via modern technology!



I ACCOMPANY MY MOTHER to a doctor appointment and afterward share Zeke's video. She so enjoys hearing her native Finnish language in song and readings.

Back at home, I eagerly open the many Christmas cards received in the mail. It feels so good to be remembered, yet I am wistful seeing the photos of families and couples. I wonder: where do I fit in as a single person?



Rylan, Brody, Sophie, Joslyn, Chandler and Lauren.

MY SLEEP-OVER WEEKEND with great-nieces begins with a driving tour of Minneapolis neighborhoods to see the beautiful old homes decorated with Christmas lights.

On Saturday we find that a fresh blanket of snow has arrived in time for a winter hike with special friend Barb at a local nature preserve.

PHOTO: BARB LEVER

Hiking at a local nature preserve, with nieces Aliyah, Sophie and Joslyn.

A Christmas light tour, with nieces Aliyah, Sophie and Joslyn.



TODAY I MAKE A CIRCLE TOUR of Sunday school Christmas programs that nieces, nephews and godchildren participate in, starting with Elk River and then on to Cokato. Such precious and simple messages are shared by the children about Jesus' birth - one of my favorite Christmas happenings.

I'm invited afterwards to my niece's home in Cokato to visit and exchange gifts with godchildren, as well as to decorate a gingerbread house - an annual tradition that I treasure with the little ones!

I PREPARE SMALL GIFTS of appreciation for my co-workers.



A VERY SPECIAL AND DEAR aunt and godmother who lives in Massachusetts is celebrating her 89th birthday. I call to wish her a happy birthday, and we share the latest happenings in our lives. She is always interested in knowing how family is doing and especially enjoys hearing about the younger ones and how it goes for them.

AT WORK I PARTICIPATE in a holiday gathering and am reminded that I am blessed to have respectful and caring coworkers who are satisfied to celebrate with a simple event in the office. It is much more comfortable to me than going out after work to socialize.



PHOTOS: SARA AHO, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



I ENJOY WATCHING the beauty of a Christmas amaryllis plant unfold - it's finally blooming! My sister Becky gifts me one every year.

MY MOTHER HAS COME TO STAY with me for the Christmas week. Though she lives nearby, it's special to be together as we make holiday preparations.



I PAUSE IN THE BUSYNESS of Christmas preparation to visit with my niece and goddaughter - we have lunch and exchange gifts. As we part, I say a silent prayer that God will grant her the grace of repentance one day - truly the most precious gift.



MY SLEEP-OVER WEEKEND, this time with great-nephews, begins with playing games and reading beloved Christmas stories. Ice-skating and a visit with Santa and his reindeer are highlights of the next day!



MY CHRISTMAS EVE and Christmas Day celebrations have become more quiet these last years as many of my siblings now celebrate with their extended families. My mother, sister Becky and her husband and our friend Barb and I attend church together. Becky and I alternate hosting festive meals on these days. It is a peaceful time.



A Santa visit with Brody, Chandler, Rylan and Rogan.



Reading with great-nephews, Rylan and Chandler.

PHOTO: ROGAN AHO



THESE DAYS ARE FILLED with togetherness and activities for all ages to enjoy. Ice skating and a walk through the “Winter Lights” exhibit at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum are outdoor highlights. Gathering in homes for potluck meals, playing games and visiting take place in the evenings.

While my station in life is certainly different from my married siblings and friends, I am reminded this Christmastime that I am so blessed and not lacking in any way. I have the joy of sharing special outings with the younger ones and god-children, peaceful visits with my mother and the quiet solitude of my own home with Christmas hymns playing in the background when I return after a busy workday. I have the opportunity to attend many Christmas church events, I have the love of family and close friends and, above all, I have the gift of faith. ♦

Mother Lea, Sara and her siblings and spouses join in Christmastime activities with sister Joy (and Aaron) Huotari, of Seattle.

AS I LISTEN to the familiar Christmas gospel during the Christmas Eve service, it comforts me that God’s Word never changes. I’m reminded of the most important message of Christmas. God is able to touch my heart and turn my thoughts from the things of this life to what is before me as a child of God – the hope of heaven.

My sister Joy and her family arrive on Christmas day – at midnight! They’re visiting us from Seattle for six days. And so, our Christmas festivities continue!



PHOTO: LAURI AHO

Skating fun with family – Lisa, Mariel, Lorelle, Joy, Sara, Ashlyn and Ella (front).

At the arboretum with Joy and Aaron Huotari’s family, Lauri and Lisa Aho, Sara and mother Lea.





Mim, Margaret, Jim, Dad and Mom at the bakery's tenth anniversary celebration.

