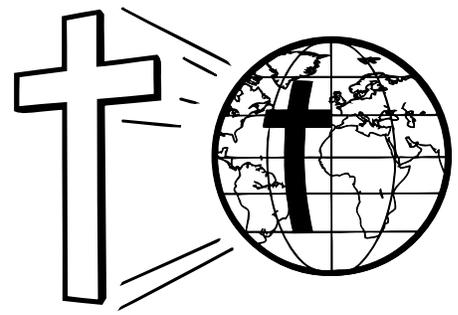


Foundation of Faith



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The Wise Still Seek Him!

What Love!

*Celebrate Christmas-
But the Right Way*

CHRISTMAS

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Editor

Hans-Dietrich Nimz

Editorial Team

Sieghard Schulz

Harry Semenjuk

Ron Taron

Hermann Vogt

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

Please address all other correspondence and subscription requests to:

Christian Unity Press

5195 Exchange Drive

Flint, MI 48507

Tel.: (810) 732-1831

or email us at

cupress@thechurchofgod.cc

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Editorial

Christmas is just ahead. We do not know the date or even the month in which the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, but we clearly know what Scripture says: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4).

Yes, God's promises were fulfilled. During the time of Caesar Augustus in Rome, when Herod and Pontius Pilate were rulers in Palestine, what had been prophesied many centuries earlier was fulfilled:

1. A Star shall come out of Jacob and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel (see Numbers 24:17).

2. A Rod and a Branch shall come from the stem of Jesse (see Isaiah 11:1).

3. The Virgin Birth was announced (see Isaiah 7:14).

4. People would come from afar with gold and incense (see Isaiah 60:6).

5. He, whose origins are from of old and from everlasting, would be born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2).

6. Yes, all people shall hear the message of the birth, suffering, and death of the Son of God so that they, too, may walk in the light of God and experience His glory (see Isaiah 60:1-4).

7. The Sun of Righteousness shall rise, and healing and salvation will be found with the Lord (see Malachi 4:2).

Oh, how wonderful is the Word of God, this heavenly gift with all of its promises from God! How insignificant all the treasures of the world are in comparison to the Holy Scriptures, the gospel that brings salvation! For everything on earth fades, but the Word of God stands forever.

Our wish is that this heavenly message would be preached to many today so that Christ, the Son of God, would be born in every heart and would receive honor, glory, praise, and worship.

I wish all readers a richly blessed Christmas!

H. D. Nimz

Christ, *the Savior is Born!*

There is an old story about a boy named Daniel. He was all alone in the world since his parents had died. The church had placed him with a farmer who gave him a place to live and a little food in exchange for hard work. He caused a lot of mischief and became more and more disobedient. One day he broke into a farmer's home and stole some money. He was arrested and sentenced to prison for two years.

No one in the town had ever had a kind word for Daniel, and now that he was in prison they were happy to be rid of him. Sitting in his cell, his heart was filled with bitterness and his mind with evil thoughts. He decided to behave even worse than before so that the people in the town would never forget him. He planned to set fire to the home of the farmer who had housed him.

This terrible thought occupied Daniel when he was released after two years. It was shortly before Christmas. He had little money, so he had to return to his town on foot in order to execute his evil plan.

It was a long way. He walked hour after hour through a winter wonderland on the 24th of December. He was hungry and freezing. In his pocket he had a box of matches that he planned to use for his evil deed.

It was already dark when Daniel reached his hometown. No one was out on the streets. This would allow him to complete his plan undisturbed and then disappear.

He turned the corner of a dark street to where the small church was. Candlelight gleamed through the windows and joyful music called out to the lonely Daniel. Today was Christmas! His heart was so full of evil and sad thoughts that he had forgotten.

He stood still. The music attracted him. He could not do what he had planned. He slowly crept towards the church door and slipped inside. There it was bright and warm. No one noticed him. He sat down on a small bench hidden in the shadow of a pillar, which was occu-

ried by one elderly lady who was heartily singing along from the hymnal.

Daniel sat and listened. The choir sang a Christmas song that touched his heart. The preacher started his sermon. He spoke of God's love that had appeared in Christ, of this love which embraces all people and wants to save each individual. Daniel heard and understood every word. However, his heart was too embittered and hardened to immediately allow room for the joyous message of Christmas. He skeptically listened to what was being said. Did something like this really exist? Was there really such a great love that cared about such a poor, abandoned, lost person as him?

The final song was sung. The elderly lady next to him offered to share her hymnal. However, Daniel was unable to sing. He shook his head and sat quietly. When he looked up, the church was almost dark and the people had left. He quickly stood up and was also ready to leave. But waiting at the door was the elderly lady who had sat next to him. "You likely have no place to stay tonight," she said to him. "You can stay with me. I've got a bed ready for you."

Daniel did not want to. "Do you know who I am?"—"Of course I know who you are," she said. "You are the Daniel who has been in prison. That is exactly why I'm inviting you. You need somewhere to stay tonight."

Daniel was shocked. He had not expected that. He silently went along with the elderly lady, who lived alone in her little house.—Was this not an example of what the preacher had said? God's love that embraces all people? Even he, the poor abandoned young man was embraced on Christmas Eve by love he had not expected nor deserved, love in which he had not believed.

They arrived at the little house. Here it was cozy and warm. The elderly lady gave the hungry visitor a warm bowl of soup. While he ate, she spoke kindly to him. He was likely tired from walking that entire way. Upstairs

was a bed where he could sleep. It was the bed of her only son, who had died a year ago. He was not to worry about anything. She wanted him to stay with her and work for her. She did not believe that he was as bad as the people had always said. He should just remember what he had heard this evening, that Christ had also come for him and loved him as a faithful shepherd.

Daniel could say nothing. He could only silently shake his benefactress' hand. She then showed him to the small room and wished him a good night.

He had difficulty falling asleep, and trembled at the thought of what he had wanted to do. Did he not have evil in mind? How terrible if he had followed through. How little he deserved the goodness of the elderly lady. Now he clearly felt it: Christ, who had come into the world for all people, also loved him and had graciously prevented him from committing this evil deed.

Daniel stayed with his motherly friend. He took great care to work hard and stay out of trouble. And he succeeded. He became a competent young man, capable of doing any job. The people in town who had previously condemned and ridiculed him began to speak kindly of him and respect him. Daniel was so happy and thankful. He was thankful for the elderly lady who had dared to take in as her own son the evil Daniel who had been released from prison. He was also thankful for Him who "became poor, that [we] through His poverty might become rich" (II Corinthians 8:9), the good Shepherd Jesus Christ, who is searching for His lost sheep.

Have you ever considered that there are people around you who need your love, especially at Christmastime? How do you celebrate Christmas? The most important thing about Christmas is that Jesus came to love and save you. Or have you thought little about that? Do it now so that you can receive the true blessing from Christmas and you can assuredly believe, "Christ, the Savior is born!"—our Savior—your Savior!

Christmas

*Humanity's Savior came to us today;
And say, will you honor Him in the right way?
There was no room for this heavenly guest,
So in a crude manger they laid Him to rest.*

*Humanity, God came to you in His Son;
Say, have you praised Him for what He has done?
Instead of obeying and heeding His Word,
They looked for a way to get rid of the Lord.*

*He showed humanity much love, and was kind;
He healed the sick and gave sight to the blind.
The thanks that He got was a slanderous cry:
Away with this man, let Him be crucified!*

*How can humanity get rid of this sin?
How can a person find true peace within?
Christ bore our sins for us there on the cross;
Despised and mistreated, He died for the lost.*

*Rejoice, oh Humanity, Jesus is here;
He wants to save us, so let us draw near.
To vanquish the devil, He paid a great price;
Salvation alone is in Him, Jesus Christ.*

*Humanity, hear it, wherever you are,
For Christmas proclaims this great love near and far.
Peace on the earth both for you and for me;
You'll have peace in your soul if Christ sets you free.*

*O Humanity, heed while you still have the time!
Receive from the Father this great gift divine!
He came to save the world that was lost,
To prepare them for heaven, despite what it cost.*

Rita Henschel

Behold, your King is Coming to You!

