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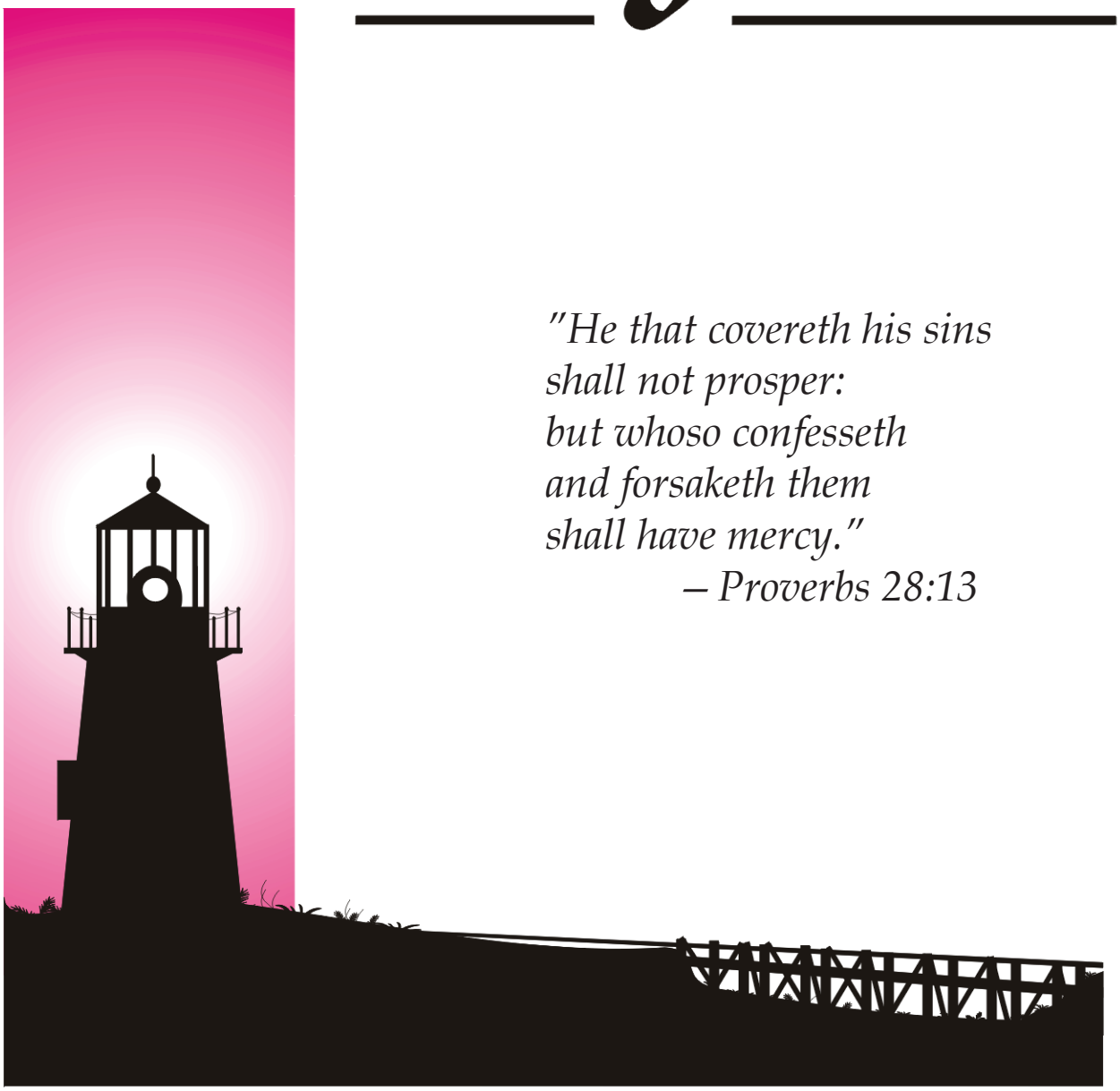

"He that covereth his sins
shall not prosper:
but whoso confesseth
and forsaketh them
shall have mercy."
— Proverbs 28:13

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BEACON LIGHTS

EDITOR
John Huizenga
Email: editor@beaconlights.org

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Ryan Barnhill
Email: barnhilr@mail.gvsu.edu

CONTENTS COMMITTEE
Ryan Barnhill
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BUSINESS OFFICE
Beacon Lights
Jeanine Huizenga
1618 1st Street
Hull, IA 51239
Phone: (712) 439-1897
Email: subscriptions@beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS ON THE INTERNET
www.beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS ON TAPE
A free service to the legally blind. Contact
Brad Vander Veen
11395 Hunters Meadow
Allendale, MI 49401
Phone (616) 895-1904

CHURCH NEWS ANNOUNCEMENTS
Melinda Bleyenberg
Email: DMBleyenberg@tds.net.

BOOK SALES
Contact the Business Office

TYPESETTER
Robert Vermeer

PRINTER
James Huizinga

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The Reality of Christmas

by Harry Langerak

Christmas is one of the most celebrated times of the year in the Christian world today. Church and world alike participate in its majestic celebration. Beginning a month before the date of celebration, the songs of Christmas begin to fill the air. The postman staggers under the ponderous burden of gift packages and greeting cards. Red and white bearded monstrosities are roaming the streets bellowing with inane laughter. Parties are held full of wine, food and song. As the day of celebration approaches, the crescendo of activity is incredible and one realizes that everyone is incomparably and indescribably happy about something.

Does one dare ask the questions, "What meaneth all this intense enthusiasm? Who or what can be responsible for this universal fervor?" The answer one would get is that "Jesus is born." But you may ask, "Is all this fuss over the birth of Jesus?" "Why of course," comes back the impassioned answer. Ah, yes, you see everybody is celebrating because Jesus is born. Yet, in the din of celebration, you will observe two diametrically opposed outlooks regarding this celebration. Jesus was born, but what a difference in outlook. The world which hates God will emphasize the humanity of the babe of Bethlehem. They see a Babe of beauty born in the romantic setting of a cattle stall. What a peaceful scene, what a lovely child, what a heavenly night! Did not the Babe grow to be the best man that ever lived? Certainly if we follow his example, we would be able to achieve the elusive peace on earth and good will towards men. What a terrible irony! They have the answer to the question. Yes, Jesus is born. They see many of the apparent features of Bethlehem. Many are the same things the child of God sees; yet the spectacles they have on are of this world. They see only what man in his sinful fallen state can see. They see what they want to see. Christ says of them in John 9:39, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." How ironic that the world is jolly and merry in the season of their judgment. The reality of Christmas for the world is their condemnation. Jesus as the babe is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, because they are blinded to the reality of who he really is. They want a babe who will grow up to be the Prince of Peace in a better world that man has made.

The child of God sees the babe of Bethlehem through the spectacles of faith and, therefore, his celebration takes on a deeply spiritual meaning. Jesus is God in the flesh. As God, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He is the king of the church and not of the world. He is the Savior of his people and as such, he walked the way of the cross taking on himself the iniquity of his people. The joy of Christmas for the child of God must be the joy of Simeon when he beheld the Babe: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). The reality of Christmas for us is salvation. This provides the peace that passes all understanding.

When you and I are tempted to get caught up in the turmoil and confusion of the celebration of this world's Christmas, remember that they have their reward. They will reap judgment on their heads because they despised the Son of God. It is a celebration born of a hatred of God, and it deliberately attempts to conceal the real meaning of Christmas. Celebrate we must and we will, but remember in all our celebration, never lose sight of God in the babe of Bethlehem. For only then is he the balm of Gilead to the battle

scarred child of God. Above all, do not forget that beyond the manger looms the foreboding spectacle of the cross. A cross which the world hates because it implies humiliation and judgment. To you and me it is the answer of our anguished prayer of "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." The answer comes: "Thy sins are forgiven." Thanks be to God. Let us celebrate Christmas with a joy unspeakable. ❖

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Bible Quiz

Things Jesus Said

Things Jesus Said: Recorded by Matthew

Since these were words spoken by Jesus, they are among the most famous words ever spoken by any one. Can you complete the quotations?

1. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal but…"
2. "Judge not…" Why?
3. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes…"
4. "But when thou doest alms" (that is, when you do any good thing) "let not your left hand know…"
5. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren…"
6. "Take no thought for the morrow…sufficient unto the day…"
7. "I came not to call the righteous…"
8. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world…"
9. "Heaven and earth shall pass away but…"
10. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you…"

Things Jesus Said: Recorded by Mark

One of the things Mark tells us about Jesus' teaching is (Mark 12:37) that "the common people heard him gladly." Can you continue the following quotations? Give the "sense": it is not always necessary to give the exact wording.

1. "The Sabbath was made for man and…"
2. "If a house be divided against itself…"
3. "A prophet is not without honor but…"
4. "Whosoever will come after me, let him…"
5. "If any man desire to be first…"
6. "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for…"
7. "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but…"
8. "Ye have the poor with you always but…"
9. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready…"
10. "Go ye into all the world…"

(Answers on page 21)

The Days of Creation

Day 1

In the beginning the Triune God
Created earth and the heavenly height.
He formed the light, He formed the darkness,
And divided them into day and night.