The Wuollet Bakery, a Family Legacy

Dan Wuollet and Mim Jurmu,
with Jim Wuollet and Mike Jurmu

WUOLLET BAKERY, the business our father started in 1944, was sold last year. The business stayed in the family for 75 years, through three generations of owners. The business and the name carry on with a new owner, but no longer a family member. We wish the new owner success.

My sister Mim Jurmu and I were asked to reminisce about the meaning of the bakery to the family. That is what we have attempted to do here. However, you can be sure that no number of words we conjure up can possibly convey what the bakery has meant to the family over these last seventy-five years. One small example may help illustrate this point. Perhaps ninety or so family members were employed for some time or another at the bakery. This does not include those who showed up briefly for a cup of coffee and decided that there must be a better way to earn money.

A Family of Bakers

Let us introduce a few key characters from the bakery's history. The 'boss,' Reino (Ray) and wife Agnes (Aggie) are responsible for starting this whole endeavor. From them the family emerged. The children, born in order, Margaret (Bratt), Reino Jr., Ellen (Randall), Jim, Mim (Jurmu), Ben and finally, me, Dan. For us kids it was not necessary to fill out an application to work at the bakery. Jim says the job started when you were old enough to reach the bottom of the sink from the top of a raisin box. It was merely expected that we would work there at least until we finished our high school and post-secondary education. Jim and Ben stayed at the bakery, making their careers as bakers. When Dad retired in the late 1960s, Jim and Ben took over the reins. Many years later in the mid-1990s I joined the firm for a few years.

My Grandfather's Legacy

I NEVER MET my grandfather, Ray Wuollet, as he died in 1973, eight years before my birth. However, he continues to live today through his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren as they follow the way he proved in the course of his life. His legacy is carried on through the guiding philosophy and business practices of Wuollet Bakery, the company he founded in 1944. Everyone's life has times when faith, values, and relationships are tested. Today's challenge is to follow the example Ray Wuollet set by simply living his life according to the values he professed. He walked the walk; he made his story a gift and his legacy a challenge to us all.

The bakery and the family were inseparable through three generations.

Aaron Wuollet

In the 1950's sons- and daughters-in-law started showing up, with grandchildren following soon after. Mike Jurmu, Mim's oldest, spent his entire work life with the bakery. He was asked "How did you get to the bakery?" The intention of the question was about his career path. His answer was telling, "Grandpa picked me up when he went to close the shop in the evening." Eventually family members of the third generation took over the business in 2004: Mike, his brother Jim Jurmu and their cousin Doug Wuollet, Reino's son.

My son Aaron worked for Wuollet Bakery for 18 years, starting while still in high school. While in college he did a research paper on Grandpa Ray and the Wuollet Bakery. The abstract for the paper presents Aaron's view of the family business.

In the Beginning

If it hadn't been for rheumatic fever, Wuollet Bakery may never have existed. According to family lore, Dad was 36 years old when he went to bed on Christmas Eve 1942. At the time he was manager of the Federal Bake Shops store in downtown St. Paul. Federal was a regional chain with several outlets in the Midwest. The December Christmas season is very busy in the retail bakery business, bringing in enough money to keep the doors open the other eleven months. Ray came home that Christmas Eve exhausted as had been the case for many Christmases, but this year he went to bed and did not get out of bed until Palm Sunday, some three months later.

Even though Dad had been a successful manager for Federal for years, when he was unable to work for this extended time, the company did not provide for him to the extent that he felt was proper. The company attitude was no work, no pay. Family and friends chipped in to allow the family of five children to manage through this difficult time. One story tells of an insurance agent delivering a box of fruit that contained not only the well needed nourishment but receipts from local merchants with the accumulated Wuollet family charges marked "Paid."

You Can Do It for Yourself

During Ray's convalescence, his wife Aggie encouraged him to go into the bakery business himself. Dad seemingly lacked confidence to do so, but she told him, "If you can do it for Federal, you can do it for yourself." It happened then in October of 1944, with borrowed money and many prayers, Filipek Bakery became Wuollet Bakery. With that purchase, the start of a 75-year multi-generation family business came into being.

Dad outside of his new bakery, Filipek bakery still on the awning. The phone number has changed only by the phone company adding more numbers; the current number is 922-4341. The storefront to the left of the bakery was leased in the 1960s, more than doubling the production space.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WUOLLET FAMILY

I was born the following June, so I missed out on the fun of the early years. Still, there were always jobs that needed doing. No child was too small to help in some way. Mim recalls going to the shop with Dad at five in the morning and sitting in the store folding carryout boxes so they would be ready when the customers came. She also tells of Dad dispatching her to fetch a forty-pound box of raisins. Mim was a slender little girl, and the box was too heavy for her to carry up the stairs. But up she went, plunking the raisin box up a step at a time.