This Christmas message is once again being sounded throughout the world. Christ came for all people, without regard to nation, standing, or gender. He is the only Savior for all people.

The old prophetic word: “Behold, your King is coming to you” (Zechariah 9:9) is the message of Christmas. But we sincerely ask: Is this great King being given royal treatment? Is He at least honored and praised as much as the rulers of our time? The sad reality is that this is not the case.

Regretfully, most people do not even prepare for the coming of this great King. Their hearts are so closed or filled with other things that they have no room for Him in their hearts or lives. When we examine the state of our time more closely, we find that even among so-called Christians, preparation for Christmas is often only an external matter. The old Christmas songs may be sung and even the Christmas story may be read according to one’s custom, but that is the extent of it. Everything remains superficial.

But the King is not content with superficiality and sweet memories of a wonderful story that happened long ago. He wants more.

What is He looking for? He wants to come to us hopeless, sad, hesitant, and oppressed people and bring us up out of all our unrest, our terrible disappointments and shattered dreams, out of a world of fear and sorrow, out of the pain of sin and death, to make us joyful citizens of His kingdom.

Every year at Christmastime, do we not find that there is this deep longing for peace and joy in the hearts of many people? Listen, whether you are a despondent man, a tearful women, a bitter son, or a broken-hearted daughter, Jesus wants to bless you with His unspeakable wonderful gift!

The Savior gladly comes to each one who is ready to receive Him. He wants to come to you, specifically. Do

you not have a desire to receive this King? Ask the Savior of the world to richly bless you:

*Come, o King, Prince of Peace,
Share with me the Christmas feast.
Come, o come into my heart,
Make it Yours in every part.*

Indeed, if you are restless, worried, and without joy, your whole life will change if in stillness and inner reflection the door of your heart is unlocked and opened for the Savior to come in.

To all who have not yet opened up their hearts to receive the King of glory: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! . . . ‘Prepare the way of the Lord” (Matthew 3:3–2).

Preparation for the King’s entry occurs through repentance and faith. Our hearts must be fully given to Him, and then a life of fellowship with Him follows. We need to prepare the way for Jesus Christ by sincerely repenting of our sins. In your life, which you have lived apart from Him, there are things that weigh you down, things which you are rightfully ashamed of. That is where remorseful insight and reflection come in. When He approaches you in His majesty and glory and you look up to him repentantly in faith and pray for forgiveness, you find peace with God. Then you can praise Him with Paul Gerhard and say:

*I look to Thee so joyfully,
I tire not to gaze there.
Since there is no more power in me,
I stand in silent prayer.
Oh, were my heart a great abyss,
My soul a sea, great, bottomless,
Perhaps I could embrace Thee!*

You may surely know that when you have made Him Lord and Ruler of your life, you can say with the prophet of old: “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7). Where Jesus reigns, there is glory. You no longer need to break under the stress of a load of worry. You do not need to mournfully sorrow over shattered dreams or look fearfully into the future when it seems dark and threatening.

Those to whom Jesus has given His peace and whose greatest joy He has become truly have a blessed and joyous Christmas, despite circumstances that bring about unrest or that include pain or illness. A life of full salvation still allows them to be confident. Jesus, our King, changes night into light, worry into glory. If you ask them the reason for their joy, they may answer with the words of the song:

*I have a joy in Jesus the world can't take away;
I sing with harps of glory the King tunes every day.
I have a deep assurance, and peace deep as the sea,
All these things Christ Jesus, the Lord, has given me.*

Let me repeat it one more time. The Christmas message is: “Behold, your King is coming to you” (Zechariah 9:9). Jesus is appealing to your soul during this Christmas season. Open your heart and let Him in. He will give you a life of peace and joy and make you into a blessed child of God!

*Into my heart, into my heart,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus;
Come in today, come in to stay,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.*

What Love!

The human heart can only be at real peace when it is resting in God. Humans have always longed for inner quiet and peace. People today and throughout the ages have looked for their happiness in outward and perishable pleasures of this world. They cannot pinpoint the reason they are unhappy. They don't seem to realize that it is sin that is gnawing at their hearts. They are unaware that real happiness is only found in God.

How different are God's ways from the ways of man. And how much higher are the thoughts of God than our thoughts! If the Messiah would have come as an earthly king just as the people had planned, there would have been no forgiveness of sins. Our God of love overlooked all ignorance and blindness and sent His one and only Son as a child, to destroy sin, which ravages happiness, and to bring an end to the works of Satan. He desired to fill the heart with happiness, inner quiet, and peace.

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). Oh, this is a wonderful mystery that is above all thoughts! He whom all the heavens can't grasp, He through whom everything was created, He who rests in the bosom of His Father in all eternity, He who lived in the splendor of heaven and whom ten thousand cherubim and seraphim worship, saying: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty”—He came down to earth and became man to reconcile us with God!

Oh, what love! This love that has been revealed to us is incomprehensible, unfathomable, and deep. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Who can measure the length and the width, the height and the depth of God's love? Yes, who can

fathom the eternal plan of this love? Who can grasp this Love which stooped so low, Who became a servant to mankind? Yes, this Love descended lower still and humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross! Our Savior did everything out of love for the sins of man. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1).

In this light, how can anyone doubt God's love and desire to remain in sin? Who has room for such a despairing, troubled, and sad heart? Oh dear soul, free yourself from doubt and fearful worries! Do away with sin and everything that depresses and troubles you. Reach out and grasp this Love that died for you on the cross! There is not a sinner here on earth, even if he is so corrupted that he is near the edge of hell, for whom the Christmas story with all its joy, peace, and comfort is in vain: For you, for you the Savior is born!

For Unto Us a Child is Born

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6).

A child is at the center of the Christmas story. What does this say to us?

I. As the pinnacle of His revelation, God chose a child to come to earth.

He had revealed Himself as the powerful, wise Creator of the heavens and the earth. He spoke one word, and it existed. When God revealed Himself through angelic figures that appeared in the form of a person, it was always similar to that of a man, never in the form of a child. It seems to me that God used a completely different method here in order to reveal Himself and let us know that He loves us.

The prophet proclaims: A small, helpless Child will be born and given over to the people—a Child that was wrapped in swaddling cloths and who had all the needs of a human. He vies for love from people. A child by its very nature is able to do what an adult cannot so easily do: it touches hearts.

II. Through the birth of a child, God came in the likeness of men.

He was born into the family of men. In one way, He is similar to us. We were all born; we were all swaddled in cloths; we were all dependent on the care of our parents. The writer of Hebrews says: “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren.” God wanted it that way so that we could identify with Him. When a child is born into a family, his or her siblings immediately accept him or her as their brother or sister. Yes, God wants us to also accept Jesus as our Brother and Savior.

He came in the likeness of men so that we should know that He understands us in all situations. He, too, experienced hunger, thirst, fear, pain, and hardship. His life was in danger, He was tempted, and He was unfairly judged.

God further humbled Himself in order to be born as a child. How is it today? When a baby is soon to be born, everything is prepared for its arrival weeks beforehand.

The soft crib with its complete furnishings stands ready in the nursery. That is not at all how it was when Jesus came. Mary likely had cloths along. But instead of finding Him lying in a soft bed, the shepherds found Him in a manger, for there was no room in the inn. Paul writes: “[He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Phillipians 2:7). Jesus was born as a servant. That is what the prophet Isaiah calls Him in Chapter 53. The Son of God came on this earth to carry out His ministry as a servant.

Even the lowest class of people should feel affection for Jesus. At the time of Jesus’ birth, it was the shepherds of Israel who belonged to those who were despised. However, they ventured to search for the Son of God in the stables. One wonders if they would have risked searching for Him in the king’s palace?