Day 2

On the earth He divided the waters above
From the waters that were below;
Between them He set forth the firmament
Away from the water's flow.

Day 3

Then from the waters He called forth dry land,
The earth set apart from the seas;
He said, Let the earth bring forth tree, grass, and herb,
And fruit be produced by these.

Day 4

Let there be lights in the heaven, to divide
The day from the night, and for signs,
For seasons, for days and years, and for light
According to God's designs.

God made two great lights—the sun and the moon;
The sun was to rule the day;
The lesser, the moon, was to rule the night,
And the stars the sky overlay.

Day 5

Then God brought forth from the waters around
All creatures that live in the sea;
Great whales, food-fish, amoebae as well,
Ancestors for those to be.

He also made fowl, o'er the waters to fly,
Large birds and small He created.
Each sort would multiply after its kind
As God, the Father, had stated.

Day 6

Then on the earth, things to live on the land;
Each creature designed by God;
He formed creeping things, wild beasts, and cattle
And all that would thrive on the sod.

Then to finish the work of creation
Our God said, Let Us make man;
In Our own image he will be made.
And so human life began.

The dust of the earth, by God's own Breath
A living soul became;
God placed him in Eden, a garden so fair,
And gave unto Adam his name.

And later God said, It is not good
That man should be alone;
He caused a deep sleep on Adam to fall
And He removed a bone.

From the rib He had taken from Adam's side
God formed a woman, named Eve;
She was the perfect help-meet for him,
As Adam did soon perceive.

At the end of each day, surveying His work
God called it 'Excellent".
He rested, and hallowed the seventh day:
Our God, Omnipotent!

*****

We know that we all are creatures of dust,
Given life by the Holy Spirit;
Yet we fell to the depths in horrible sin;
And His voice, we wished not to hear it.

God's grace overruled our evil desires,
For He ever loved his own;
His dear Son's atonement paid for our sins,
We'll rejoice with our Lord on the throne.

—Thelma Westra

A Child Loved: Chastened and Scourged

by Daniel Miersma

Daniel Miersma, a 24 year old member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, was a busy student studying mechanical engineering with many exciting opportunities available for him, when God, in his inscrutable wisdom suddenly and very violently with heart wrenching anguish of soul yanked him from that life, and brought him (and brings us) face to face with the reality of God's holiness. Daniel wrote this letter from jail to his congregation in Redlands. With encouragement of some from his congregation, he sent it to Beacon Lights *for publication. "I want to be an example to others, my church and family want me to be an example to others. Perhaps my letter may be used to encourage others from other churches to turn from their sinful lifestyles. I know that I am not the only person in our churches that drinks too much or has a problem with drinking."*

Dear church family,

I would like to start off by thanking everyone for all their thoughts, cards, and prayers towards me and my family during this difficult time in our lives. I covet and cherish them so much! "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friends" (Prov. 27:17). I've gotten so many letters from so many different people that I find it impossible to write everyone back. I spend much of my free time studying my Bible or writing letters, but it's never enough. In fact people are always making fun of me because I sharpen so many pencils everyday in my classes. This letter is my way of getting back to so many of you that I couldn't. Sorry for the delay!

For those of you who don't know, on October 10, 2009, I got into a DUI accident in which I fell asleep at the wheel and hit another vehicle. One person was killed, another seriously injured. After being in the hospital all night and much of the next morning, I was sent to jail. There I sat for a few days battered and bruised, both physically and emotionally. I was eventually bailed out, where I then continued going to school. I fought my case for about 8 months before I finally turned myself in on June 23rd. I was sentenced to serve 2/3 of 270 days in jail and 5 years probation. The Lord was definitely with me, as this was a very lenient sentence. My release date is set for December 12, 2010.

Since my incarceration, I've been moved a number of times. I first went to West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga. Here I was housed in a cell with about 45 other men, one bathroom, one shower, and very little privacy. Rarely were we allowed to leave the cell and much of the day we were confined to our bunks. Each day we would get a certain amount of time to stretch out in the day room, an open portion of the cell with tables, phones, and a TV. We were served all our meals in the day room. There were no clocks and we could barely see the light of day. It was here that I learned about politics, a form of gang mentality that separated everyone according to their race. This was done by the inmates, not the jail. Each race tried to keep its own race in order and took turns each day in cleaning up the cell.

On July 9, I was moved to Glen Helen Rehabilitation Center in San Bernardino. Now I was in a cell (dorm) with double the amount of inmates and with a lot stronger politics. This building held 4 dorms, dorms 1-4, and they all shared the same day room and small outside dirt yard. I hated this place and found it very annoying as it housed many of the younger, immature, problem people that were too unruly to be trusted with work.

Fortunately, I was only there for a couple of days. On July 11, I was moved from the non-working orange dorms to the working blue dorms. I now wore blue instead of orange and the inmates were much more pleasant to be around and deal with. I was sent to work in ODR, the Officers Dining Room, where I bussed tables and helped prepare food for the officers. Every day I had to get up at 4:30 a.m. for breakfast, be at work at 6 a.m., and work till 6 p.m. I had to do this 7 days a week.

I only did this for one week before I was again moved. On July 19, I was sent up to Big Bear jail. This was about as good as it could get around here for jail. It was nicknamed "Camp Snoopy" because it really was a lot like being in a summer camp, only you actually had to work. I had my own cell to sleep in, we could walk about

the jail as we pleased, we could walk around outside as we pleased without any fences holding us in, our family and friends could bring us many luxuries we couldn't have in normal jail, and the deputies and officers trusted us and treated us like normal people, which was very refreshing. Here we did a little of everything, including washing vehicles, painting, splitting wood, going to the dump, changing the occasional wheel or light bulb in one of the patrol units, cleaning cells, and cooking. Being in Big Bear was truly a blessing!

Unfortunately I couldn't stay In Big Bear. I had court ordered IN-ROADS classes I had to complete before I was released back into the world. I have to take 6 classes: living skills, substance abuse, anger management, computer skills, cognitive skills, and pre-release (how to find a job). The program is set up so that I will take two classes a month for three months. Thus, on August 23rd I was sent back down to Glen Helen.

My first two classes, living skills and substance abuse, didn't start till August 30, so I spent most of my first week working in laundry. This was the easiest job in the world, and yet other inmates still managed to complain about it. When you witness the attitude and work ethic of many of these inmates, you know exactly why they are in jail and can't seem to get anywhere in life.

I am here because I sinned. I am guilty of the sin of drunkenness; I am guilty of the sin of murder. Whether I meant to hurt anyone or not, in my own pride and selfishness I did. I thought not of the safety and well-being of others, but only myself. I wanted to get home that night so that I wouldn't get into any trouble. I didn't even think of my own safety. For all the times in my life where I would go out and drink too much or take delight in the many other sinful pleasures of this world, that is why I am here. For all the times that I would forget about God and put myself before him, that is why I'm here. God saw that I needed a life change, and so in his loving mercy he decided to chasten me.

God saw that I needed a life change, and so in his loving mercy he decided to chasten me.

Many may see my jail time as my punishment, but it is only a fraction of it. It is a small portion in which the Lord has given me the opportunity to take a break from the world and study his word that I may grow in wisdom, knowledge, faith, understanding, strength, courage, and humility. John 15:1-2 says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The Lord is pruning me while I am in jail. He cut away many of my earthly distractions in life so that I may focus more on him and bear fruit.

He cut away many of my earthly distractions in life so that I may focus more on him and bear fruit.

As I said, jail is not my only punishment. As a result of my accident, I was banged up and sent to the hospital where I had to spend the night and much of the next day on a table, with an extra large catheter in me, unable to move, before finally being sent to jail. This is my punishment. My car was destroyed and my license taken from me. This is my punishment. My entire savings and that of my parents disappeared to pay for bail, legal, and other fees. This is my punishment. When I get out I will still have a civil case to face in which I will be ordered to pay restitution to the families of those hurt, on top of everything else we've paid for. Only God knows how long I may have to continue paying that back.