Dad firmly believed that a bakery had to be clean to be successful. It seems there are several million difficult-to-reach, nearly-impossible things to clean even in a small retail bakery. With the production in the back and the store in the front, it is easy to get flour dust, icing, fruit filling and assorted other glass-smearing, floor tracking marks everywhere and on every surface. The top of the oven and the tops of the wall refrigerators are memorable for their resistance to cleaning and to the discomfort of the cleaner. These tasks were on the entry-level job description for all of us kids. I especially remember sweeping the basement floor every Saturday. On special occasions, I added a wash job with a hose and squeegee.

Providing for His Family

I was interested in the business side of the bakery and often sought Dad's views of business. He insisted that he never went into his own shop to make a lot of money or to get rich. He only wanted to provide for his family. In his view, buying the bakery was not a



Ben working in production, already a baker at a young age.

Jim scaling dough at the bench.

choice or a business decision. He felt it was forced on him by Federal not taking care of a loyal employee. He likened it to the story he told of a school custodian who went to the school during Christmas break to fire the boiler to keep the building warm. Alone in the sub-basement of this cavernous building he somehow caught his hand in the furnace door and was only able to free himself by cutting off his hand. Dad then ended this narrative with the rhetorical question, "What choice did he have?" While I thought the story to be melodramatic, it illustrates Dad's viewpoint. He did what he had to do to provide for his family.

As the bakery grew under his leadership, he often marveled at how the business prospered far beyond

Lasting Impressions

CHRISTMAS – Christmas is the reason that the store remains open the rest of the year. December is half again bigger than other months in sales. Retail bakery products remain largely hand crafted, so to sell more you have to work more. More sales means more production and sales hours. Shopping for Christmas goodies at Wuollet Bakery was a neighborhood tradition. On Christmas Eve morning, the parking lot was full of customers waiting for the store to open. Throughout the day, up to forty or more people waited in line to be served.

WORKERS – At peak times as many as 125 people were drawing a paycheck with many of those being seasonal, part time employees. Perhaps 25 percent were family. If the church family were included, that percentage goes substantially higher because many believers have worked there.

BLESSINGS – Dad bought a bakery with the prayer that it would provide for his family. In his lifetime Dad commented that God blessed the bakery so much more than he could have imagined or hoped for. In visits from time to time over the years among us

children we have asked "What would Dad think about the bakery now?" It is hard to imagine what he might think, but it is certain that God blessed the efforts of those involved, perhaps more than we could have hoped. Mike reflects on how he has been able to provide for his family through the years because of the bakery. When asked what the greatest blessing that has come from the bakery he suggests, "Look at all the families that have been fed and sheltered by their work at the bakery. This seems like it might be the legacy and the greatest blessing from Grandpa's bakery."



Dad with the production crew. The man on the right side of the photo is Chet Wuollet, Dad's brother.

his expectations or even his wildest dreams. He could hardly believe how God blessed his bakery business. In the mid-1960s the neighboring bay in the building became empty. He took over the lease on the space and doubled the space the bakery occupied. At that time, he commented that he did not need a bigger facility for himself, but when Jim and Ben take over there will be two families to feed so a bigger shop may be necessary. The bakery had provided for his family as the whole family grew up, and it was time to think about the next generation.

Expansion

Dad died in 1973 after selling the business to Jim and Ben and retiring a couple of years earlier. In 1977, Jim and Ben approached Marty Olson, owner of the Bungalow Bakery in St. Paul. Marty, like Ray, had worked in the Federal system before starting his own shop. Jim and Ben thought it would be a good idea to expand since the next generation of potential workers may be in need of employment. At that time Marty was looking to sell and retire. When the Wuollet boys showed up with thoughts to possibly buy the Bungalow, Marty said, "Somebody upstairs sent you here." The second Wuollet bakery was added to the fold. A third was added when a bakery became available in Wayzata in 1991.

In the years that followed, the business changed according to prevailing market conditions. New outlets were opened and some subsequently closed, with six being the most operating at one time. Ownership also evolved with the third-generation family members until 2019 when the business was sold outside of the family. ♦

A Child's Musings

Laila Uljas

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, we went to Sunday school every Sunday and afterwards stayed for the morning church service. Church was a place to pause during the week and listen to the Word of God, but it was also a place to see extended family members and sisters and brothers in faith.

We would often sit beside Margaret and Doug or Grandpa Jim, at the other end of the bench. They sat in front of Mim and Bob. A few rows behind us sat Reino and Betty. Just like to any normal child, the sermon sometimes seemed long. We built small houses with the brown hymn books against the wooden back of the bench. These little constructions were rather unstable as the seat of the bench was padded and soft, and they required rebuilding time and again. Perhaps it is easier for a child to listen when little hands have something to do.

Sometimes after the service, grandpa would mention that he had a couple of wedding cakes to deliver, and I would eagerly volunteer my assistance. I think at that time the bakery used station wagons as delivery cars. One of them was a light grey Oldsmobile station wagon.