Here is an illustration that I once read: A poor, drunken man woke one morning in a strange bed. He felt something soft and warm next to him. He realized he was in a stable next to a cow. He considered begging for breakfast at the home of someone he knew, but realized that no one would allow him in. They all considered him a low-class citizen. Then his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of bells ringing. Today is Christmas, he told himself. What was the story of the shepherds, angels, and a manger? So he was not the first one who had slept in a stable. He said to himself, perhaps Jesus slept in a manger so that He could help a man like him whom no one else could help. He knelt and prayed the prayer of the tax collector: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13).

III. A little child is captivating.

A mother carrying a child enters the bus. All of the passengers look at the child.

Jesus was captivating to everyone. When Jesus openly appeared as an adult, we read that mothers brought their children to Jesus, and He took them up in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16). We do not read that children started crying, as they sometimes do when they are placed on the lap of “Santa” to take a picture with him. How much better would it be if all parents brought their children to Jesus, the friend of children!

IV. A child is able to move hearts.

Rock-hard hearts have been moved out of love for a child. It was Christmastime. A grandfather asked his little granddaughter what she wanted for Christmas. She bluntly said: “Another grandfather who would sometimes come along to church.”—And so it happened. The pastor and his assistant couldn’t believe their eyes. This grandfather, who was otherwise so dismissive and even mocked, actually sat in the worship service on Sunday with tears in his eyes. What caused this? He himself confessed to the pastor the next day: “I would never have thought that a child could have so much power.” If a normal child can exercise such power, how much greater is the power of Bethlehem’s Child.

A marriage is failing. The couple has drifted apart, and a heartfelt connection between them is missing. But then they have a child, and that child connects the hearts of the parents and builds a bridge between them. Jesus, born as a child, came to bring reconciliation. “[God] sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” writes John (1 John 4:10). Reconciliation between God and man, as well as reconciliation between man and man, has been made possible. This reconciliation is possible only through the Son of God, who was born as a child.

V. Christmas—a family celebration.

The joy of family shines from Joseph, Mary, and their Child. Is it for this reason that people like to spend Christmas with family?

The first Christmas celebration has made it possible for us to be at home in the family of God. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God,” writes John. If we are unable to celebrate Christmas in the circle of our loved ones, it is possible to celebrate in the circle of our spiritual family, if we know that we have been born into God’s family. Cherish your spiritual brothers and sisters, and especially your Savior, whose coming to earth as a child has allowed us to experience the joy of a spiritual family.

R. Roesler
Toronto, ON

The Wise Still Seek Him



“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’” Matthew 2:1-2

The story of the wise men visiting the Christ child is an intriguing one. These men began a long trip to Israel simply because a particular star was in the sky, alerting them to the birth of the king of the Jews. They likely traveled for several months to finally meet this special child in person. I believe it is more than just a story meant to entertain us, it is meant to teach us something today, about seeking Christ, the Savior.

God makes every effort to reach every person who is far away from Him.

He used the star to reach these wise men in order to bring

them to Christ. We read of these wise men when they arrived in Jerusalem, “[W]ise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him’” (Matthew 2:1a–2).

The wise men were on a mission: to find the newborn king of the Jews and worship Him. What is fascinating about these men is what they have to teach us about God; that God makes every effort to reach every person no matter how far away they are from Him.

If God could reach Gentile astronomers, He still desires today, to draw those whom we might consider to be

beyond hope. God doesn't give up on anyone and He uses whatever means He can to help lead them to Christ. In this case God sent them a message using an astronomical event, a star, to signal to them that they needed to search for the Child born as king of the Jews.

We need to remember that not everyone is raised in the church; they don't know church language, and they don't understand their need to seek out Jesus. We are sometimes baffled why people don't participate in church. Many times it's because they have no foundation; it was not part of their upbringing. They don't know they are supposed to seek Him, and so God comes to them in ways they can understand; He makes it relevant to them where they are at.

That is why God came in the flesh, so that He could be like one of us, talk to us in our own language, eat our food, and experience our culture through our eyes, so that He could tell us of our need for Him.

The Wise Men teach us that God wants us to diligently seek Him.

We need to seek out a relationship with God through Christ. The danger we fall into is thinking that knowing about Jesus is enough. We can have all the knowledge of the Bible and God's commandments, and still miss what the Christian faith is all about: seeking Christ until we find Him.

We know that these men only had partial knowledge about the Bible and the Jewish Messiah, because otherwise they would have known to look for the Infant in Bethlehem. But they had faith, and made an effort to seek out the Christ Child.

On the other hand, we see the religious community in Jerusalem. These people confessed to have a firm grasp on the Old Testament. They did all of the rituals and followed all of the commandments. They knew about God from their Holy Scriptures. Yet, when the Wise Men showed up, Herod and these religious leaders were stunned to find out the Messiah had been born. In fact it says they were "disturbed," or "troubled" upon hearing the news.

We can have knowledge of the Bible, we can even have religious convictions, but God is seeking a relationship with us through His Son Jesus Christ, and He wants us to seek Him. As Jesus later promised, those who seek, will find. We read in Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

When we find Him and have a relationship with God through Christ, the proper perspective falls into place.

We need to Worship Christ.

Once the wise men reached Jesus, Matthew writes that the first thing they did was worship: "[They] fell down and worshiped Him" (Matthew 2:11). It signaled their submission to the Messiah as having authority over them. That is why today we say we must receive Jesus as Lord, because He is in control and we submit ourselves willingly to Him.

They also presented an offering: three gifts were given to Jesus as a sign of worship.

We worship when we give our offering, our time, and ourselves to God. We worship by offering that which is valuable to us.

Each of these gifts came at a significant cost to the bearers. Worship should cost us something. What do we bring or offer Christ which is costly to us? What do we lay at His feet?

We need to continue to be open to God's Holy Spirit.

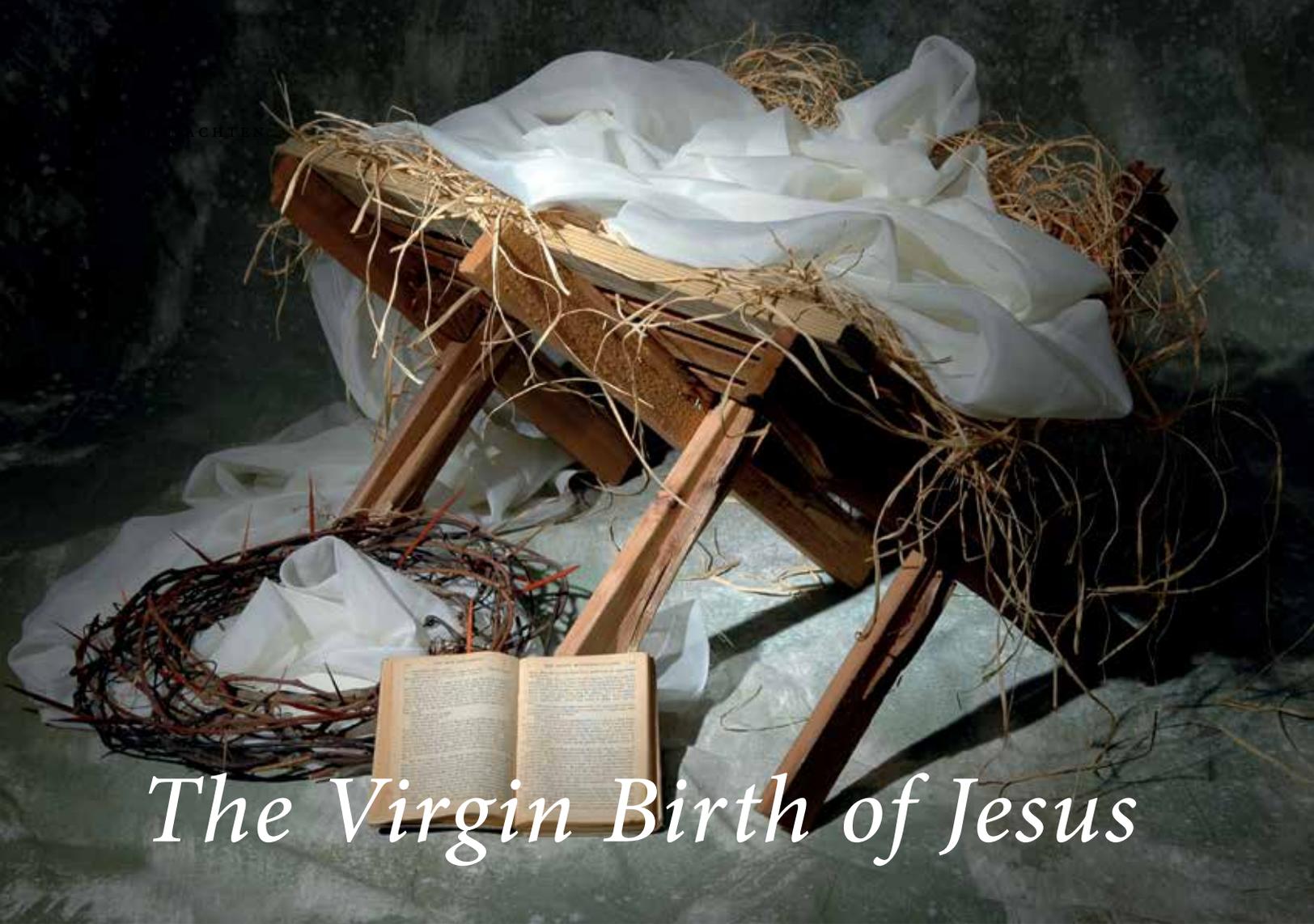
The wise men obeyed God's direction by not returning to Herod. The journey to the Christ and their reward of faith had taught them to remain open to God's leading.