This is my punishment. For five years I will be on probation. I will be on pins and needles, unable to make any contact with police, having to report to a probation officer, unable to drink, unable to leave the state, likely unable to drive, along with a whole list of other restrictions. I will also have two felonies on my record. This is my punishment. I had to go from neighbor to neighbor, lawn client to lawn client, classmate to classmate, teacher to teacher, family member to family member, and friend to friend explaining to them what I had done and asking them if they could please write a character reference for me. Imagine having to go to all of these people, especially those who didn't know anything about my accident yet, and saying, "Hi, I got into a DUI accident and killed someone. Would you please write a character reference for me?" It was embarrassing and utterly humiliating! I remember telling a neighbor and lawn client about my situation and asking him if he would be willing to write a character reference for me. It was an older man. The

I had to go to court to fight my case only to be followed by two little girls carrying a large portrait of the girl I had killed. This is my punishment.

information was too much for him. He said he wasn't sure. The disappointment in his face was heart crushing. We had known each other for years, and that information had destroyed my reputation with him so much that he wasn't sure if he could write a character reference for me. I walked home, sat on my doorstep, and cried. This is my punishment. I wrote that man a special letter, apologizing to him and asking for his forgiveness. He eventually wrote me a character reference. I had to confess my sins to the consistory, have numerous visits from the elders, and have my sins confessed before the whole congregation. One would think such an event would be hard and embarrassing, and it was, but compared to everything else I had gone through up to that point, it felt like nothing. I had to go to court to fight my case only to be followed by two little girls carrying a large portrait of the girl I had killed. This is my punishment. I had to continue going to court month after month in utter terror, wondering if I was going to have to face the families or friends of those I had killed or wounded again. This is my punishment! I remember riding home from school with one of my best friends, Grant, and just staring out the passenger side window, afraid to turn my head forward, because I was crying and ashamed to let him see my tears. This is my punishment. My situation put a strain on my friendships, relationships, and commitments. I felt like many of my friends were scared of me. I felt like many of my family members were embarrassed of me. My life was put on hold. Knowing I was probably going to jail, I couldn't fully commit to anything or anyone for anything long term or in the future. Companies wouldn't hire me because I couldn't promise them full commitment. Many things I may have normally committed to I didn't, simply because I already had enough on my plate to have to deal with. It was extremely frustrating at times, but this is my punishment. Knowing that there is a girl who no longer walks this earth because of me, that there is a family that will never be able to hold her again or see her grow up because of me; this is my punishment. The fear of the unknown; this is my punishment.

For those of you who think or instruct others that my sin was drinking and driving, then you are like the scribes and the Pharisees, "Blind guides, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matthew 23:24).

All this was part of God's holy and perfect plan, not only that I may learn from and turn from my sinful ways but that I may become an example to others living in sin so that they also may turn from their sinful lifestyles. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). We can't do this when we are not sober. For those of you who think or instruct others that my sin was drinking and driving, then you are like the scribes and the Pharisees, "Blind guides, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:24). Some people may have stopped or become wiser with their drinking because of my accident. Praise God! But for some, "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." (Proverbs 26:11). Who of you continue to fall and return to the sin of drunkenness? If you don't stand for something, then you will fall for anything. What does it say about you and what you stand for? Do you stand for anything? If you buy alcohol for others knowing that more than likely it will be misused, then you are contributing to causing others to sin. If you intentionally provide a place for people to drink and misuse alcohol, then you are contributing to causing others to sin. Matthew 18:6-7 says, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom offense comes!" "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord" (Psalm 107:43). Don't be like the fool who, "…when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to

thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven" (Deut. 29:19, 20). We must live every day of our lives prepared and ready for Christ's return! Observe the parable of the two servants in Matthew 24:45-51, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his position with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What will it take to cause those who continue in their sinful lifestyles to change? Will the swift hand of God have to smite you too like it did me? Will someone else have to die? Perhaps next time someone we know and love! Don't make God use more drastic means to make us change our ways. My accident was a message from God. Don't think for a second that it wasn't. God uses all kinds of events, both major and minor, in our lives and in the lives of others, as a means of talking to us. I love you all and count you as my friends. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6). Perhaps some of us should question and reevaluate who our real friends are.

Will the swift hand of God have to smite you too like it did me? Will someone else have to die? Perhaps next time someone we know and love!

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Prov. 3:11, 12). "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:7-11). This is my blessing. What a joy! What a comfort! God loved me so much that he chose me, of all people, to chasten! I find peace in knowing that my sins have been forgiven. I have been washed clean in Christ's blood. The Lord no longer sees me as a murderer or a drunkard. Only a child of God could find so much peace, comfort, and contentment as I have in my circumstances. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. …I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psalm 119:71, 75). "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand all" (Prov. 28:5). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

I had plans in life, and I still do, but it was the Lord's desire that I come here first. Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand" (Psalm 37:23, 24). This is my comfort. Whenever I fall or go astray, the Lord will uphold me and direct me in the right path again. This same comfort is true for all God's people.

Mr. Hudson, my substance abuse teacher here, asked our entire class of inmates, "Who here thinks that their family is proud of them right now?" I hope that my family, my friends, and my entire church family can be proud of me right now and not ashamed.

I love you all so much and pray for God's blessings upon you and upon our church.

Your friend and brother in Christ,
Daniel Miersma ❖

News from the Fed Board

by Joshua D. Engelsma

Every year at the Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention, an important meeting is held. A group of young people delegated by their respective churches gathers together to vote for new members of the Federation Board. This Board meets monthly (and sometimes more!) to take care of all the business for the Young People's Societies as a whole.

At the last Convention hosted by our Hudsonville PRC, the delegates voted for the following new members: Jonathan Langerak (Vice-President), Annie Zuverink (Vice-Secretary), Jordan Koole (Vice-Treasurer), Rev. G. Eriks (Spiritual Advisor), and Mr. Scott VanUffelen (Youth Coordinator). Members serving for their second year are: Joshua Engelsma (President), Rebecca Koole (Secretary), Scott Mingerink (Treasurer), Elizabeth Kuiper (Librarian), and Rev. R. VanOverloop (Spiritual Advisor). A hearty thanks must be given to the following retired members for their years of faithful service: Ryan Barnhill, Emily Kuiper, Ben Rau, Rev. A. Lanning, and Mr. Joel Langerak. If you see one of them, tell them thanks for all their hard work.

The Fed Board is presently hard at work! Some of the things we deal with are the annual Convention, the Young People's Scholarship Fund for prospective teachers and ministers, the Thanksgiving and Easter mass meetings, and the Winter and Pre-Convention singspirations.

We also have oversight of our Young People's magazine, the *Beacon Lights*. Recently, the Board has been working hard to improve the *Beacon Lights* and make it an important part of the life of our societies. We are thankful to our editor-in-chief, John Huizenga, for his work in the past and for his willingness to continue in this position. If you have any questions or suggestions about the *Beacon Lights*, feel free to contact us. We would love to hear from you!

Young people, parents, grandparents, we covet your continued support. Encourage the Young People's Societies. Attend the Conventions and mass meetings and singspirations. And support the *Beacon Lights*. We need that support. But, above all, pray for us. Pray that God will give us the wisdom to perform our work for the good of the young people and to the glory of his name. And pray that he will bless our labors in the coming year. ❖

Joshua is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Front: Scott VanUffelen, Rev. VanOverloop, Jordan Koole, Elizabeth Kuiper, Annie Zuverink.
Back: Scott Mingerink, Joshua Engelsma, Jonathan Langerak, Rebecca Koole (missing: Rev. Eriks).

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

December 2 Read Psalm 10:1-11

Sometimes we might wonder why God inspires these kinds of Psalms. We can see why David might pen these words. God's people throughout the ages have these sorts of concerns. But what is God's purpose? From other places of Scripture we can see that they provide a background for the comfort provided for us by our heavenly Father. Even though the wicked rage around us and even at us, we can know that we are safe in the arms of God and Christ. The Psalmist shows to us the absurdity of the thoughts of the wicked in the last verse of this section. Do we fall into this error? Sing Psalter 18.

December 3 Read Psalm 10:12-18

Over all the people of the world, God is king. He is king over both the just and the unjust. The unjust seeks every hour to overthrow his rule. Do the just? If we do, we must know that God will use his kingly power to bring us back to an obedient God-honoring life. This power may hurt, but it is better than the effects of the power of God upon the wicked. That effect is death forever. Let us bring our needs to him in prayer, knowing that he will bring deliverance in our time of trouble. Sing Psalter 19.

December 4 Read Psalm 11

How many times do we, like David, lose the consciousness of our faith in God and turn to our own understanding? David, in his trials with Saul, was tempted and fell into that temptation often. In our lives we, too, have these kinds of trials. It may be illness, the loss of a job, or some other affliction. When these strike, we may say, "I just want to hide." Over against that we find the truth that God is in his holy temple. He sees us and our afflictions. We can know the truth that Jehovah loves us with an incomparable love. That love draws us back to him and sets our feet on the right path. What a comfort that is to the struggling child of God! May we ever remember that love and seek him. Sing Psalter 20.

December 5 Read Psalm 12

What makes things bad in this life? Is it a lack of goods? Is it a lack of respect? Is it anything in which men place their trust? The answer is, of course, sin. Where sin abounds, bad follows for the child of God. The primary sin spoken of in this Psalm is that of the tongue. Remember that James showed how this sin marred the unity of the church. It also is a cause of oppression for God's people. But our God is faithful. He will appear and protect his covenant people. His words are pure words like a precious metal that has been purified many times. Even though the wicked may surround us, the pure Word of Jehovah will sustain us all through this life until we reach the life to come. Sing Psalter 21.

