

Home Moravian Church
2010
Advent Devotions

Foreword

Recognizing that **families** today come in all shapes and sizes, this booklet has been compiled for individuals and families seeking a daily boost to their devotional life during Advent.

These entries reflect many generations, years of living, and a variety of life experiences, all folded into a reverence for worship and gratitude for God's grace.

We hope your life will be enriched by the thoughts shared within these pages.

Betty Cole, Editor
Advent Devotions 2010



November 28

An Advent Tradition

The assembly of the Advent wreath was always a family affair in the Kimel household. On the Saturday evening before the first Sunday of Advent, all the children and grandchildren came home. The girls and women in the family gathered in the basement for the project. From several large boxwoods in our yard, I would have cut an ample supply of greenery the previous day, allowing the branches to soak overnight. Oasis was cut and arranged on large rimmed pizza pans. Four large beeswax candles and a small Moravian star in the center completed the wreaths. Then their individual identities began to take shape as each wreath was adorned with items to reflect the interests and hobbies of each family. Our children's wreaths held their infant ID bracelets and teething rings.

Hamburgers and hot dogs comprised the traditional menu on this night, a meal entrusted to the guys, who had no interest in what the girls were doing in the basement. We relied upon their grilling skills.

Now, as each of the children has grown, I hope that they have not just continued the traditional activities, but remember the real reason we celebrate the Advent season: to honor the birth of Jesus and remember his meaning for us today. Like that Moravian star in the center of the wreath, Christ, the Morning Star, will fill our hearts with light divine.

Lucille Kimel

November 29

Advent Wreath

John 8:12 Jesus said, "...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (NIV)

Rev. 22:16 "I, Jesus,...am...the bright Morning Star."

After Thanksgiving at our house, it is time to open the Christmas closet and find the big round box containing the Advent Wreath. Though "Grandmama" (Evelyn Thom Spach), is never far from our hearts, we feel her especially close as we refresh the wreath each year. We remember how she created the original "Moravian Advent Wreath" when, in 1955, she was asked to decorate the newly restored Vogler House for Christmas. After extensive research she designed her version of the old Austrian traditional Advent Wreath that symbolizes the coming of the Christ child as the Light of the World.

We ponder its metaphors: it is round with no beginning or end and evergreen like eternity. It has four candles, one for each Sunday in Advent. The first signifies the Prophets who foretold His coming; the second is for Bethlehem; the third is for the shepherds; the fourth for the angels. The tall dowel in the center is topped by a star and represents the Christ candle. When all the candles are alight they proclaim, "Christ is the light of the world...the bright morning star."

And so, we rejoice and give thanks for all the reminders of the light, the truth, the eternal love of God, and the incomparable gift of His son. The beauty and special meanings of the Advent wreath are a sermon to contemplate each day of the season.

Gerrii Spach

November 30

Advent: What Is It?

The Glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. Isaiah 40:5

Advent: Why is this a season of excitement and anticipation for me? Something is going on; something that I feel. Something that I know is about to happen; that has happened; that will continue to happen. Something happens at the beginning of a new liturgical year to remind me again and again through the readings in Isaiah and others of the truth that I know in my soul. But, what is it?

Advent: The season to ponder the mystery of the coming of God among us. God has always been with us and always will but cares so much that He chose to show us in person by coming to us in one of our own bodies to remind us once-and-for-all of the simple, joyous, message of His requirement and our need to love God AND to love each other. Yes, it's a very simple thing but one that seems to be oh so difficult to carry out in this world of constant conflict.

Advent: The season leading to the ultimate message that nothing can separate us from God. The season leading to the truth that God cared enough to become one of us.

Advent: The season leading to His ultimate example and message that we can, indeed, love God AND love each other. So let's do it!

Our King and Savior now draws near: O come let us adore him.

Hal Garrison

December 1

Advent – Our New Beginning!

Scripture: Psalm 30:11-12

How could we celebrate Christmas in a joyous way when feeling such a sense of grief and loss? The year was 2001. Like other Americans, we were devastated by the events of 9/11. However, for our family, there had been additional personal losses throughout the year: the death of a mother, father and brother. In addition, though elated over the marriage of our only child, our daughter Katy, we still felt alone as she moved to New Mexico to live with her new husband.