There is never a point in our lives when we can say that we've arrived, in the sense that we've got the Christian life all figured out. We need to seek Him, we need to worship Him, but these aren't a one time event. We must continue to remain open to God's leading.

Even though the wise men had found the Christ Child and had worshiped Him, they weren't done. They continued to remain open to God. God gave them a message in a dream (Matthew 2:12). These men were familiar with interpreting dreams, and so God spoke to them again in a way they would understand. They recognized this dream as a message from God and they obeyed.

The point is clear for us. Just because we have sought and found Christ doesn't mean we are at the end of our journey. It is only the beginning. God wants us to be open to the leadings of His Holy Spirit. It may not be a dream, but God still speaks to us in other ways such as through Scripture and prayer, to lead us away from danger and stay focused on His plan.

M. Kehler
Winnipeg, MB



The Virgin Birth of Jesus

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

(Matthew 1:22-23)

The Gospel of Matthew was written from a Judeo-Christian viewpoint. The author emphasizes that the events of the New Testament were perfectly predicted in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament. His goal was to demonstrate that the birth and life of Jesus corresponded with the prophecies of the Old Testament down to the most minute detail.

The virgin birth is based on divine authority.

We are dealing with facts here. Our faith rests securely on the rock of eternal truth. Anyone who denies the

virgin birth of Jesus denies the Bible. In this current age of materialistic religions, in which most people no longer believe in miracles, people try to explain away the biblical account in which Jesus is conceived through the Holy Spirit and given birth to by Mary, a virgin. I prefer to found my convictions on the Word inspired by God instead of relying on the assumptions of fallible people.

Our faith in the inviolable conception and birth of Jesus Christ rests on four main pillars:

1. The unambiguous, divine revelation of the Prophet Isaiah: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).
2. God sent an angel to proclaim Jesus’ birth to Joseph: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18). Joseph then wanted to leave Mary in secret (Matthew 1:19). “But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’” (Matthew 1:20). Then, the angel announced to Joseph the name of the son, as well as its meaning (Matthew 1:21).

The divinely-inspired evangelist completes the account, writing that all of this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah (Matthew 1:22-23). Matthew takes care to emphasize that Joseph did not know her until she had given birth to her first son (Matthew 1:25).

3. The angel Gabriel announced the coming birth of Jesus to Mary as well. “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27). The angel said to Mary in verse 31: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.” Then we read in verses 34-35: “Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’”
4. The Holy Spirit attested to this truth through Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-43). The cited evidence,

along with the testimony of two evangelists, is enough to ground our faith and let us rest in the living hope of our Lord Jesus.

The necessity of the virgin birth.

Sin and death were a result of the fall of Adam. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world . . .” (Romans 5:12). That applies to all of humanity. The depravity was inherited by all generations, and every descendant of Adam was by nature a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Christ had to be without sin. He is the pure, spotless Lamb of God in whom there is no sin, as Scripture says. The angel Gabriel said to Mary: “that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). That was only possible through a virgin birth.

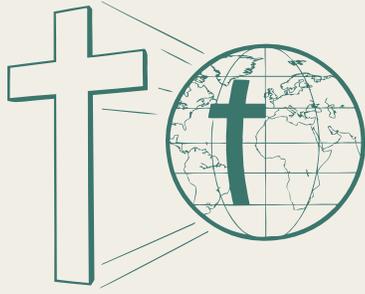
It was equally necessary for Christ to be both God and human, since a full pardon from sin would otherwise have been impossible. A human sacrifice alone would not have been enough, for God said: “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever” (Psalm 49:7-8). This explains the fact that people who deny the divinity of Christ are forced to reject the entire doctrine of atonement and to claim that Jesus was fully human and merely a good example.

The birth of Jesus was something wonderful.

The wonderful birth of Jesus is unique in the history of the world. It fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. He was the greatest figure ever to be born; He was the mediator and the Savior of the world; He was the Son of God. His birth occurred in astonishing lowliness. He was born in a stable, and His parents were very poor. Wonderful events surrounded His birth. Angels from heaven announced it, singing and praising God. The wise men from the Orient came and sought the new-born king of the Jews, bringing the Child presents and worshipping Him. They did not yet know that Jesus was the Savior of all humanity and the Lord and King of all peoples.

Yes, Christ was born as King. That was the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth, the beginning of a reign of righteousness, and the beginning of a new religion that would eclipse all others. The birth of this Child was a blessing for millions of individuals, for entire families, communities and nations, and for the whole world. Thank God for the virgin birth of Jesus! It gave us the Son of God and Man in the person of Jesus Christ.

H. M. Riggle



Radio Broadcast Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs, Kitchener, Ontario

The Wonderful and Great Love of God

*Words alone cannot adequately describe and praise this love.
It must simply be recognized and experienced.*

The love of God is the fundamental theme of the Holy Scriptures. It is therefore also emphasized again and again by the writers of the Bible. Much has been written, preached, and composed about this divine love. Yet it remains unfathomable to us. Convinced of this fact, Wilhelm Jung wrote:

*God's great love has no limit,
deeper than the deepest ocean,
higher than the shining stars,
farther than the clouds can motion.*

This tells us that we can encounter this love everywhere and that it can find us, too!

The Love of God is visible!

John directed his readers to these comforting truths in his letter: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us" (1 John 3:1). This love was the main theme of his writings and sermons. This was the reason he was called the "apostle of love." God actually made His love visible. And whatever is visible cannot be denied. But whoever does not want to see or recognize this love will pass by it. It is certain that God has made His love visible in the gift and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. John testified: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the

Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-14). We can also see Christ with true faith. Isaac Watts testified:

*When I survey the wondrous cross,
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride!*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

The love of God is immeasurably deep.

As unfathomable as God is, so incomprehensible and deep is His love. D. S. Warner wrote:

*O love divine, unfathomed!
O shoreless sea of bliss!
Thy throne the highest heaven,
Yet flowing down to this
Dark world of guilt and sorrow,
Redeems the fettered soul;
Thy paths of peace I follow,
O love, our hearts extol!*



God wants to reveal His love to everyone

Even though we cannot comprehend this love to its full extent, we can experience its pure and healing action. It goes after the lost, the broken hearted, and the deeply fallen soul. It seeks to meet the destitute and wounded heart. It has pity for the despondent and helpless. It does not pass by the desperate, the forsaken, or even those dying by the side of the road. Love wants to uplift, forgive, heal, rescue, and save.