December 6 Read Psalm 13

In the first part of the Psalm, David recounts the times in which he believes that God has forgotten about him. When we think about David's early life, we might think that he has a valid complaint against God. Of course, when we think that, we begin to consider our own lives and come to the same conclusion. But David then reconsiders. He thinks of the mercies that God has shown to him. Do not we have those same mercies? Do not we see that those mercies are new every morning? When this is our frame of mind, then we must rejoice in our salvation. Then we must break out into singing and sing the songs of Zion. Those songs are our expressions for all the undeserved goodness God has shown to us. Sing, people of God. Sing praises unto our King who reigneth forever. Sing Psalter 22.

December 7 Read Psalm 14

There are atheists, also known as fools, all around us. But how often do we fall into the same sin. We think that God cannot see us in our sin; this is being atheistic for a time. The Psalmist is distressed at such a condition as he sees it around him. He is distressed as God's people are oppressed by those who mock and laugh at belief in a sovereign God who is the creator of heaven and earth. For the people of God, the day will come when they shall all be gathered together to sing praises to the God who sees all and loves his people. May we eagerly wait the great day when our Savior Christ Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven. Sing Psalter 23.

December 8 Read Psalm 15

In this Psalm David shows to us the way of sanctification. A child of God must live a sanctified walk. He does this not to gain entrance into God's temple and holy hill, but rather because he has been given such entrance. In earlier Psalms David has described the wicked person. That person does all the negative actions listed here. The child of God seeks to walk in a way that pleases the Lord. In doing those things, he receives the assurance of his salvation. Let us so walk throughout all of our lives. Sing Psalter 24.

December 9 Read Psalm 16:1-6

While this is a short Psalm, the thoughts need to be considered in more than one writing. This is one that many an aged saint has requested to be read as his life ebbs away. It is easy to see why. The first part asks for God to preserve him, as God is his inheritance. He sees in his life the heritage of salvation as found in God's Word and carried out through the preaching of that Word in the church. He has no worth of himself; it is only through God's grace that he is anything and has anything of merit. We should consider verses 5 and 6 often. Those words should be our prayer as we walk through this life, for they are comfort not only on one's final bed but also they are comforting for daily life. The fact that only God can preserve us brings to us a comfort that cannot be found in the world. This is the peace that Christ spoke of in John 14. Let us seek our inheritance in Jehovah alone. Sing Psalter 27.

December 10 Read Psalm 16:7-11

While we see in this section a cry of David, we also see a prophecy of Christ. Peter in his sermon to the early church used this Psalm to prove to his audience the fact of the resurrection of Christ. This is also a message of great comfort to the child of God. When he lies on his bed awake at night, the Psalm shows to him that God is at his side. Because God is there, the believer has utmost comfort. The believer also does not have to fear death. He has hope of eternal life at the right hand of God. Let us make Psalm 16 a part of those Scriptures which bring to us comfort in every difficult situation. Sing Psalter 28.

December 11 Read Psalm 17:1-7

This Psalm by its title and words is a prayer of David. The prayers of the Bible can show us how to pray. David is not praying out of desperation. David prays because he is used to praying. Do we pray without ceasing? Now our prayers should not become rote, but we must be comfortable to pray at any time and in any circumstance of life. David realizes that in his path through life there is only one sure guide to keep him from trouble. That guide is God and his Word. Is this our experience? May we experience the loving kindness that will save us and take care of us every step of life's pathway. Sing Psalter 31.

December 12 Read Psalm 17:8-15

David continues his prayer of refuge from the enemy. We, like David must realize that our refuge is in God alone. Verse 8 gives to us some interesting figures about God's care for us. The figure of hiding under his wings is powerful and comforting. To defeat the wicked takes the sword of God, not man's sword. Then there are the beautiful words found in verse 15. Death holds no fear for the child of God who has been justified by the blood of the Lamb and is sanctified by the Spirit. We can be confident that when we close our eyes for the final time here on this earth we will open them in a new and glorious place looking at the face of our God, which is glorious and comforting. Sing Psalter 17.

December 13 Read Psalm 18:1-12

David's first words in this Psalm are words of love toward his heavenly Father. Some might scoff and say that who would not love a God who delivered him out of the trouble that that God put him in? David and we must see that as Paul said, "All things work together for good to them that love God." Do we see that in this life? In verse 2 David enumerates the ways in which God is on his side. Take time to look at each of those words and see how God is that item. We need to call upon God in the confidence that he will help us. By faith we can know that God will act even as he is described in verses 3-12. Our God is a great God and will help us in all situations. Of that there is no doubt. Sing Psalter 34: 1-6.

December 14 Read Psalm 18:13-18

David describes a deliverance that God afforded to him from the hands of Saul and other enemies. This was obviously an historical deliverance. But it is also a picture of the spiritual deliverance that God has afforded to us at Calvary. Jesus's death on the cross is no less a feat, in fact it is much greater, than the physical feat described here. God sent his own Son to die for us so that we would not be swallowed up alive by Satan and his hosts. Why did he do this? Was it because we were better than anyone else? Was it because we earned it through our works? The answer to those two questions is no, no, a thousand times no! We are saved from destruction because he delights in us. Is there any better picture of grace? Sing Psalter 34:7-10.

December 15 Read Psalm 18:19-28

David is not boasting here but outlining the way of sanctification that the child of God must walk in this life. We must live a life clean from the ugly taint of sin. We must walk in his laws every day. Being merciful is necessary because God was merciful to us. In our sin he sent his Son to die on the cross for us. Our acts of mercy are to be thankful responses to his supreme act of mercy. In the last verse of this section we see that all of this work is God. He is the one who lights our candle. He takes us out of darkness into his marvelous light. May we walk in that light living the blessed life of sanctification. Sing Psalter 35.

December 16 Read Psalm 18:29-41

In the beginning of this section David lauds God as the one who holds him up in times of trouble. God is a comfort to David because he is the covenant God of his salvation. This should be our comfort as well. Covenant friendship and fellowship with the almighty God affords to us a comfort not found on this earth. When we face troubles on this earth, we should read this Psalm over and over, and then we should seek our deliverer in prayer. Because he is our covenant God, he will save us from all troubles. Sing Psalter 35.

December 17 Read Psalm 18:43-50

As David finishes this Psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from the enemy, he breaks out in to a beautiful song of praise. It is one that we would do well to learn and use. First of all, we see that it is because of Jehovah God that we can do anything at all. Secondly, it is God who gives to us victory over Satan and his hosts. Therefore we should praise God. How do we do that? We use the songs that God has given to us. They are to be used in every circumstance of life, and even among the wicked. We also see that David looks ahead to Christ. Are we looking for Christ's return, and with that, the final victory? Sing Psalter 36.

December 18 Read Psalm 19:1-6

We find a reason to enjoy God's creation in the first part of this Psalm. In going outside we see the glory of God. We hear him speak to us. We see examples of Christ and his work for us. All of creation is not a god; that is pantheism, but all of God speaks to us in all of creation. Take time to go out and views the stars. Their glory is but a small picture of God's glory. Look at the effect the sun has on the rest of creation. Even as the sun rules many of the processes in creation, our heavenly King rules all of the processes on earth and in our lives. We should not worship creation, but in it we see the God that we worship. Sing Psalter 37.

December 19 Read Psalm 19:7-10

While we can see about God and about many of his attributes in nature, those do not impart to us the way of our salvation. For that the child of God must turn to Scripture. The law is the only means to convert the soul and give to God's people the wisdom that we must covet. This is true because of the character of God's Word. His ordinances are not fallible; his ordinances will last forever. When we become aware of them by grace, we find that they are more delectable than the finest of foods and more valuable than the purest gold. Let us delve into that Word every day and see the wonders found in it. In that way we will find blessing. Sing Psalter 38.

December 20 Read Psalm 19:1114

As we finish this Psalm, we see further instruction in the value of God's Word as found in verses 11-14. First of all, they warn us from the dangers that surround us in this life. Those dangers are the sins that we might commit both externally and internally. The Psalmist prays that God will keep him from those sins so that they do not overcome him. Secondly, we are told that in the keeping of God's law is a reward. That reward is not of merit, however, but of grace. We, like the Psalmist, must know that the only way we can keep the law of God is if God puts that desire in our hearts. Notice that in the last verse, it is the words and thoughts that are foremost in the writer's concern. Do we watch our thoughts and words? Do we pray that God will make them acceptable in his sight? Sing Psalter 40.

December 21 Read Psalm 20

We can call upon our God with utmost confidence. Is this not a grand thought? When we pray, we can know that our prayers do rise higher than the ceiling of the room we are in or the atmosphere if we are outside. This was David's confidence as he lived his life as king. All his life he had called upon Jehovah. All that life he had learned that Jehovah heard him. He did not need to trust on man's inventions or creation for help. We do not either. We may use them, but our help is in Jehovah's name. As we walk upon the path that God has given to us, let us remember to call upon his glorious name. In that way we will stand in the Day of Judgment. Sing Psalter 43.