Usually there was only about two or three deliveries because the bakery was not open for business on Sundays. We would drive through the alley to the back of the bakery to get the large white boxes that held the cakes. Sometimes there was dry ice to keep them chilled. Dry ice seemed like magic to me, and sometimes after the cake delivery excursion, my siblings and I would admire the way dry ice evaporates in curls and swirls. The cakes were placed in the back of the station wagon and next to them a few frosting bags, just in case something needed fixing.

The venues we delivered to were grand but empty, quietly waiting for a celebration to begin. Usually there was an abundance of natural light from large windows and flowers waiting to be placed around the cake. I would run to the door and pull on it. Sometimes I got it open but more often than not, it was too heavy. I really was not of much help, except for keeping company.

On the way home we would take the scenic route and drive along the river until we arrived at grandma's and were greeted with warm hugs and smiles.

These Sunday excursions captured the essence of the bakery: it was about family. Families of course have their moments of friction, and even the bakery went through growing pains, but the moments that remain in our hearts are the moments of togetherness and companionable affection.

Karl Jurmu Gives from His Heart

Suzanne Pitkanen

AS FALL COMES TO AN END and the Advent season draws near, my brother Karl Jurmu begins his Christmas shopping. He has numerous people he buys for – several godchildren, parents, family members and others.

When we stopped by to visit one day, he beckoned us to his bedroom and in a hushed voice whispered, “I need your help ordering Christmas gifts.” As we entered his room, a stack of catalogs sat on his table with several pages earmarked. “What do you think of this one for mom and this one for dad?” We settled in and listened to Karl as he shared his thoughts, and then helped him decide which gifts to order.

Karl loves to buy Christmas gifts and spends a lot of time considering which items to buy. As the boxes are delivered to his home, he carefully wraps them and ponders and plans how he will get the gifts to each recipient.

In addition to buying gifts at Christmas, Karl remembers his precious escorts in faith in their joys and sorrows all year long. He listens carefully to others as they discuss events that are happening – weddings, engagements, deaths or illnesses. He walks or bikes to local stores and purchases gifts, cards and sometimes flowers to acknowledge these events. Mom once remarked that she had run out of her large stock of gift bags when Karl used them for the numerous gifts he was buying.

One evening I stopped by to visit, and Karl gave me a gift. “This is for your friends,” he told me. I was puzzled by this and he explained to me that he bought a gift for my friends who had recently lost their baby before birth. This is what Karl’s heart wants to do – remember other believers.

Karl also desires to be a worker both at home and in the work of God’s kingdom. Karl was born with Down Syndrome into our large and busy family when I was five. During our childhood years, Karl was expected to do chores and participate in family activities as much as he was able. He had his jobs to do and his routines to follow right along with the rest of the family.

Still today, Karl has his routines and jobs that he does at home. In addition, Karl is and has always been very



PHOTO: BRITA FREDRICKSON

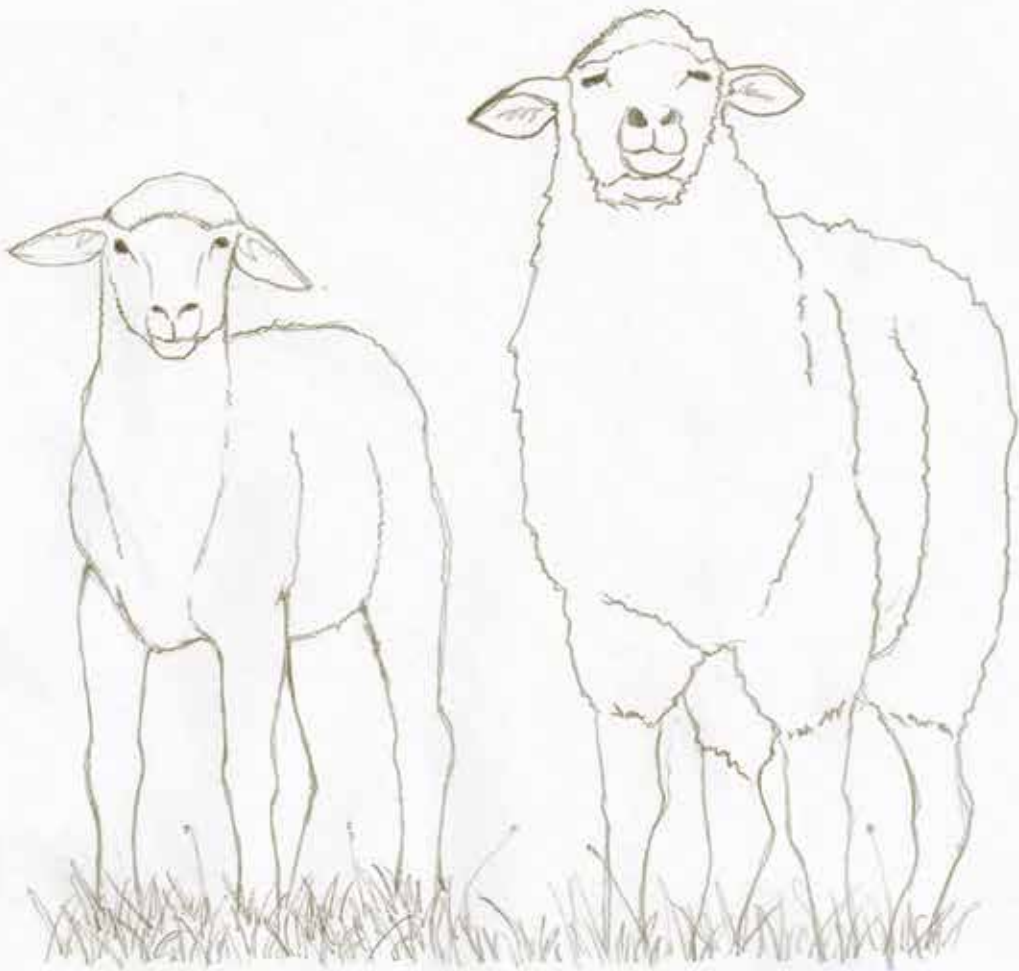
eager to help at church and participate in church duties. When the summer camp kitchen work list comes out, he works hard to find someone to join him for a kitchen shift at Stony Lake Camp. Many have noticed that he enjoys carrying the mic around during discussions and loves to volunteer to pass the collection plate.