And anyone who has even comprehended a little of the depth and width of this love will give thanks with Tersteegen:

*O Love divine, all else transcending,
In Jesus present evermore . . .
Yea, let my soul, in deep devotion,
Bathe in love's mighty, boundless ocean.*

Yes, out of love for a lost world, God gave His Son that no one should be lost. Jesus said: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). That is divine Love! And where is there a love that has made such a great sacrifice for us as the love of God?

The Love of God is eternal.

Love is unchanging and eternally constant. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek

its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

This is not a weak and sensitive human love, but this is the love from God! What an awesome love! The special thing is that this love can dwell in the hearts of the redeemed. Life with God and love are connected. Advent and the Christmas season give us a wonderful opportunity to think about this love.

Someone was walking through the streets of a city. From afar, he saw a church with a display case in front of it. He thought: "Surely there will be a dark, dejected human form with a verse next to it." As he approached, he discovered a brilliant poster, and in large letters it said: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "Yes, so who is the man whom God loves?" he asked himself. He stood before the display case and realized that the shining poster was a mirror, and in this mirror he saw himself! Now he understood that God loved him too! He said to himself, "I want to understand this whole thing anew and rejoice that God also loves me. And He loves me just the way I am!"

Do you not also want to understand this, my dear friend? Let this fact touch your heart, and do not postpone your salvation. Realize that "it was His great love that brought Him down to us—what would have become of me if there was no Savior!" Think about this especially during the Christmas season!

Jesus Stands Alone— in His Birth

What must the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem have been thinking on that historic night some 2000 years ago, when God's Son was born? In the quiet of that most holy night, did they think of the prophecies of old, that the Messiah would be born in their hometown and that of King David? Did they recall the words of the prophet, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). It had been some 400 years since the last prophet of the Old Testament had spoken. Perhaps that night they silently prayed, "Oh Lord when will you come? Please come soon." Suddenly heaven gave its answer!

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

And 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, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:8-14).

Never in the history of humankind had the birth of a child been heralded in such fashion. The very heavens opened up and the brilliance of God's glory lit up the night sky, and an angel proclaimed to the shepherds of Bethlehem's fields the birth of God's Savior to the world. Heaven's message was of such importance that the angel-

ic host joined in praising God for His wonderful gift to all people. In all of history, Jesus stands alone as the only begotten Son of the Father full of grace and truth! On that night the Word, by which all things were created, became flesh and would dwell among us (see John 1:1-16).

Never had there been a birth heralded by extensive prophecy. Most children are born into this world unannounced. Even those who attain greatness and fame appear on the pages of history without prior announcement. Herein Jesus stands alone in the pre-announcement of His birth. The prophecies of old declared that the Messiah would be born from the house of Judah and of David's seed, in the little town of Bethlehem and of a virgin. This would happen according to God's perfect timing.

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:4-7).

The Good News is that Jesus opens the way to the Father for all who would receive this amazing gift of grace and forgiveness. Of all the gifts of Christmas, none compares to this most wondrous of all gifts. Those who receive God's Son in faith become His children and heirs of God! (John 1:12).

In all of history, never before and never again would a virgin conceive and bring forth a child. This promise was given by the prophet Isaiah in 7:14; "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Jesus stands alone in His birth from the virgin Mary. What a special name this child would bear. He would

be called Immanuel or God with us. God drew near to us in His Son to bring us peace. His name would be called Jesus; the Christ and our Savior. He would live among us, understand us, love us and suffer with us. He would bring us God's message of hope and peace and demonstrate its power in His healing and teaching ministry.

Jesus alone was born to die for the sins of the world.

Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, is not far from Calvary, the place of suffering. Only some 8 kilometers from where Jesus was born, He would be crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem at Calvary. Some 30 years later, this celebrated Child would become the disdain of many. They would reject His preaching of God's Kingdom and His claim to being the Messiah. They would have Him condemned to death and nailed to a cross. But for this very purpose, Jesus was sent as our Savior to bear our sins on the cross. From this sacrifice flows the greatest gift to those who repent and in faith accept God's forgiveness, peace, and healing of the soul. Dear reader, have you experienced this great gift of salvation? Jesus alone can give you this heavenly peace with His Father. May you accept it with a humble heart and live forever in Him.

The shepherds of Bethlehem's fields believed the angels' message and rushed to the manger to see the promised Child. There they found Mary and Joseph with their newborn son, Jesus. They now stood in the presence of the Good Shepherd. By faith they would become sheep of His flock. Jesus alone, as the Good Shepherd of our souls, could lead them to green pastures and beside still waters, and finally home to life everlasting with the Father in heaven. Their prayers had been answered and their joy knew no bounds! On that most holy night, all of their deepest longings had been fulfilled in the Savior's birth. They could not contain their joy and began to spread these good tidings to all who would listen to God's message of love and peace (Luke 2:15-20). This message still resonates through the centuries to us as fresh and vibrant as the night it was proclaimed. Jesus stands alone in His birth as our Savior and Lord! This alone is the true meaning of Christmas.

Harry Klinger
Hamilton, ON

**VERSE OF THE
MONTH**

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32).

God gave us the best gift of all in His only Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we can have everything we need to be eternally happy. This gift is free for you. Have you already accepted it? Has Jesus become your personal Friend and Savior? Can you celebrate Christmas in your heart? If not, this offer is still open to you today.

Let us pray that many more people recognize and accept this gift of mercy and salvation.

Experiences with God

“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul” (Psalm 66:16).

In 1948, we came to Karaganda, Kazakhstan. My mother started searching for a gathering of believers. In our vicinity, she found believers who gathered together in a home, and after several months, she found salvation.

It was preached that one should find salvation. But I just could not understand how to do it. At home, I asked: “Mother, why does my heart beat so hard during the service?”—“You need to get saved,” was her answer.—“But how do I get saved?”—“You need to ask forgiveness for your sins,” was my mother’s reply. So with child-like faith, I prayed. That was in 1951.

The next spring, the preacher and some other brothers were arrested, and the meetings were closed and forbidden. But God led that young brothers from the church of God came from the distant city of Pavlodar, where Brother Heinz Hoss was the preacher.

These brothers brought a new doctrine and talked about the church of God. After a few months, the older congregants realized that this was the full truth as taught in Scripture.

In these services, I experienced a complete transformation. The Spirit of God showed me that I was a sinner. In deep sorrow, I repented and asked God to forgive all my sins. Now I could really grasp what Jesus had done for me on the cross. My heart rejoiced. Now I understood the words of this song:

*Now I have found the ground wherein
Sure my soul’s anchor may remain—
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin
Before the world’s foundation slain;
Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,
When heav’n and earth have passed away.*

Now I could tell others about the love of God and what the Lord had done for my soul. I was able to minister in the church of God in Karaganda, and later I was responsible for leading the congregation in our part of the city until we emmigrated to Germany.

With God’s help, we are able to have services of the church of God here in Bösinggen, where I serve the congregation. God alone be praised, thanked, and honored forever!

Waldemar Rogalsky,
Bösinggen (Germany)



CHILDREN'S CORNER

“Goodwill Toward Men!”

The author Herbert Kuhn shared the following experience from his childhood to explain the wonder of Christmas:

A pair of blackbirds hatched their young under the roof of my parents' house. But repeatedly, when the baby birds attempted their first flight, they were eaten by the cat. But one spring, young Herbert decided to prevent this tragedy. He watched closely, and when the first little blackbird left the nest, he carefully lifted it up, stood a ladder up against the house and carried the little animal back into its nest.

But then the poor little birds were filled with fear as Herbert's head appeared over the opening of the nest. It was enormous in comparison to their miniature size. In terror, they climbed over the edge of the nest and took off in a flurry. The cat who had heard the loud chirping, however, was there in a flash and once again ate them up.

Afterwards, with sadness, Herbert complained to his mom about the foolish blackbirds. However, she answered: “If you had turned yourself into a blackbird,

the young would not have been frightened and would still be alive.”—“But,” replied the boy, “no human can do that, turn himself into a blackbird!”—“Yes,” his mother finally said, “You're right, no human can do that; only God can do that. And He did it for humanity when He descended to us on that Christmas night.”