December 22 Read Psalm 21:1-6

In this section of Psalms, David rejoices in the victories that God has given to him over Israel's enemies. With these victories we see David as a type of the conquering Christ who gives to us victories over enemies today and the ultimate victory over antichrist and his foes. As we look to the coming of our Christ, we can see in these Psalms the beauty and glory of our Savior. It is this Savior that we must thank for such a great victory over sin and Satan. Let us pray for such a spiritual life every day of our lives. David's prayers were answered. With the confidence of faith we, too, will receive a gracious answer from our God. Sing Psalter 46

December 23 Read Psalm 21:7-13

This is the close of a Psalm in which David expresses his gratitude to God for victory over enemies. David realizes that all enemies of the church are God's enemies. This Psalm is not a personal vendetta against those who hated David but rather an expression of thanksgiving for God's work in him. David's desire is that God is exalted. He realizes that it is not of his strength that he can have victory, but only in God's strength. Are we singing and praising the power of God? Do the words of the songs we sing extol God as the Mighty One? Let us sing, people of God, but let us sing the songs of Zion. Sing Psalter 45.

December 24 Read Psalm 22:1-10

We see in this Psalm obvious evidence that David was a type of Christ. From the words of the first verse, which Christ uttered on the cross, to the description in verse 8, we see the obvious parallels. David used these words during his life as a cry for help to his beloved God. We can use these words in our lives as a cry for help to our beloved Savior. We know he delights in us. He gave his life as a ransom for us. When all around us mock our faith; mock us for our devotion to God, let us cry for help unto our covenant God knowing that he will save us from all those who oppress us. Sing Psalter 47.

December 25 Read Psalm 22:11-21

We continue with this Messianic Psalm of David. From verse 18 of this section it is easy to tell its Messianic nature.

David in this prophecy of Christ shows how Christ prayed to his heavenly Father for strength even as he hung on the cross bearing the wrath of God for the sins of his people. He hung there for you and for me! Is there any other message so telling in all of Scripture or even in all of the world? Christ died for us! What mercy! What compassion! What comfort! He died that we may pray to him and through him in our distress. Let us pray often in thanksgiving for the great sacrifice suffered by our Savior on the accursed tree. Sing Psalter 48.

December 26 Read Psalm 22:22-31

Now the focus of this Messianic Psalm switches from the dying Christ to the resurrected Christ. His focus of redemption now switches from the sacrifice to the praise of God in the midst of the elect. David did this as the type of Christ. Even though he was hounded by Saul, pursued by enemies, he remained the sweet singer of Israel. Do we do this today? Do we focus our lives upon the praise of God? Do we confess that the kingdom we seek is Jehovah's and not of this earth? What about our children? Do they know how to praise Jehovah? That covenant promise is found in the last two verses of the Psalm. We need to spend energy instructing our youth not only in the praise of Jehovah, but also how and when to praise Jehovah. The how is with the whole heart-with every part of their being. The when is continually. May we praise our God daily for the gifts that he gives to us daily. Sing Psalter 49.

December 27 Read Psalm 23

This most-beloved of all the Psalms is read, meditated on, and used for many situations by many of God's people. It is one that a child can understand. It is one that brings comfort to the dying. Reading through the Psalm shows to us the path of our life from birth to death. As lambs we need to be led by those things that we need. We need to be taught catechism as the means of grace. We will walk in the valley of the shadow of death as we take our places in God's church militant. Then we have the blessed promise of a place in Jehovah's house forever. We are never too old for Psalm 23. Read it and read it often. Sing Psalter 53.

December 28 Read Psalm 24:1-6

Immediately following the Shepherd Psalm is this Psalm depicting the kingdom of God and its inhabitants. Because the earth belongs to the Sovereign King of Creation, he decrees who will walk in the house of the Lord forever. Notice that creation is on the forefront in the Psalm. Those who do not permit God to be the sovereign creator can find no comfort in this Psalm. Those that will enter God's kingdom are those who have a sanctified walk in this life. They will receive God's blessing in the way of that walk. They are the ones who are drawn to him by irresistible grace. It is good for us to consider this Psalm each time we look to enter his house here on earth. Sing Psalter 57.

December 29 Read Psalm 24:7-10

After describing to us the kind of man that will be eligible to enter the kingdom of heaven, the Psalmist now calls us to praise the King of that kingdom. Just as an earthly king received a certain type of pomp and pageantry when he came to visit a city, so the King of Kings must receive from us the praise due the honor of his name. The rhetorical question, "Who is the King of glory?" is asked twice in this small section of Scripture. The answer is straightforward. The King of glory is Christ who has and will defeat all of Satan's hosts and take us into his heavenly kingdom. Let us glorify the King with every breath that we take anticipating the glorious day of his coming. Sing Psalter 58.

December 30 Read Psalm 25:1-7

Who of us does not need to lift up our souls unto Jehovah? Who will be ashamed in going in that way? Oh, we might be ashamed before man but never before our heavenly Father. Who of us does not need to pray for God to show him the way that he must go? This should be the desire of all of God's people, young or old. Each of us also must pray for the forgiveness and remission of sins. David, here, even prays about sins of youth. It is not on account of our goodness that we will find forgiveness but only on account of the goodness of Jehovah. Let us daily pray the truths found in this Psalm for in them we will find comfort for our souls. Sing Psalter 64.

December 31 Read Psalm 25:8-14

Here in this part of the Psalm we have valuable instruction concerning the covenant. First of all it is equated with the law. It is not because we keep the law that we are received into the covenant, but rather that in keeping the law we keep that covenant of friendship which God has established with his people. Then in verse 14 we have that idea of friendship further explained. A friend is one to whom we can trust our secrets. God trusts his secrets to those who fear him. In that friendship he shows to us the workings of his covenant. We must wait until glory to fully understand all of its facets, but even now we can be comforted by the knowledge that God is our friend. Sing Psalter 65.

January 1 Read Psalm 25:15-22

In this life there are those who would do us harm because of our faith. They hate the God we love and hate us for loving that God. What must be our response? Do we hide our faith? Do we pretend to be someone we are not? We find the answer in this portion of Scripture. We look to Jehovah from whom all blessings flow. We go to him in daily prayer for deliverance. We can do this by the assurance afforded to us by his gracious hand. We can trust him because we see the evidence of his sovereign care for his creatures. Let us wait upon our God to deliver us and redeem us from all of our troubles. Sing Psalter 66.

His Name Is Jesus

by Rev. George Lubbers

"And you shall call his name 'Jesus" (Matthew 1:21).

Soon it will be the time for our Christmas programs and celebrations. We will not hold "mass" as the name "Christmas" originally meant in the Romish church. We will use the word uncritically and put new wine in the old bottles; we will celebrate the great mystery of godliness. God is manifested in the flesh, and after the suffering of death was taken up in glory!

Literally, this command to call the child of Mary by the name Jesus, was given to Joseph in a dream at night by the angel of the Lord. Many men and husbands have been confronted with profound and difficult problems which disturb their hearts deeply. The one problem which disturbs a righteous man more than any, would be to be married or betrothed to a faithless wife. It touches the most sacred of all relationships between men—the marriage-tie! Unfaithfulness in this relationship reflects the deeper unfaithfulness toward God as our covenant God. A marriage-breaker is a covenant-breaker and a desecrater of all that is holy. Such we expect from men and women who are profane; who do not distinguish between what is sacred and what is polluted. Such was the problem of Joseph who had betrothed to himself Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The plain fact was that Mary was to have a child, and presently she would be "great with child" (Luke 2:5). Joseph knew that he was not the father of Mary's child which she carried under her heart. There was only one alternative left, as far as Joseph could reason, and that was that Mary had been unfaithful and had played the harlot, or at least she was guilty of adultery. Joseph was not a man that believed the worst, being subject to morbid suspicions. He loved Mary very much and it pained him, therefore, the more deeply for her sake. He was a just man. He had not known Mary in pre-marital relationship. Mary was, therefore, not that kind of maiden either. As far as Joseph knew she was a virgin, who had never known a man. He also knew that she was a sinner who had need of confessing her sins and to be covered by the blood of sprinkling.

Now his confidence is shattered as far as Mary's marital integrity was concerned. She was to have a child. Since the world began, no women ever gave birth to a child without the "will of man." Joseph's soul was troubled till deep in his slumbering hours at night. He is in need of help and mercy from the Lord. Mary, too, must be protected…and her child! On the pages of history, Jesus must not be known as an illegitimate bastard, nor Mary an adulteress. Joseph was to be the God-appointed "father" of his Son, who is called "Immanuel—God with us!" All must stand forth in spotless beauty of faithfulness, honor and glory. God must intervene to interpret from his own Word of promise what had occurred in Nazareth's fairest maiden, most blessed among women. Not only must Joseph's confidence be restored, but it must be brought to that high level of faith in which he will serve the counsel of God willingly. He must, as an act of faith, take Mary to wife fearless of all consequences. He must say: "I believe the Lord's word." His faith and confession must be the counterpart of Mary's resigned faith which answered the angel in Nazareth, "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). In that united faith these two, Joseph and Mary, find each other, and they marry in the Lord.