One evening, I was busy in the kitchen during a fundraiser at our Elk River church when Karl came bursting into the kitchen and asked, “Can I help?” Karl isn’t a member of Elk River congregation and I knew we had plenty of help; however, I also knew that Karl wanted to help. I quickly rattled off a few tasks for him to do, and off he went to gather up garbage and haul it to the dumpster. He is a reminder that everyone is able to help with the work in God’s kingdom. God has given Karl a heart to give and to serve.

Karl desires to be with believing companions to help him in his life of faith. He wants to be among believers at services, youth gatherings, weddings, and always for Christmas festivities. He makes it to as many local events as he can, especially special services in nearby congregations. He also has been able to travel across the country for larger services, youth day weekends and ski days. He sometimes travels with others but sometimes travels by himself.

Most importantly, God has given Karl the gift of living faith and Karl desires to share this gift by preaching the gospel to encourage his friends in faith with that hope of reaching heaven one day. ♦

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS IN ZION



ARTWORK: BRADLEY GRANGROTH

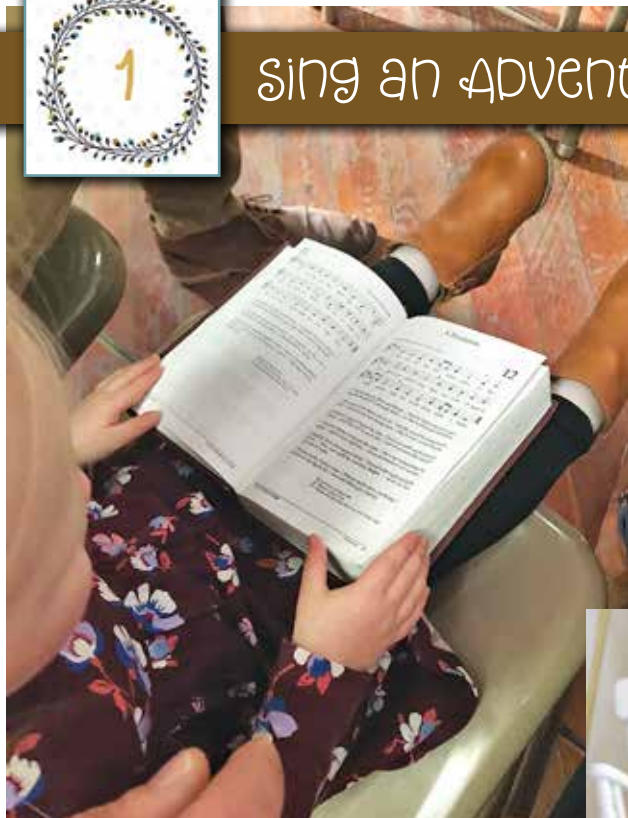
How Do We Celebrate Advent?

Brita Fredrickson, Mary Grangroth, Caroline Jacobson and Britta Jurvakainen

Children from the Flathead Valley, Montana, congregation share their experiences of Advent. Follow their stories to learn about their Christmas holiday traditions! Does your family do any of these activities?



Sing an Advent Song



Little Emma Fredrickson singing.