We celebrated that Christmas the best way we could – in New Mexico. It was very different with the unusual weather, regional decorations and extended travel time added to the calendar. However, we learned that those differences did not matter. This was our opportunity to hug each other a little harder, linger around the kitchen table a little longer and share tearful memories of our loved ones more openly. Things were not important. Being together was what mattered most.

In retrospect, it was and will always be a Christmas to remember. The emptiness we felt individually as we missed our family members or yearned for “the way it used to be” became our time to look forward, to strengthen the bonds of being together and to focus on each other, not ourselves. Whether in grief or not, it was our time to love, care and share each and every day.

The Christmas of 2001 was our Advent – our new beginning!

Cathy and Tom Seaver

December 2

A Candle Tea Memory

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:10-12 (NIV)

One special Candle Tea memory is that of a little boy about four years of age who worked his way to the front of the group at the nativity scene. He listened quietly and watched intently as the beloved story from the gospel of Luke was read. When the lights above the nativity scene focused on the babe lying in the manger, the little boy exclaimed, "It's Jesus! Hey, Baby Jesus!" There was silence in the group as we all saw the babe through the eyes of a child.

It is important for our Women's Fellowship to share our Moravian heritage as our guests at the Candle Tea visit the Single Brothers' House, sing carols and listen to the organ in the Saal, observe candle making, savor the smells and tastes of coffee and sugar cake and imagine life in Salem as portrayed in our lovely putz. But the most important gift to those who visit our tea is the one a little boy received when he said, "It's Jesus!"

Mary Jo Spaugh, Candle Tea Chair, 1980

(Submitted by Libby Ayers from a previous compilation of Candle Tea stories)

December 3

A Moravian Lower Brass Reflection

Every year during Candle Tea, The Moravian Lower Brass plays Christmas chorales in Salem Square. We are a group of both Moravian and non-Moravian musicians. While we play, people stop and listen. Some stand and smile happily at us, some request their favorite songs, and others sing along with the joy of Christ in their hearts.

Playing with this group for several years has brought joy to my life. As I play, I ponder. Why am I here? For whom do I play? These are simply answered, "I play for Christ and His glory." As I reflect, more questions arise. If I play for Christ and His glory, do I live that way as well? Do my everyday actions and thoughts promote Christ and His glory? Would Christ approve of my daily living? My shameful answer is, "Sometimes."

I then think of that man sent from heaven, the only man without sin to live on earth. I think of the ultimate sacrifice He gave so that I might have eternal life. John 3:17 states, "For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (KJV). This verse reminds me that Christ has forgiven me. Therefore, as a Christian, I must forgive others as well.

As we approach Advent, I think about Home Church and the changes she has gone through in the past year. What if we all, as members of Home Church, let the love of Christ and His forgiving spirit permeate our hearts? What if we practice and share this love and forgiveness with each other? I believe this would please Christ.

May the love, joy and forgiveness of Christ fill our hearts this Advent season.

Chris Jones



December 4

Froehliche Weihnacht!

Although it occurred 60 years ago, I still remember fondly an experience that greatly enhanced my understanding of the message of Advent. During my Seminary years, I chanced upon one of our exchange students working at his desk. He had a razor blade, a ruler, some pencils, and transparent paper which he was using to fashion three and four-cornered shapes into points for a larger piece. Several were white; others, pale yellow. I asked him what he was doing. Bro. Hartmut Beck, in his fairly good German-accented English, told me that he was making a 26-point star for Advent. This was my introduction to what has come to be an important and traditional part of the season that identifies the coming of the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Many of these same stars, some even larger and composed of far more points, will hang above doorways of homes and high above in sanctuaries all over the Moravian world and beyond, making this special season of the church year so much more meaningful. I so appreciated my German brother's contribution to my Advent understanding.

Since that day, other activities have added to Advent's significance in my life. When we sing hymns and anthems describing the "bright and morning star," the star that comes "out of Jacob," and the star that shines over the manger bed, my heart swells with special joy as I anticipate yet another thrilling rehearsal of the coming of the Christ child into a world so desperately in need of redemption and renewal. I hope again, in the Advent time soon upon us, that you will feel joy and happiness with me. As our German brother would say, "Froehliche Weihnacht!"