Young Herbert showed goodwill toward the blackbirds, but he could not rescue them. He could not change himself into a blackbird. But God did transform Himself. God became human for our sake. He showed His goodwill toward us. He did not want us to be consumed by the powers of hell, and He also did not want us to be killed by terror of His greatness and might.

*So that sinners might receive grace and worth,
You lowered Yourself, as Lord of the earth,
You chose to take part in our humanness,
came in the flesh to bring healing and forgiveness.*

A. W.

Celebrate Christmas —But the Right way!

Christmas is a wonderful family celebration. It can be even more memorable and meaningful when we prepare our hearts for this special time and celebrate it from the proper perspective.

Christmas carols are sounding over the speakers again and again at this time of year. The pre-Christmastime has begun. As Christians, we also celebrate Christmas. Our focus is the birth of the Savior. Jesus Christ came in “the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7), to give His life at Golgotha by proxy, in our stead. The exact date of His birth is not known, and it is not absolutely necessary to know it. What matters is that He was born.

Celebrating Christmas is one thing, but celebrating Christmas properly is something entirely different. Commercially, Christmas is celebrated on a large scale. There is a danger for us to be drawn into the current of the time; and then, almost without realizing it, we celebrate Christmas exactly like everyone else does.

Christmas should not burden us or make our life difficult, rather it should be a joyous and blessed time. But not only that, we want to visibly demonstrate the blessing of the Christmas season and pass it on. The Christmas blessing is not just for a select few, but for “all people” (Luke 2:10).

The Christmas season, like almost everything else in life, must be planned well. The upcoming celebration is a fitting opportunity to discuss how Christmas should properly be celebrated. Children often have good and even practical ideas of how this can be done. The thoughts of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:18 could certainly be used as a dominant theme: “that in all things He may

have the preeminence (NLT: So he is first in everything).”

Over time, I have learned that in order to avoid stress, one must begin preparing early. To leave everything to the “last minute” causes unnecessary stress that essentially nobody wants. When you send out your Christmas cards early, not only do they arrive at their destination before Christmas, but we avoid that constant reminder, every time we receive a Christmas card, that we still need to mail ours.

Allow me to give a few practical tips for the planning of the Christmas season.

Christmas Goodies—you can buy these or bake them yourself. The aroma of Christmas baking fills the whole house. There is no lack of possibilities. From cookies to sweet loaves, cookbooks are filled with recipes. Do not put off the baking to the last minute. Bake early. Bake some extra cookies. They are great to bring along as hostess gifts. Many an elderly person cannot leave their home. A visit during the Christmas season with some cookies brings joy and comfort to the lonely.

Christmas Decorations—the same principle applies here: do it early. It prolongs the joy of Christmas and touches the hearts of those who visit us. The Christmas message should be expressed through the decorations and can often be used as a springboard for discussion.

Thanksgiving—is just a part of it. It was important to us that our children learned at a young age to say, “thank

you.” And if they forgot, the question came: “what do you say?” God gifted us at Christmas. From John 3:16 we know that God loved the world so much, that “He gave His only begotten Son.” He was the first Christmas gift. Paul must have thought about this when he wrote to the church at Corinth: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15). If we move thankfulness to the forefront, the Christmas celebration becomes purposeful and Jesus Christ is doubtlessly given “the preeminence.”

Gifts—Since God gave us the greatest gift, His Son, the desire arose to express Christmas joy through the giving of gifts. When giving gifts, it is important not to overdo it. When spending money, we should not forget that the credit card bill arrives in January and if we cannot cover it, we will be struggling with high interest rates. Have you ever noticed that the expensive gifts are not necessarily the most valuable to the recipient? Gifts of love reach the heart. What should we look for when choosing a gift? Is there something that could spiritually enrich the recipient? This requires some thought and ingenuity. When buying toys, one needs to be careful that they do not have an occult background. Not everything that children want is good and wholesome. We want to be a help to our children and grandchildren and not become a hindrance. Throughout the course of the year, my wife thinks about the coming Christmas season, and buys gifts at a discount and puts them away “for Christmas.” In December, we do not need to think about what we will give. An older Sister explained that in her home it is customary to take one of the gifts they receive and re-gift it to a less fortunate person.

Christmas Gatherings—It is so nice to get together with dear people during Christmastime. We travel or receive guests, we invite people or receive invitations. How can I organize a Christmas party where my guests go home as blessed individuals? And when I am invited, I should ask myself: how can I be a blessing as a guest? It is good to pray over this and ask the Lord how best to proceed. Everything has its place, from the gifts to the Christmas roast. But they are not the chief object of Christmas, rather they are more like the gift wrapping around the actual gift.

God’s Word—The Bible has a lot to say about the Christmas event, directly and indirectly. Right at the beginning of the Bible, we read about the fall of man and the separation of man from God. If Christ had not come into the world, we would be hopelessly lost. The prophets

arose and prophesied of the coming of a Savior. The writers of the four gospels then reported the actual Christmas event, the birth of the Savior. If we take time to immerse ourselves in Scripture, we are seized by the love of God. Scripture is part of it. A Sister had invited us to her home. At the meal, under each plate we found a Bible verse and a question about the events of Christmas. The conversation that came from this was the beginning of a blessed evening for all participants.

Christmas Carols—What a blessed effect singing can have. Precisely in the songs and through the singing, Christ receives “the preeminence.” Is it not much more profitable if I, as the host, plan the evening to give it direction? Some sheet music lying on the table indicates that today there will be singing. And if we are invited, one could ask the question whether it would be appropriate to sing a few Christmas carols. I have never received a negative response to such a question. On the contrary, many people have said at the end of the evening: “That was such a nice evening.”

Lonely People—Not everyone has relatives and not everyone has family. How does such a person celebrate Christmas? While we celebrate Christmas with “our people,” others spend their evening in solitude. Would it be possible to invite a lonely person here and there? Maybe we could scoot the chairs a bit closer together around the table. There are also lonely people in nursing homes and hospitals. How much joy we could bring with a visit during the Christmas season. If we take our children along and sing a few Christmas carols, not only are the listeners blessed, but also those who are spreading the blessing. And our children learn how easy it is to spread cheer. But that is only possible if we write our Christmas cards on time, bake cookies on time, and buy presents early so that we are not stressing about those!

The preceding points are only intended as suggestions. There are so many ways to turn Christmas into a blessing. Plan the Christmas season. Involve your children in the planning. They often have good ideas and it makes them feel important as well.

Do not make the main thing secondary, and the secondary into the main thing. Set your priorities straight.

And now I wish you and yours a Christmas season richly blessed from the Lord in which Jesus Christ has “the preeminence.”

Harry Semenjuk
Wetaskiwin, AB



The Lord's Prayer

By Gerhard Mielke - Part 8: Our Daily Bread

Why did Jesus teach us to pray: Our daily bread give us today? In the original Greek text, “Give us today” are the last three words in this sentence. Why not leave out “today”?

1. Jesus wants us to ask in faith. We should not pray, just in general, but also specifically for today. It is possible that when we pray, we are not expecting an answer today or tomorrow. Maybe not even next week, or next year. This prayer teaches us that we can count on God's help today.

2. Jesus wants us to take one day at a time. This reminds me of a gospel song written by Marijohn Wilkin: “One day at a time . . . that's all I'm asking from You. Give me the strength to do ev'ry day, what I have to do. Yesterday's gone . . . and tomorrow may never be mine. Lord, help me today, show me the way, one day at a time.”

In His sermon on the mount Jesus said: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34).

3. Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us our daily bread, today” because He wants us to live in the present.