Joseph has a fatherly duty to perform. He must "name" Mary's child. God had selected the name for his Son in the flesh. The angel had said to Mary, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Now the angel says to Joseph that he is to perform that sacred task. He is to circumcise that son on the eighth day. We read, "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the child, he was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:24).

Now for Joseph, this was to be obedience of faith, nothing less. He was to believe that Mary's condition of being with child was the fulfillment of the word of the prophets, spoken to a very wicked and disobedient king in Israel, Ahab by name. This king was in dire straits at the time that Isaiah spoke this word concerning the "virgin who would be with child" in David's royal line. Rezin, king of Damascus, and Pekah, king of Samaria, were confederate kings, who had a concerted effort to dethrone the sons of David from the throne in Jerusalem, and to place another on this throne. This would be to nullify the word of Nathan, the prophet to David, that there should not lack a son on David's throne from David's

loins. These machinations of the wicked the LORD himself would bring to naught. The LORD would fulfill his own word to David by the wonder birth of his only begotten Son from a virgin. It was the "sign" of the virgin which was given to an unbelieving king. The true Israelites clung to this prophetic word concerning the birth of Immanuel, God with us. Joseph was not hearing a strange text recited to him by the angel in his dream at night. It was a word which was well-known and which was the sure word of prophecy, which shines as a light in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in the hearts of the waiting people of God.

These people were waiting for the Redeemer to deliver them from their sins. He looked for the redeemer to come out of Zion. They looked for the fulfillment of the Word which says, "For unto us a child is born, for unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his Name shall be Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." What Israel was waiting for, more than watchmen for the morning light, was now being realized. A child is to be born, a son is to be given, and thou shalt call his name Jesus!

This one and this one only shall save his people from their sins. He will save his "people," the congregation of God. He will come to save all his people from their sins, both in the Old and New Testaments. Yes, he will save them from their "sins." He will stand in the midst of the multitude of his people and take all their sins upon himself as the perfect sacrifice. He "shall save" them from their sins. He will fulfill all righteousness.

Take Mary to be thy wife, Joseph. She is not guilty of adultery, but she will be the mother of the Son of God. The Son of God will be born from a woman—seed of the woman is he. In him will all the seed be blessed. For if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. ❖

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Christian Living

Of What Value Is Christmas?

by Mr. Herman Hanko

Although I am almost finished with the series that I began when the *Beacon Lights* was again published last winter, and although it would be possible to finish that series in this issue, I think it may be well to pause, since this is the December issue, and call to mind a few thoughts concerning Christmas and Christian living.

It is true that in this age of commercialism, when the church itself conies under the influence of the world, in its celebration of Christmas, we are very easily led away from the true spiritual significance of Christmas as a Christian holiday. It is often true that with the glitter of gifts and tinsel the greatest miracle of all times is obscured to us. It is true oftentimes, that the excitement of merry-making obliterates from us the wonder of grace: God became flesh. It is true that we are so concerned about presents and eating, that the mystery of Bethlehem is lost sight of.

If that is the case, then there is no reason why we should celebrate Christmas at all at least as a Christian holiday. The question is, Why Christmas in the church? The world answers; to make money; to have fun; to exchange gifts. Last November six there was a Santa Claus parade in downtown Grand Rapids to usher in the Yuletide season. One just barely recuperates, financially, from the past Christmas and the next season is on its way.

Why Christmas in the church? Why does the church have a Christian holiday called Christmas? And do not say that you have heard often, that Christmas is so abused that you have no need of it. Maybe that is true. But it is a danger.

Why do we, as church, set one day aside for Christmas?

Let's answer that question.

Certainly the church did not set this day aside in order that we might have this day of the year to shout "Merry Christmas" to each other and shower our friends with gifts even though the Magi brought to the Christ, gifts

of frankincense, myrrh and gold. If that is all Christmas means to us, then we might just as well strike the holiday out of our Christian calendars.

You may say that it is the day that we commemorate the birth of Christ. And in itself that is true enough. But Christmas is not the only time that we talk of the incarnation. We speak of it the year around, for it is of central importance in our life in the midst of this world.

You may answer that this is the day on which one thousand, nine hundred and fifty six years ago Christ was born, and therefore we commemorate his birthday. That is not true, for the exact date of the year is not even known.

Why, then, do we have Christmas as a Christian holiday?

The answer is that once a year the church comes together to commemorate in a special way the great miracle of God: that he sent his Son into the likeness of sinful flesh.

The story itself is very simple. Luke tells us that Christmas story—"And 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." That is really all there is to it. There is more about what happened before Christmas, and what happened after Christmas, but that is the Christmas story. There is nothing so complicated or so strange about that. A child can understand that story. "And she brought forth her firstborn son…" But, at the same time, all the theologians in all the ages of the church, and all the students of holy Writ from the beginning of time have never been able to fathom the depths of that simple story. A child can understand it, oh yes, but the wisest in the church of God cannot comprehend it. For it is the wonder of God, the miracle of miracles, the center of the Christian's faith.

And on Christmas we go as the church of Christ with the wise men, with the shepherds, to that humble manger outside of Bethlehem, to pause for a moment at the side of the Christ child.

And on this coming December 25th when we are brought there again, what is your reaction? Do you turn away in disbelief, more interested in the things of this world? Do you pity the poor child who came into the world in such abject poverty? That is the same as unbelief. Look at the shepherds. There is no pity in their eyes. Do you try "to make room in your heart" for this child who could find no room in the inn? No, we pause with the shepherds and the wise men and worship. For we have before our eyes, the wonder of God.

And what thoughts go through your mind as you stand there?

As you gaze on that babe this thought enters your mind: this is the eternal Son of God who is coequal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, who is highly transcendent above all that is of this world and everything in it. This babe is the most blessed one, the only holy one. But he is Immanuel—God with us. God in our flesh come by way of the womb of the virgin Mary, to be like us in all things, sin excepted. And then you can only marvel at this great wonder.

Or you can see in this child that is in the manger before you a human nature like ours perfectly united with the divine nature in the person of the Son of God. And again you marvel. How is that possible? It is a wonder of God.

And certainly to learn of these things you go to Bethlehem on Christmas.

But there is more that is important to you. This thought also passes through your mind. This child is called Jesus —Jehovah Salvation. And then you see that in that child is the most amazing of all wonders, that he is the gift of the love of God whereby he came into your and my flesh in order to take upon himself that flesh and blood, and in order to suffer for our guilt that we might be free from our sin.

And that is important, isn't it? You are concerned about your sin, aren't you? And you have come to the conclusion that there is no escape in yourself from the dungeon of your iniquity. Therefore, as you stand beside this manger, let this thought enter your soul also, that here is God's manifestation of the salvation He has prepared for you.

And then as you leave that manger on December twenty five, the blessedness of that experience lingers with you as you pursue the way to the hill called Calvary, and to the Garden of Joseph, until many Christmases later, you shall again see Christ return to take you to himself in glory. We will not find that truth anywhere else in all this world. We will not find that truth if the world dictates our celebration of Christmas. But if God in his grace leads us this coming Christmas to his manger, and instructs us by his Spirit in these truths, then we are blessed indeed. Then we have a reason for commemorating Christmas as a Christian holiday. Then we see that Christmas is for the church of Christ the most blessed of any day in the year. ❖

Reprinted from the December, 1954 Beacon Lights.

The Origin of Christmas Customs

by Winifred Koole

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ rejoices that her head and redeemer was born as a babe in Bethlehem almost two thousand years ago. On December 25? In the year I A.D.? It seems that neither the month nor the year are correct. The few historical facts recorded in the gospels gave scholars little to go on. In the sixth century a learned monk designated the year 754 after the founding of Rome as the year of Christ's birth and marked it as 1 A.D. on his new Christian calendar. Later investigations found that this placed the death of Herod the Great in the year 4 B.C., and the young child Jesus was residing in Egypt with his parents at that time. But the erroneous dating was too difficult to correct.

While most early Christians believed that it was on the 23rd day of the month that Christ was born, the exact month was uncertain. The early church did not appear to have much interest in the date of Christ's birth; the fact of his birth was the important thing, and still is. The attention of the early church was particularly focused on Christ's coming again to judge the quick and the dead—a natural reaction to the severe persecutions the church was undergoing. In fact, in 245 A.D. Origen, probably in protest of existing pagan festivities, declared it to be sinful to even think of keeping Christ's birthday. It was not until controversies arose regarding the divine nature of the Savior that greater interest in the circumstances of his birth emerged. A more dominant position was also given at this time to Mary the mother of Jesus. In 350 A.D. Julius I, Bishop of Rome, set December 25 as the specific date for observing the birthday of Christ. Many and varied were the celebrations already observed at this time of the year. Perhaps the Romish church desired to turn the attention of its newly "converted" members from such pagan festivals as the celebration of the winter solstice or the lavish Roman Saturnalia to a holiday that had sacred significance.

The church made many attempts to maintain this as a purely spiritual festival concentrated upon the mystery of the Incarnation. But it was not long before the pagan concomitants had become an integral part of Christmas festivities. fires, lighted candles, the use of greenery for decoration, the burning of the Yule log, and the exchanging of gifts were some of these secular elements.