Kenneth Robinson

December 5

Not A Sentence, But A Crown

Many Moravians remember the annual emphases in liturgy, hymns, scripture and sermons, on the Second Sunday in Advent, that focused upon our Lord's promise that He will come again. To me, this emphasis is a vital part of the deep meaning of Advent.

Remember the way in which the Apostle Paul faced matters that some consider morbid, frightening, a dread of "final things." To young Timothy he wrote (II Timothy 4:6-8): "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but to all of them also who love his appearing." (KJV) Paul felt his work was complete; he was prepared to move into the more immediate presence of his Savior. When he thought of the return of the Lord to consummate his Kingdom, he felt supreme happiness. Paul knew that he was to be judged not by a tyrant, but by a righteous judge; he anticipated receiving **NOT A SENTENCE, BUT A CROWN!** AND, this was **NOT** a **PRIVATE RELATIONSHIP** that Paul had with Christ. He said that this crown which is awaiting is "**NOT FOR ME ONLY** but for all of them also **WHO LOVE HIS APPEARING.**"

May Paul be our model as we face the door to the endless eternity that our Lord is making ready for every follower.

HAPPY ADVENT!

Jay Hughes

December 6

Sharing Lovefeast with the Community

Clifford and I moved to Elizabeth City in 1964. A few years after our arrival, the Pasquotank Historical Society Program Committee Chair, a Salem College graduate, asked if we would put on a Moravian Lovefeast. We agreed. There were no Lovefeast mugs, no candle trimmers, nor Moravian-trained bakers. We came back to Winston-Salem to pick up buns at Dewey's Bakery and purchase candles from Mary Southerland, whose league sold them to raise money for the Salem Home. We kept the candles in the refrigerator all fall! I bought mugs for the coffee and baskets for the buns from Garden Ridge Pottery. To avoid conflicts with services at other churches, the lovefeast was held during the week, at Cann Presbyterian. Eventually, the lovefeast outgrew Cann and was moved to the largest church in town: First Methodist. However, their kitchen was in the basement, so coffee and buns had to be toted up an elevator, through other offices, to the sanctuary. So that was just one year. Then, we moved to First Baptist.

Eleanor and Bill Starbuck got interested and offered to bring a Moravian minister to speak. Years later, Wayne Burkett was one of the invited guests, as was Jay Hughes. Eleanor even made all of the aprons and caps for the diners.

Although we initially struggled to convey to the residents that Lovefeast was for the entire community, not any one denomination, programs and news clippings sent me by friends in recent years show me this goal has been accomplished. The community Lovefeast was probably our best gift to Elizabeth City, a time when folks could focus on the beautiful music common to all Christian faiths and the simplicity of greeting your neighbor in peace and joy.

Anna Bair

December 7

Advent—Who is Coming?

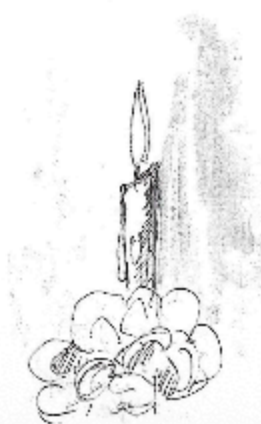
Scripture: John 1:29

Does the year seem to wind down slowly? Students have settled into school; the World Series is over; the fall schedule has been established. Is there anything to look forward to?

When I meet students at the door of Candle Tea, I tell them that it is the Advent Season; that "Advent" means "someone is coming." Who is it? The little ones will probably answer, "Santa Claus!" Perhaps an older one (maybe she has come to Candle Tea before) will say, "The baby Jesus."

Yes, Jesus is the one we're all waiting for: not only the baby in the manger, God's greatest gift to the world, but also the man of Nazareth who spoke of the love of God and healed bodies and souls; and best of all, Jesus our Savior who died for our sins, rose from the dead and lives again to bring joy to our hearts every day.

Marian Couch



December 8

The Power of Light

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." John 1:9 (NRSV)

What is it about children playing with sticks in a campfire? What fascinates them so? Maybe boys like this sort of thing more than girls, but all of us like to watch the sparks fly, the flames rise, and then watch the embers glow against the dark night.