There are some people who live in the past, and are always talking about the good old days and wishing for times gone by. And yet the Bible says: “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For you do not inquire wisely concerning this” (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

There are other people who always live in the future. They may still be on vacation and are already planning

their next one. Or perhaps it is the weekend, and instead of enjoying the weekend, they are already worrying about their next week at work. By always living in the past, or constantly living in the future, we forget about today. We neglect to take time for the children, for our friends or for our spouse today. We neglect to take time for the Lord today. We neglect to enjoy the pleasures, beautiful memories, and small joys the Lord sends our way today. In the New Testament (NKJV) the word yesterday occurs only three times, the word tomorrow comes up eleven times, but today occurs 29 times. Jesus is the eternal I AM. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

4. By praying: Give us our daily bread, today, Jesus encourages us to pray for today's needs. Bring today's concerns to the Lord. Today, have you already asked God to give you His strength for this day? God is not only interested in the big things of life, in which you can obtain His guidance. He also wants you to bring the little things of this day to Him in prayer. Some people fret and ask themselves if they would have had the courage of the martyrs in confessing Christ even unto death. Do not worry about that. God gives strength according to the day. When I was in Grade 3, I could not have handled all the homework expected of a Grade 12 student, and if I had worried about the assignments I needed to finish during graduate school when I was still a child, that would have been ludicrous. As I mature, I do not even realize that what I find easy today would have been extremely difficult at an earlier stage. In like manner, God



*“Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.”*

(Matthew 6:9-13)

gives the strength for the work ahead when the time comes.

In Mark 13, Jesus speaks of terrible times ahead for the disciples: “For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days” (Mark 13:19-20).

Yet He still tells them not to worry: “But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11).

Your duty is to live victoriously for the Lord today. What the future holds we do not know, but should times of affliction arise, it is then that the Lord will give us the strength we need in that hour.

People who do not believe in victorious living say it is impossible to live a godly life in this present age. Yet that is what the Bible tells us to do in Titus 2:12. And Jesus Himself says: “go and sin no more” (John 8:11b). Can you live without sin for a minute? Sure. Maybe an hour? Could you perhaps live victoriously for one day? Let us focus on today, and live the way the Lord wants us to live today, and not worry about the long term. Let God take care of that.

5. God’s time is today. In the New Testament the word “today” is found more than twice as often as the words “yesterday” and “tomorrow” combined. In Hebrews 3:7-

8a we read: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’” When Jesus met Zacchaeus in Jericho He said to him: “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5b) and “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). You see, God’s time is today. Hear the voice of God today. Don’t wait until tomorrow; Christ wants to live in your heart today. Don’t harden your heart, for salvation is here for you today. Act according to 1 John 1:9 and salvation is yours.

To the penitent thief on the cross, Jesus said: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The thief on the cross knew he was saved and was going to paradise today. He knew this even before he got to paradise. Likewise, even if we still have years to live, we can know today that we are saved. The day of salvation is today. God’s time is today. Are you saved today? Saying I was saved yesterday, or I want to be saved tomorrow is irrelevant. You need to be certain of salvation today. Not yet, and too late are ploys of the devil. It is not God who says not yet or too late. Today is His time.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). So “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matthew 6:34).

Don’t live in the past. Don’t live in the future. Live in the present. And don’t forget: Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Therefore you can pray for your current needs, today.

Impossible?

A miserable existence! He, we will call him Heinz, drank—and how! The whole family was affected and suffered, and the farm was neglected. He raged, ranted, swore, and beat them. His wife scolded, shrieked, grumbled, and scratched. He spent all his money in the pub so that these establishments prospered. To survive, his wife borrowed money wherever possible. Admittedly, what could she do differently? Five children needed food, as well as herself and Heinz. Misery was visible throughout the home. The needs and mess were visible in every corner of the home. It was a wretched existence, unsuited for humans, a life from hell. The poor people, the poor children!

What a Christmas they had last year! Horrible! She had nothing for the children, not even something to eat, never mind presents. She tried all day long to acquire something borrowed or to be gifted something, but all her efforts were in vain. She was known, and so was he.

Finally, a church social worker came and brought a basket filled with food items and some presents for the children. In spite of all the family's extenuating circumstances, she could not forget about their needs.

And Heinz? He had not been sober for three days. He was unemployed again, and he had gotten his hands on the unemployment money. The family had not seen one cent of it. It all went to the pub owner and his supporters. As well, he came home again at 3 a.m.—and how! He had instigated a fight in the pub and was beaten up. Now he was not just drunk but also full of rage. The alcohol encouraged him to direct his anger towards his wife and children until the neighbors called two policemen. They encountered a wild man, an abused wife, beaten children, and a wrecked house and furniture. They took him with them and held him until the next afternoon, when, upon his release, he immediately went again to the pub. There he met some companions who paid for his drinks, but this did not stop him from arguing with them.

Suddenly someone stabbed him in the ribs, and that evening he lay in the hospital. Now his wife and children finally had some peace, food to eat, as now that welfare money did not go to the pub owner.

God has many different methods! A follower of Jesus, working as a handyman, fell from a ladder. Three fractured ribs resulted in him being placed into the same room as Heinz. On New Year's Day, the visiting hour came. No one came to visit the alcoholic, but the believer's wife and four children visited his roommate.

As Heinz watched the family, a thought passed through his mind—they must be well off. They were all well dressed, they had brought many items along, and they talked about the gifts they had received for Christmas! Yes, they even gave him something. The small present touched his heart. For years, no one had given him a present. How much must this man earn? Heinz was a pipefitter, and in the past, he had looked down on the handymen and helpers.

Now, however, he was sober and could think things through. He compared the family of his roommate with his own family. How happy this family was! What about his wife and children and himself? The miserable drinking! The dreadful alcohol!

Why had he not noticed this earlier? These people were polite to him, even though they were not related! This man did not swear, did not grumble, and was not unhappy. He read in the Bible and prayed! Who still does that today? He also gave him a tract! No one would have tried that fourteen days ago!

Now he began to read what he had been given. This was impossible! But it was so. Yes, it is like the author had written. It was not long before the roommates began talking. Not even a pastor could speak as this handyman did. How did he know all this? Everything that he said was so clear and understandable.

His roommate's wife had even visited his wife. On the Sunday after New Year's Day, his wife came to visit him in the hospital, but she seemed different than before.

Heinz' pain from the stab wound increased. The doctor's face assumed a doubtful look. "If your blood were cleaner, you could recover more quickly." An infection of the lungs and ribs set in, and he was moved to another room. For weeks, he swayed between life and death. His roommate had recovered and had been released.

However, every Sunday, Heinz's believing roommate came to visit him. Heinz looked forward to this every week. His roommate's wife and his wife with their children came on Wednesday. When Heinz was finally released, through God's help he had become a different man and his wife a different woman. Now it is Christmas again. How different it is than last year!

Now, both of them were standing in spirit beside the crib with that wonderful Child. Their faces reflected their hearts, as well as their minds: "Behold, all things have become new"!

*Oh, that is a different life
If one knows: I have been freed,
My sins have been forgiven,
My life to the Lord I cede.*

They are still poor, but in spite of that, they are rich. They still need to work hard to better their circumstances, but what a different life they now have when compared to before! No one needs to wish these people a merry Christmas. They have it. They have experienced that "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God"!

A Blessed New Year

In a city in New England, there lived a man named Jim Drayton. Once a respected craftsman, he had gradually become an alcoholic. His small home had fallen to ruin, and he had pawned almost all of his possessions to fuel his habit. The happiness of his home had given way to anguish and misery. His wife suffered from a broken heart, and his children went about disheveled and in rags. The man himself boasted torn clothes and a haggard face.

One New Year's Eve, he went to the pub intending to see the old year off. Since the bartender was busy when he entered, he sat down in a corner, alone. As he was waiting, two young men walked in and ordered a beer. As they drank, one said to the other: "Say, Bill, did you hear that Jim Drayton slit his throat?" The other answered: "That's great news if it's true. Nobody will miss a guy like that. Even his family will be better off without him. He really was the worst drunkard in this town."

The first replied: "Yes, I've often wondered why he doesn't just end it all. If I ever got to be that sad and

pathetic, I would just shoot myself in the head."

Old Jim had heard every word. He drew his hat down further over his face, thought about what he had overheard, and asked himself: "Have I really sunk that low? Would my death be a relief for my family and a blessing for this town?—Oh Lord, help me to stop drinking and to become a new man!"