My mom took out our Christmas story books. We only take them out at Christmastime because we want them to stay nice. My mom says my favorite one is *The Joyful Light*. I always pick that one first. I like to find the animals in the pictures.

We went to church today. My mom said it's the first Sunday in Advent. We sang the first verse of SHZ 11, "A candle we are lighting now, it's bursting forth in flame." While we sang the song, the service director lit one candle. I don't know how to read, but I still like to have a songbook and sing.



Read a Story

PHOTOS: BRITA FREDRICKSON



Cut Down a Christmas Tree



It was a cold day looking for Christmas trees, but it was fun to walk through the woods and pick our own. Here is Emma with Miles Loukusa, Damon Byman and Gage Lahti (above) and Kay Lahti and Amelia Loukusa (right).



We got a Christmas tree! This was our first time cutting down our own Christmas tree. We went with some of my cousins and their cousins from Washington. When we got the tree home, we strung it with lights and Christmas bulbs. I don't remember seeing a Christmas tree lit up before! It is so pretty.



make homemade ornaments



THIS was our first Christmas in our own home, so we didn't have many Christmas decorations or tree ornaments. We invited my cousins, Paige and Alexa, over to help us make some clay ornaments. My mom says they are super easy to make, and I liked coloring on them! Paige and Alexa painted theirs. You can make a lot of different shapes, but we did a lot of circles.



Emma makes ornaments with cousins Paige and Alexa.



CLAY ORNAMENTS

4 cups flour
1 cup salt
1 1/2 cups water

Feel free to add cinnamon and nutmeg to scent your ornaments.

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees F.
2. Combine flour, salt and water in a medium bowl. Mix well and knead for 10 minutes.
3. Roll out to a thin dough on a lightly floured surface.
4. Using cookie cutters, cut into shapes and make holes for hanging.
5. Bake for 30 minutes. Allow to cool before decorating.
6. Decorate with paint, glitter, markers or whatever you choose. Use ribbon or yarn to hang them on the tree.



Emma's dad Troy helps her decorate the tree.



Decorate your tree

Paige Byman uses paint to decorate the ornaments.



PHOTOS: BRITA FREDRICKSON



Read the Christmas in Zion

PHOTO: CAROLINE JACOBSON

Drew, Madeline and Sam Jacobson

When we get the *Christmas in Zion*, the first thing we do is read the Christmas gospel. We enjoy taking turns reading it out loud.



make GINGERBREAD HOUSES

It has always been our Christmas tradition to make a gingerbread house, so this year we did a gingerbread travel trailer since we were living in our trailer while we built our house.

Madeline and Drew
creating with gingerbread.

PHOTOS: CAROLINE JACOBSON



LOOK AT CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

We look forward to driving around to look at Christmas lights. After that we will come home to enjoy cocoa with a candy cane.

Madeline, Drew and Sam
enjoy the season with hot cocoa and candy canes.





PRACTICE FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS PROGRAM



Clint Grangroth sings by the Christmas tree.

EACH year at Christmastime, all of us in Sunday school practice our parts and songs for the Sunday school Christmas program. Most nights, we take turns standing in front of the Christmas tree and reciting our pieces. Then we all sing the songs that are in the program. It is a fun way to get ready for our program as a family.



PHOTOS: MARY GRANGROTH

Alexa and Natalie Grangroth practice their song for the Sunday school Christmas program.



DRINK HOT CHOCOLATE

11



make & decorate cookies

Juliana and Alexa
decorating cookies.



Holly tastes
a cookie.



OUR family's favorite Christmas treats to make are cutout sugar cookies. We make a whole bunch of these cookies every year to put in the freezer and share with guests.

Our mom bakes the cookies. When they are cooled, our dad helps us decorate them. He always lets us choose one cookie to decorate ourselves. We put as much frosting and sprinkles on as we want, and we eat it right away!

**Louise, Natalie, Clint,
Juliana, Alexa, Sidney and
Holly** decorate cookies.

PHOTOS: MARY GRANGROTH



COLOR a CHRISTMAS PICTURE

FIND a Christmas picture online or make copies for everyone of the picture on page 67. Or draw your own picture to color!



Attend a CHRISTMAS PROGRAM



PHOTO: CAROLINE JACOBSON

We participated in our first Christmas program with the Flathead Valley Laestadian Lutheran congregation in Montana.



READ THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL

READ the Christmas gospel together. It can be found on pages 30–31. You can also read about these events in the book *Aviva and the First Christmas* (LLC, 1999).