Most of us are far removed from such experiences unless we go camping or attend church camp. There, in the twilight, we find our eyes focused upon the fire and the light that flickers upon us and our surroundings. The dark doesn't seem so scary now. It is an ancient experience to sit by a fire, yes, but it is always new for us when we take time to participate in this ritual.

There is a drama at work here: the drama of light versus darkness. Will the fire die down and leave us in the unknown mystery of the night? Will the light return and prevail over the darkness? Will that light shine upon us and remind us that we can carry light to other people who live in darkness? These are the questions that come into our minds when we sit by a campfire or when we go to an Advent lovefeast and receive a beeswax candle in our hand. When we do this, the light is very close. We see its glow and feel its warmth. And then we remember that Jesus Christ is the true light that enlightens everyone. He came into a dark world and brought the light of God's unending love to us all.

The task before us is to take some of that light into the darkness where people don't have enough food or money or shelter or good health or friends. That way, the Light wins!

Bill Gramley

December 9

The Ultimate Gift

Scripture: John 1:1-5

Christmas is a time when we rejoice in having been given the ultimate gift. As the Nicene Creed states, we have been given the "Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." That gift was the miracle of all miracles.

All miracles either lead to Christmas or from it. Without it, we would have no cause for hope. Incarnate God is the central switching station of our faith, hope and love. Without Christmas we would not have the propitiation of our sin and the resurrection that were made manifest by Jesus' birth. We would be bound prisoners under the law and sin. But, because of Christmas, Immanuel, we have abundant life and no condemnation. And with that inheritance comes the joy of knowing eternal salvation through the only one ever sent and authorized to give it: a small, crying baby born in a rude stable in a rural town to a couple traveling due to citizenship duties. Doing what we all do every day: executing the tasks society demands of us and hoping for a better future for our loved ones and ourselves. And yet, that reality has already been born, has died and was resurrected, all so that we could have that better future: eternity in the presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Merry Christmas! He is born indeed. He came. He died for us. We live. Thanks be to God.

Helen Beets

December 10

Make a Joyful Noise!

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with Thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! Psalm 95:1-2

"Mary had a baby. Oh, yes, Lord," sang the two-to-five-year-old children's angel choir. It was Christmas, 1992, and I was about to perform on stage with the nine and ten year-old children's choir in "Celebrate the Child," a celebration of the Christmas season and the birth of Christ through skits and songs. I can remember all the beautiful music sung not just by my choir, but also by my sister Jennifer's high school choir and the other choirs as well. I especially recall feeling the love of God and the joy of Christmas fill the sanctuary.

Memories like this are the best part of the Christmases of my childhood. I have participated in Christmas Eve services for a long time, but none of them have come close to being as special as that production of "Celebrate the Child." I will always remember how happy I felt during the last song, performed by everyone, from the adults all the way down to the two and the three-year-old little angels. Together, our chorus of voices made "a joyful noise" to celebrate Jesus' birth.

David Cole



December 11

Christmas in Old Salem, Through the Eyes of a Child

As they have for generations, families gather in Old Salem Square. The band welcomes the worshipers as they wait, often for hours, to be led in for this special Moravian service.

Inside the church, children's eyes light up. High above the sanctuary, laurel and cedar ropes reach out from the 26-point star. Magnolias frame the stained glass of Jesus kneeling at Gethsemane; narcissi encircle the choir loft. Two magnolia-leafed podiums topped with gigantic red poinsettias greet the holiday-dressed congregation as they assemble for the traditional Christmas Lovefeast services. The organ pipes awaken dramatically while the white-gloved youth assemble in the balcony corner with their brass bells. All heads turn to hear the celestial ringing as they sound out the joys of Christmas.

Soon, the much-awaited trio of youthful cherubs stands in their neatly pressed white caplets framed with large red bows. The congregation smiles with tears of joy as the children sweetly sing "Morning Star" while lights dim, preparing for the arrival of the red-ribboned beeswax candles to be passed from worshiper to worshiper. With the last hymn, candles are raised to signal Christ's arrival in our hearts. Then, worshipers extinguish the flames and greet each other as they spill out into the winter evening, headed home.