At just this moment, the bartender called: "Jim, do you want a cup?"—Jim jumped up and said: "No, I'm going to quit drinking, starting now!" Loud laughter tore through the room. "Hear, hear! Jim Drayton wants to quit drinking!"

"Yes, I do, with God's help!" said Jim, leaving the bar and heading home. He paused a while at his doorstep, appalled by his home's state of disrepair. Finally, he stepped through the door. When his wife heard the door open, she frantically searched for a hiding spot, cowering in fear.

Reaching out to her, he said: "Mary, come here! I'm not drunk tonight! Mary, I haven't had a drop to

drink tonight," he repeated, clasping her hand.

"Oh, Jim!" she exclaimed, clutching at his neck and sobbing loudly. Jim continued: "People call me Old Jim Drayton and say that I'm nothing but a burden on my family and this town, and that I'm past saving. But Mary, from now on, if God answers my prayer, I won't drink anymore. Wake up the children, let's pray together!"

"Does daddy want to kill us?" the children whispered when their mother woke them.

"Oh no, he's sober now. He wants to be a kind, good father again," she sobbed.

Not long after that, Jim Drayton was kneeling in the midst of his crying family and praying over and over again: "Oh Lord, forgive me for my past! Help me to love and serve You and to be a good husband and father in the future!"

His prayers were answered. When the sun rose on the New Year the next morning, a new sun had risen in Jim Drayton's heart as well: the sun of righteousness, renewing and reviving his entire future life.

Did You Grow?

That we “may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4,15b).

We have come to another milestone. We sit down on it to catch our breath and look back on the path that we’ve trod. Yes, we’ve journeyed a distance. In life, there is no rest or standing still. Without fail, the current of time carries us forward. But, in what manner did we journey? Have we traveled with a set goal in mind as the wise men did? They kept their eyes on the star until it led them to the newborn King. Or are we headed who knows where like an abandoned ship with broken masts that is simply carried along with the currents of the sea?

Where do we stand? What was the net gain of our work and effort in this past year? Let us balance the books and calculate what successes and failures the year brought.

Each year, another growth ring is added to the oak tree. By this one can see that the tree has grown. With each ring, the tree becomes larger and stronger and is more deeply rooted. The diligent human soul also obtains its yearly rings. With each year it grows, becomes larger, richer and deeper. Woe however, to that soul if it is hardened and becomes arid and dry! One can make firewood out of a dried out oak trunk. But, how does a selfish, unproductive soul benefit others?

Did you grow in the past year? Did the past add to your soul’s maturity? Maybe you did better financially than ever before: your business blossomed, your harvest was plentiful, and your handiwork brought blessings and gain. That is reason to be thankful. Don’t forget that! But, that may not mean you had growth in Christ. The bank account may have increased, but are you richer in God? In a true Christian life, these yearly rings are revealed by increasing evidence of “wisdom” and “favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

Did you grow in knowledge?

Do you have a better understanding of the Lord’s will for your life? Do you have a deeper understanding of His leading, a clearer vision for His ways and a more attentive ear to hear His voice? Did you faithfully attend worship services in the past year, listen to the messages, and study God’s holy Word on your own?—Did all of

this bring you closer to God? The older children become, the more understanding they have for the intentions and plans of their parents. This is how it should be for God’s children. Over the years they should come to understand their heavenly Father more deeply and should follow His will more assuredly and more fully.

Did your character increase?

Did you become a better, more genuine, virtuous person? After all, that is the only real, lasting progress we can make as we allow our character to be transformed into the image of Him who left us an example, that we should follow in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21). A growing Christian increases in maturity, in noble character and in purity. The higher and holier his ideals and goals, the higher and godlier his life’s purposes are and the purer and more fruitful his life becomes. Only the genuine fruit of the Spirit flourishes. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23a). Was your character more firmly grounded in what is good, or are you still driven by moods and passions like changing winds that drive a fallen leaf? Ripened fruit becomes more tender, juicy, and sweet. In the same way, a life that is ripened becomes more lovely, genuine, and beautiful.

Did you increase in your work for the Lord?

This year was full of opportunities to do good. How many of those did you take advantage of? A life gets its worth not only by its number of years, but by its usefulness. How many people were blessed by your various deeds? How many tears did you dry, how many sighs did you quiet, and how many hearts did you encourage? Did you show a lost soul the way home? Did you reach out a saving hand to one that was sinking? A life that is rooted in God continually sprouts new blossoms of loving deeds. A growing Christian is an active Christian. “I lost a day,” a Roman Caesar used to say whenever a day went by where he did not accomplish a good deed.—How many days did you lose?

The festive sound of the bells impacts us in an unusual way as we reach the transition between years. We bid farewell to the old year and sound a welcome, to ring in the new. The old year has come to a close. It is forever gone with its joy and suffering. What will the new year bring? Surely there will be new opportunities, new assignments, and new duties! How wonderful that we still have the opportunity to work, strive and fight! “Sir, let it

alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it” (Luke 13:8b). We are given yet another chance for new growth. The secret of a growing, productive life is not hidden from us: “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit” (John 15:5). So let this be our motto for this new year: “but, speaking the truth in love, may [we] grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Readers of the Foundation of Faith!

The turn of the year is always a suitable occasion to look thankfully on the past, upwards in faith, and courageously into the future. Looking back on this past year, we thank our dear Lord and Savior for the indescribable grace that has sustained His work and that has led us through various situations. He also gave the opportunity and means to place the Good News through the printed word into the hands of dear people.

We also are especially thankful for the loyal prayer warriors who have helped carry the load of this work with persistent prayer. For only godly blessing, as well as His continual leading and inspiration, make this publication of value and a help for practical daily living.

Our thanks also goes to the many coworkers in the work of the *Foundation of Faith*. By the time the printed edition reaches the homes of our readers, a great number of faithful workers in various countries have sacrificed many hours of their time to work on that edition. May God richly reward each one of you, likewise the brothers and sisters who make this work possible through their financial support.

God has brought light and blessing through the *Foundation of Faith*. Are there perhaps people in your circle of acquaintances, neighbors, or family who would like to read the *Foundation of Faith*? Perhaps your doctor would lay out a copy of the *Foundation of Faith* at his practice. Wouldn't you also like to become a coworker and invite new readers and bring them nearer to the biblical truth? What a blessing could result if you could gain one new reader every month. We will gladly send a personal copy, free of charge and without obligation, to anyone who is interested.

We wish you a peaceful and richly blessed Christmas celebration. May the eternal God be your guide, shield, and your never-ending source of grace and blessing in the coming year.

The Editors

Another Year

*Another year has passed again;
And it flew by so rapidly.
It just began, but now it's plain
To see it reached eternity.
So lift up your eyes with mine,
To our God, the Lord of time.*

*With speed the hours have slipped away.
Whether they brought joy or pain,
As we look back on them today,
Let's give thanks and not complain.
God gave all that came our way;
We'll trust in Him for each new day.*

*We trust in God, that gives us rest;
He's been faithful all these years.
We know all things work for the best,
If time brings sunshine or brings tears.
A guiding star, Christ is our light,
Even in the darkest night.*

*Through God's great wisdom, it is hidden
What the new year holds in store.
But all our worries we are bidden
To bring to Him, who is our Lord.
God's plan for us, out of love,
Will lead to heaven above.*

*Many things you won't understand,
But look to Jesus, your Lord.
Submit to Him all of your plans,
Build on His grace and His Word.
The Good Shepherd cares for you;
Trust Him in all that you do.*

*All things are possible with God;
Joyfully, embrace this thought.
Let Him lead on the path you trod,
Safely through all you'll be brought.
He will help you and guide you,
Whatever may betide you.*

*Let God's Word be your companion;
Pray confidently each day.
May God give you understanding,
And His Spirit guide your way.
Praise the Lord with every breath;
Whatever comes, be true till death.*

*God will reward you for those things
That you are doing out of love,
Until your soul in heaven sings,
Resting in His arms above;
Without end your joy will be
When you reach eternity.*

Herbert Klinner