Among primitive people sun worship was common. The Persians also showed reverence for the sun and at the time of the winter solstice would kindle great fires in homage to Mithras, the deity of light. One of several church fathers who warned against the use of the symbols of sun worship was St. Augustine. Later the Romish church invested these symbols with religious significance hoping to direct their use to higher purposes. Certainly the church was correct in its interpretation of natural phenomena being symbolic of things spiritual, such as the material sun being a type of the Sun of righteousness who was also that true light that came to lighten the Gentiles. But when the heathen perceived, through the things that were made, the invisible things of almighty God, "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator…" (Romans 1:25). Giving sacred significance to pagan symbols does not sanctify the symbols.

The use of greenery in the home was intended for more than decoration by pagan people. They revered natural phenomena, and the evergreens in particular were regarded as an emblem of immortality by northern tribes. By bringing greenery into their homes, these superstitious people hoped the magic power evidenced in the fact that the greens did not die during the freezing winters would prevent death from striking them also.

The most common of many legends concerning the origin of the fir tree as a symbol of Christmas centers on St. Boniface. This English missionary is reputed to have rescued a young prince from the hands of the Druids who were accustomed to offering human sacrifices at the sacred oak to their god. Boniface cut down the oak and in its place a small fir sprang up. After telling the people the story of Christ's coming to earth, Boniface asked them to take the fir tree into their homes and to celebrate the birthday of the Christ. It is claimed that the German people were also the first to use lighted and decorated trees. A story, not authenticated, is told of Martin Luther's decorating a fir tree one Christmas Eve

with candles to illustrate the beauty of the starry sky. But years before, the Romans in their riotous celebration of die Saturnalia—a festival which honored the ancient Roman god of agriculture—trimmed trees with trinkets and toys and sometimes candles. The Saturnalia was also an occasion for elaborate decoration of homes, temples, and statues of gods and goddesses with green boughs, garlands, and flowers. The practice of giving and exchanging presents was almost as common then as it is now at Christmas time.

Manger or creche scenes have become both popular and competitive today. It originated with St. Francis of Assisi in 1223 A.D., who is also supposed to have been the first to popularize carols. Singing of Christmas carols was one of many things discouraged by the Calvinists who preferred instead the metrical psalms. Puritans in England and America did not allow Christmas caroling at all. In fact any special celebration of Christ's birth or of his death was forbidden by them. According to a Roman Catholic author, Francis X. Weiser, when Christmas celebration was restored with the return of the monarchy in England, it was a new kind of "Christmas without Christ. The old traditions of religious observances disappeared, leaving only a worldly shallow feast of amusement and reveling." And he could easily have added: "at which Santa Claus is the feted guest."

To the church of God this imaginary character represents one of the most repugnant aspects of a worldly observance of a "holy" day. There was a real St. Nicholas, an early Christian bishop who lived in an ancient town in Asia Minor, and who was noted for his generosity to the poor and to the children. Stories of him were carried by Dutch seamen to Holland, and as a result December 6 was designated as gift day for the children in his honor. No doubt the early Dutch settlers of New York took with them this tradition. But the Santa Claus of today bears no resemblance to this ancient bishop. The poem of Dr. C. C. Moore probably had much to do with this transformation. Certainly the church does not fear the supplanting of Christ as the central figure of Christmas by Santa Claus. And the world never did and never can celebrate Christ's day anyway.

The church of Christ rejoices in the birth of the Savior every day of the year, but it is good to have one special day set aside in which the church comes together to commemorate this wonderful fact. How easy it is to be swept along with the rushing world into a shallow observance—to allow oneself to become beguiled by a superficial joy which is intensified by all the outward trivia that seems to be part of the whole "Christmas season." And then suddenly everything palls, and we are glad that Christmas will soon be over. For a deep and lasting joy, for a proper celebration of Christmas, it is necessary to separate oneself from all that is not truly God-glorifying in this season. Take time to read and meditate, alone and within. ❖

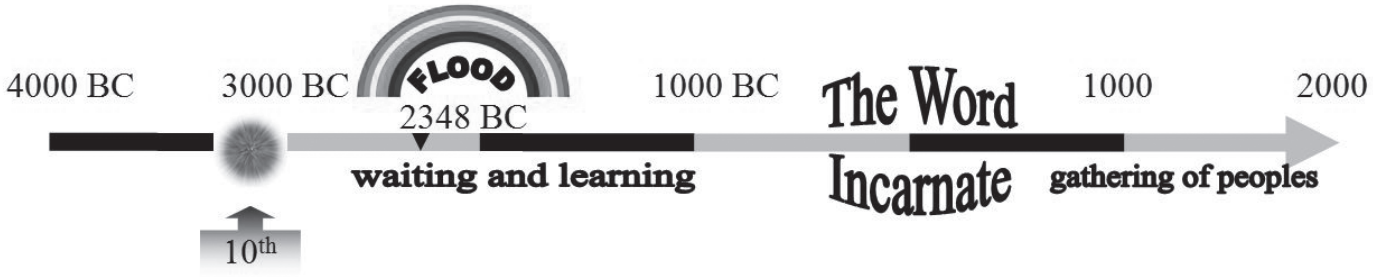
Reprinted from the December, 1964 Beacon Lights.

Church History

The Tenth Century of His-Story: Enoch Is Translated to Glory

by John Huizenga

The first millennium of history was marked by an amazing event which created an uneasy stir in the otherwise pleasure-wild city of Enoch, but a thrilling revelation of hope for the church. Everyone watched the antithetical and climactic clash between the wicked citizens of Enoch (the city), and Enoch (the man who walked with God, and was not, for God took him). Just when the "ungodly men" with their "ungodly deeds," "walking after their own lusts," speaking "great swelling words," and "having men's persons in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16) were ready to silence the disrupter of their fun, God made them fall back with one stroke of his power. Their fun now would be overshadowed by the mysterious translation of Enoch to the throne of victory. The words of Enoch, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute



judgment upon all," was seared into their conscience, and would torment them every day, and especially 600 years later while Noah built the ark and preached the same thing. This momentous event sent a chill through the camp of the wicked, but a thrill to the heart of the church.

We noted last month that Adam had died. As with every death, those left behind feel lonely and afraid. They cling to the godly inheritance, and are forced to look forward. Expelled from Paradise, they increasingly felt too that the beautiful earth—now cursed—was not really their home. Those hopeful words of the gospel preached by the only man who had personally walked with God in perfect fellowship in the cool of the evening were now only a memory.

Here we see a particularly beautiful display of that "walking with God;" not now in the cool of the evening, but in the very heat of a raging battle!

But, now look at this man Enoch! What do they say of him? "That son of Jared who walks with such peace and joy through this sin-cursed world. How does he do it?" Here we see a particularly beautiful display of that "walking with God;" not now in the cool of the evening, but in the very heat of a raging battle! Here was a walk with God raised to new heights, and this merely a picture of the covenant life prepared by God through the work of his only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Enoch displayed the power of God's grace at work in the regenerated heart of a child of God. Like Christ he walked on the raging waters of the sea: the tumultuous unrest of the wicked. Fear had been banished from his heart. He loved God, and his chief desire was to please God. He preached with unbelievable boldness in the face of and against the wicked.

God reveals to us in the book of Hebrews that Enoch's walk was a walk of faith. A walk by sight would bring terror to the child of God, even as Peter was filled with terror when he saw the violence of the waves. The church faced the violence and murderous hatred of the ungodly who were rapidly growing in might and glory. By faith, Enoch was united to Christ who "arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). God had given Enoch faith (Eph. 2:8), a most blessed gift for his children living in this world. Our reformed fathers have defined faith as "not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (HC A21). Enoch believed what God had promised through the preaching of Adam. Enoch also received revelation from God and preached the crushing of Satan's head, the bruising of the church's heel, and the ultimate victory for God and his people.

Had it not been for Enoch, the ungodly may have contented themselves with the smothering of the church by its rapid growth and absorption of the dwindling church into its life. But Enoch and his preaching proved to be a grievous thorn, and warranted a bounty for his life. Perhaps he had slipped from their clutches from time to time, but when their rage reached a murderous bloodthirsty pitch, a search party was quickly organized to bring a sure and swift end to Enoch. Nothing would stop them, and they would not stop hunting until his dead body was paraded before the eyes of every man, woman and child then living; a sure testimony that man, not God would prevail.

What a terrifying and humiliating failure they faced

when on the day appointed, an eerie silence pervaded the pulpit from which Enoch had always boldly preached. Did he hear of their plot? Was he scared and hiding? No, that would be most uncharacteristic of Enoch. Like so many saints after him, he would have rejoiced to sing from the flames had they caught and burnt him at the stake. The failure of a most thorough search to find one trace of him amazed everyone. His footsteps simply stopped. "He was not found." He was no more! Science had no answers. Only the living God who "spake, and it was done" (Psalm 33:9) could so remove his servant, and in doing so, rebuke the wicked, and comfort his people. Adam had died, but not he. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). What a marvelous testimony to the church of God's faithfulness! God will preserve his church. He will display his power and glory in the way of the wonder, the impossible in man's eyes. And in this way, the way of the cross, the church would come to know the depth of God's love.