Getting into our car, my precious children, tired from a full day's Lovefeast activities, would turn and sweetly say, "Our Christmas is giving to others!" This is truly how a memory is created through a child's eyes.

Marcia Tabram Philips

December 12

**Preparation for Christmas Lovefeast at the Moravian
Children's Home, Kwethluk, Alaska**

Sometime in October, a carefully wrapped package arrives, containing about 250 beeswax candles and pre-cut red paper. Close to the date of the service, the older boys and girls, ages 12-18, trim the candles. We may see a parallel to our trimming project at Home Church. Some youth attack the process, while first-timers wonder how it's done. Others goof off, keeping the group in smiles and laughter, accompanied by glares and groans from the staff member assisting them. Nevertheless, the finished product is one of beauty and wonderment.

Lovefeast buns are another special effort involving many hands. Your offerings to world missions throughout the year enable supplies like flour and yeast to be shipped from the west coast during the summer months. On the Friday evening before Lovefeast Sunday, dough is mixed for about 250 buns. The dough rises during the night. Three to four staff members, assisted by the older girls, cut the dough, weigh it, and roll it into buns on Saturday morning. There are no M's or W's on these buns! No one has heard of Winkler's Bakery.

The little girls, ages 5-11, and the older girls are excited to receive "new" dresses to wear to the next day's service. Again, these special gifts come because you, individually, or a Sunday school class or other church group has sent packages throughout the year. The care, interest and time you took for children you may never meet brings joy to these girls. This will be their Sunday dress until Easter.

Fran Huetter

December 13

**Sharing Lovefeast at the Moravian
Children's Home, Kwethluk, Alaska**

Similar to here at Home Church, neighbors from surrounding villages come with anticipation and appreciation to join us at this worship service. Instead of Clemmons and Kernersville, they arrive from Akiak and Akiachuk. Around 3 pm, while it's still light, you hear dogs barking as the teams travel over the frozen riverbeds and trails leading to the Moravian Children's Home. The lead dog of each team must be tied to a tree or a solid object, and not too closely together for fear of dog-fights. Parking problems here, too! Make room for snow skidoos!

Coffee, made in huge stockpots with canned milk and sugar added at the last minute, and buns are served in the chapel. Unlit candles are passed through the congregation. The older girls take a large lighted candle to the first person in each pew, who in turn passes the flame to the next person, until the whole chapel is aglow with the warmth of Christian fellowship. A young "Yupik" (girl or boy) sings "Morning Star" antiphonally until all the candles are lit. Can you hear "thy glad beams" in your heart, and feel that you are there?

Prayer: Throughout this Advent season, may we reach out through prayer to share with our brothers and sisters the joy and peace of Jesus Christ as well as grace and strength for daily living. Amen

Fran Huetter

December 14

**For Where Your Heart Is, There Will Your Treasure Be
Also**

The Christmas our daughter Julia and our son Jonathan were five and three years old, respectively, found us living in base housing at Cherry Point Marine Air Station. David worked long hours at the hospital on base, and was often gone all night when on call. As the holidays approached, Julie and Jon enthusiastically helped decorate the lovely, wonderful-smelling, fresh balsam Christmas tree. Among our decorations was a small wooden nativity set that we placed under the tree. I had also found a children's Advent calendar, and each evening we turned on the Christmas tree lights, sat together to read a Christmas book or two and opened that day's window on the Advent calendar. We talked about why we celebrate Christmas, what the birth of the baby Jesus means to us, and how the lights on the tree remind us that Christ is the light of the world. That time of peaceful contemplation about the true meaning of Christmas, snuggled with our precious children, was incredibly special: it helped us put aside the flotsam and jetsam of the day and center our thoughts on what is most meaningful of all, the redemptive and freely offered love of Christ. Our lives have grown more complicated since that time, but the memories of that very special Christmas remind us of what is truly important in life.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. John 1:9

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. John 1:14

Susie Jackson

December 15

LIGHT OF LOVE

To receive the kingdom as a child is to depend in trustful simplicity on what God offers. Mark 10:15-16

It had been a very busy morning; last minute Christmas shopping, checking our lists to make sure we had everything covered. We usually attend three lovefeast services on Christmas Eve, going with our grandsons and their parents to one and serving as dieners at two other services. Now we were running late for the two o'clock Christmas Lovefeast service we were planning to attend with Luke and Jake and their parents.