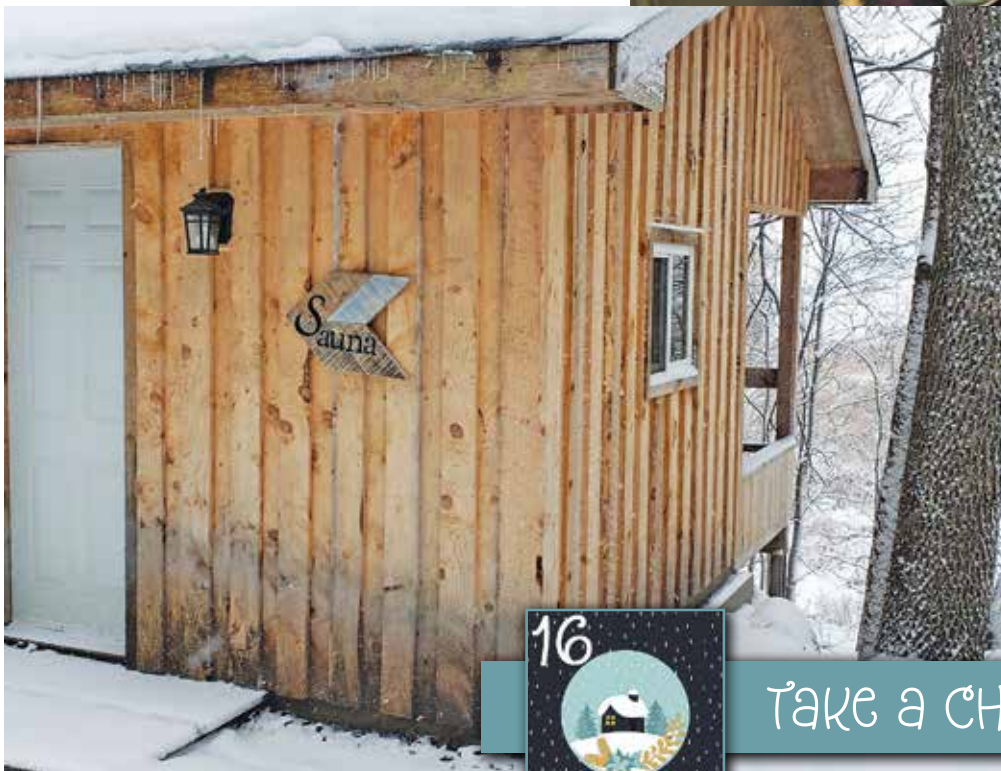


TRAVEL TO GRANDMA & GRANDPA'S HOUSE

We went to church today and then went to a friend's house. We anxiously await our trip to Grandpa and Grandma's tomorrow!

We wake up and can't believe today is the day we leave! We fly from Kalispell, Montana, and land in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We have a one-hour drive to Grandpa and Grandma's from the airport. So many of the buildings look familiar from other times we have been here!

Maci, Ethan and Brooklyn Jurvakainen at the airport.



One favorite thing to do at my Grandpa and Grandma's house is to take a sauna. They have an amazing sauna. It gets so hot. I am so thankful that my parents take us to Minnesota for Christmas.



Take a CHRISTMAS sauna



GO SLEDDING

Today I wake up to lots of fresh snow! I go out to the barn with my Aunt Julia. We find a sled and go sledding. It's so fun having lots of aunts and uncles and cousins! I even go skating at the town rink with my cousin, Bella. We have so much fun!



Maci and Brooklyn get a sled ride from their aunt Julia Hannus.



BUILD A SNOWMAN

If you don't have snow, draw a picture of a snowman you would like to build.