May we also live in this hope as the world continues to revel in pleasure, seeking to drown out the witness of God, which no effort on their part can silence. May we by faith walk boldly the antithetical life of God's people in the midst of this world. May we by faith see with the apostles the empty tomb, and know that the second Adam, our Lord and head is in glory, sitting at the right hand of God. ❖

John is a teacher at Trinity Christian High School, a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church and the Editor of Beacon Lights.

Answers to Bible Quiz *(page 4)*

Things Jesus Said: Recorded by Matthew

1. "…but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-20).
2. "…that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1).
3. "…of thorns or figs of thistles" (Matt. 7:16).
4. "…know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. 6:3). Jesus was saying "Never do a good thing to show off: to do that spoils it—it isn't any longer a good thing."
5. "…ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).
6. "…is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). In other words, "Don't worry."
7. "…but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13).
8. "…and lose his own soul" (Matt. 16:26).
9. "…my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).
10. "…do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Things Jesus Said: Recorded by Mark

1. "…not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).
2. "…that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25).
3. "…in his own country" (Mark 6:4).
4. "…deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).
5. "…he shall be the last of all and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).
6. "…of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).
7. "…to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
8. "…me ye have not always" (Mark 14:7).
9. "…but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).
10. "…and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Taken from The Bible Quiz Book*, and used with permission of Baker Book House.*

Church News

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Act 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Levi Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Hoekstra—Calvary, IA

Miya Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Schiermeyer—Calvary, IA

Avyn Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Grant Klein—Doon, IA

Cambira Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Rau—Faith, MI

Josie Lauren, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kent Deemter—Faith, MI

Karissa Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nate Bol—First, MI

Justin Robert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Knott—First, MI

Dorothy Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Phelps—First, MI

Lillian Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David Rutgers—Hope, MI

Jared Nathaniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Cleveland—Hope, MI

Bethany Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Lane Brummel—Hull, IA

Christian and Heather, children of Mr. & Mrs. Rich Goudy—Loveland, CO

Daniel Benjamin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chuck Cammenga—Loveland, CO

Levi Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Cleveland—Redlands, CA

Jessica Rosemarie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Philip Hopkins—Redlands, CA

Tyler Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ross Kaiser—Southwest, MI

Adult baptism was administered to Mrs. Kim Goudy—Loveland, CO

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." Proverbs 4:26

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Elsie Nieuwenkamp—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Gord Tolsma—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Jason Boone, Devan Dykstra, Nick Tolsma, Josh Dykstra, Lucy Griffioen, Kyle Noorman, Justin Terpstra & Jonathon Dykstra—Faith, MI

Alex Bomers—Hope, MI

Charles Hoekstra—Hope, MI

Dolan DeRoon—Hull, IA

Dayna DeRoon—Hull, IA

Alyssa VanMaanen—Hull, IA

Kim Goudy—Loveland, CO

Ricci tenHaaf—Providence, MI

Daniel Birkett—South Holland, IL

Kristina Huisenga—South Holland, IL

Andrew Lenting—South Holland, IL

Nicholas Lubbers—South Holland, IL

Lorelei Buiter, Rachel Kamps, Tina VanDonselaar & Nancy VanSolkema—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Benjamin Tolsma and Miss Stephanie Huizing—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Mr. Luke Regenerus and Miss Debbi Young—First, MI

Mr. David VanTil and Miss Abby Engelsma—Grandville, MI

Mr. Manuel Kuhs and Miss Emily-Kate Dunning—Limerick, Ireland Mission

Mr. Dale Kooienga and Miss Nicole Bertsch—Loveland, CO

Mr. Chad Richards and Miss Jeanette VanDyke—Randolph, WI

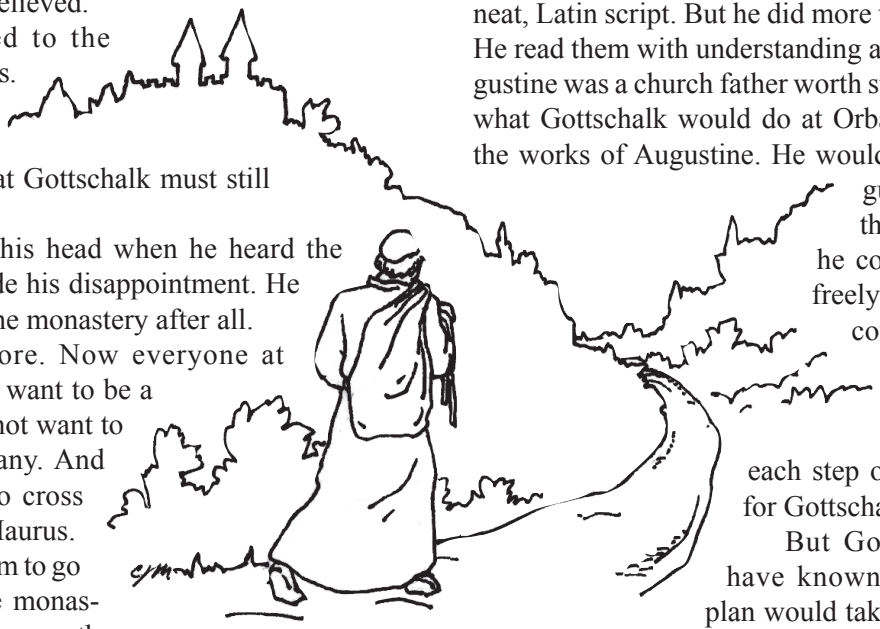
Gottschalk: Lone Voice in the Night (3)

How dare this young monk named Gottschalk try to break his vows to be a monk? And almost worse, how could the Synod of Mainz vote to allow him to do it? Rabanus Maurus clenched his fists as he entered his cloister. He would not allow this to happen—not while he was head of the monastery at Fulda. A vow is a vow forever. That's what Rabanus believed.

Rabanus appealed to the emperor, Louis the Pious. Another council was called. And this time the council decided that Gottschalk must still live as a monk.

Gottschalk shook his head when he heard the news. He could not hide his disappointment. He would not be leaving the monastery after all.

But there was more. Now everyone at Fulda knew he did not want to be a monk. Gottschalk did not want to be part of their company. And Gottschalk had tried to cross their abbot, Rabanus Maurus. It would be better for him to go to another Benedictine monastery. There was one in France, the monastery of Orbais. Rabanus sent Gottschalk there. The abbot smiled within at the thought of this troublesome monk moving three hundred miles away.



For Gottschalk, the journey to France was long and lonely, but he was grateful to see the world outside the monastery on the way. Another monk was sent to walk alongside him to France, but this monk was of little comfort to Gottschalk. Gottschalk knew the other monk was supposed to help keep him safe from robbers. Traveling was a dangerous thing to do in the 800s. But Gottschalk was not worried about robbers. Benedictine monks were poor and had little to be robbed of. Nor did Gottschalk have any intention of running away himself. God had given him a logical mind and an honest heart. He knew he had no choice anymore. He must be a monk for the rest of his life.

He stared at the trees, meadows, and fields that stretched out before them, as well as the castles and towns they passed by. He heard the gurgling brooks alongside the road and smelled the fresh scent of leaves and grass. But he did not dwell on these pleasant things. He thought about his future. He thought about his past.

He had copied some of Augustine's works at Fulda in neat, Latin script. But he did more than copy the words. He read them with understanding and appreciation. Augustine was a church father worth studying more. That's what Gottschalk would do at Orbais. He would study the works of Augustine. He would compare what Augustine taught to what the Scriptures teach. If he could not live his life freely out in the world, he could try to do something worthwhile in the monastery.

The plan made each step of the journey easier for Gottschalk to take.

But Gottschalk could not have known what journey that plan would take him on. Nor could the abbot of Fulda know this journey would cause them to meet once more.

"LITTLE LIGHTS" . . . let it shine !

by Connie Meyer

Find the underlined words of the text in the puzzle below:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

T	D	L	N	O	T	Y	H	E	A	R	T	L
L	L	A	H	S	W	V	D	S	C	L	H	D
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V	Y	T	R	U	S	T	H	I	N	E	L	Z
K	A	Y	V	L	C	T	N	E	O	T	B	L
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B	T	W	R	A	N	Y	K	Q	L	P	C	B
G	N	I	D	N	A	T	S	R	E	D	N	U
T	D	K	Y	W	R	R	W	T	D	C	A	O
D	A	A	L	L	H	W	B	N	G	G	V	K
R	O	V	N	L	T	H	I	N	E	Y	H	T

Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Who are the speakers for the 2011 PRYP Convention?

One of the speakers is a newlywed;
A fine young man, I've heard it said.
A father of ten is another one;
His years of preaching are far from done.
The third one's name unlocks a door-
Need I tell you anymore?

Come and hear them speak on
"Lessons from the Life of Joseph"

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