GO ICE FISHING

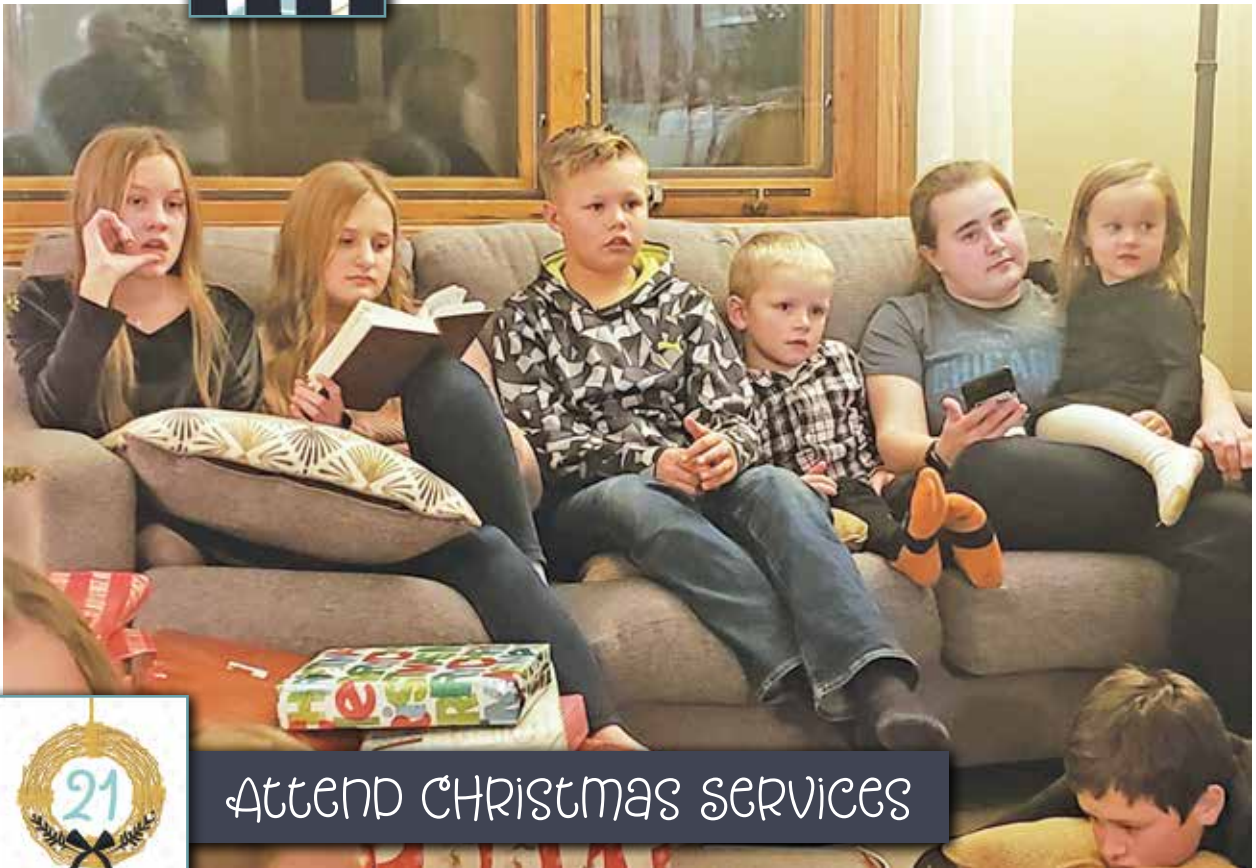
FISHING is my favorite winter hobby. I am excited to spend a few days at Lake of the Woods with a bunch of boys. My favorite part is visiting and catching fish. I am so lucky to get to go fishing!

Ethan catches a big fish.

PHOTOS: BRITTA JURVAKAINEN



Light some candles



Attend Christmas services

Kayla Kotila, Kate Forstie, Ethan Jurvakainen, Drew Forstie, Kallie Hannus and Piper Kotila. All except Ethan are from the Cokato, Minn., congregation.

Finally, Christmas Eve comes! I am so happy I jump out of bed and run upstairs. We go to church and the minister talks about Jesus' birth. It's important to remember why we celebrate Christmas. After church, we go back to Grandpa and Grandma's and gather with all my cousins. We sing many Christmas songs of Zion. At my Minnesota Grandma's, Santa comes to visit. Every year we have lefse as a special tradition. It's so yummy!



Hang your stocking



SING CHRISTMAS SONGS

Do you have a favorite Christmas song?

Maci with her cousin Abby Hannus.



visit santa

I wake up and I can't believe that Santa came. My cousins come for lunch. My favorite part about Christmas is opening presents and spending lots of time with the people I love most.



PHOTOS: BRITTA JURVAKAINEN

Brooklyn with Santa.



MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Christmas Peace

Siionin laulu 15

Jaakko Linjama 1965/1977

1. In this world of sin we seek peace with - in, peace to rid all hearts of

The first system of musical notation is in 3/8 time. The treble clef contains the melody with lyrics: "1. In this world of sin we seek peace with - in, peace to rid all hearts of". The bass clef contains a simple accompaniment of chords.

hate and mal - ice, call - ing souls to find God's king - dom's sol - ace.

The second system of musical notation continues the melody and accompaniment. The treble clef contains the melody with lyrics: "hate and mal - ice, call - ing souls to find God's king - dom's sol - ace.". The bass clef contains the accompaniment.

May the word of Christ-mas night spread on earth its peace and light.

The third system of musical notation concludes the piece. The treble clef contains the melody with lyrics: "May the word of Christ-mas night spread on earth its peace and light.". The bass clef contains the accompaniment.

2. On this dreary world
glorious light unfurls,
from God's kingdom shines His Christmas radiance.
He who smote death with his mighty valiance
seeks those souls who wander, lost,
hopeless in the sin-cold frost.

3. O'er this world of sin
sounds a mighty hymn,
from the manger words of love are swelling,
words of grace earned on the cross are telling:
Christ was born to set us free!
Lord, impart your Christmas peace.

Niilo Rauhala 1965/2010
E Matthew Keranen 2020

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 LAESTADIAN
LUTHERAN CHURCH