As we arrived at the church, the sanctuary was already full. This meant we would have to go to the chapel and experience the Lovefeast via the large video screen. This was the final straw to a very hectic day. I was hardly in the mood to celebrate the lovefeast.

The service began with the usual singing, sharing of the coffee and bun and a children's story. **THEN IT HAPPENED!** As the dieners brought in the lighted candles, I glanced at the boys. Their faces were aglow! When the candles were passed down the pew to everyone, I didn't take one myself (for safety reasons), but looked at each of the boys as they held their lighted candles.

As we sang "Christ the Lord, the Lord most glorious..." I watched Luke and Jake. The look on their faces reminded me what Christmas is all about... love--unconditional love--trust, wonder, and belief.

Bob Hunter

December 16

Let your light so shine ... Matthew 5:16

The Home Church Christmas Eve lovefeast was approaching its conclusion as "*Child Divine*" was softly being sung and the lights dimmed. In the hallway behind the chancel, diners were in the process of lighting candles on six candle boards. A shout rang out: "CLOSE THAT DOOR!"

To the shock of the candle lighters, someone had opened the outside door and the cold winter's wind swept down the hall extinguishing candles right and left. A mad scramble ensued, and the damage was corrected just in time for the ladies in white, holding their single lighted candles, to lead the men into the darkened sanctuary.

That year, when candles were raised as a pledge to follow the *Light of the World*, those diners who had been in the back hall felt especially thankful for another beautiful Christmas Eve lovefeast.

Prayer

Gracious Father, in this holy season of Advent help us to keep our minds and hearts focused on you son, Jesus, the *Savior of the World*. Deliver us from the winds of commercialism and holiday distractions. Fill us with your spirit of love. Amen

Arthur and Mary Jo Spaugh

December 17

God in A Cup of Coffee?

My call to be a Lovefeast Coffee Maker came in 1996 when Tom Spangler invited me to assist him in making Lovefeast coffee for the August 13th Renewal Lovefeast Service. Tom faithfully made Lovefeast coffee for Home Moravian Church for 50 years. He taught me that the making of Lovefeast coffee is truly a gift. I, in turn, have shared that gift with my cousin Wayne and my sons, Hamilton and Harrison.

Whatever our Christmas traditions, we all share one amazing gift: the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who dwelt among us, full of grace and truth! God's gift to us remains as powerful today as it was on that very first Christmas Eve! Christmas Eve Lovefeast celebrates God's gift to us through His son Jesus Christ and promises us a full life, brimming with Grace and Truth. When the light of Christ within us begins to burn low, God can be trusted to rekindle Christ's light within us through the simple warmth of a cup of Lovefeast coffee and the soft glow of a handmade beeswax candle. God became flesh and dwelt among us: what a wondrous gift to contemplate on Christmas Eve!

A total of 2,800 cups of Lovefeast coffee will be brewed for the four Christmas Eve services held at Home Moravian Church. Those four services are Home Church's gift to the community. Making Lovefeast coffee is my gift to Home Moravian Church, to the workers and worshipers. Above all, it is my gift to God. As I stand in the balcony holding my candle high, I look out over the congregation and "sing with awe and love's sensation... Hallelujah, God with us!"

Tony Disher



Manger Moments

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.
The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.*

How do you picture the birthplace of Jesus? The anonymous author of these two familiar stanzas describes a peaceful scene, the child serene, unafraid, surrounded by friendly cattle. The baby is a friend and guardian to other little ones. An archaeologist described the birthplace as no mean stable, but a secure dwelling surrounded by a wall. He was eager to picture the Holy Family as better off and more secure than we usually think of them. At a Christmas pageant in a little church in Florida, a toddler put himself in the scene. He broke away from his parents, ran down the aisle, and climbed into the manger with the doll that represented the baby Jesus. The pastor said this was a great example of the true meaning of Christmas.

However we picture the birthplace of Jesus, we know we cannot long hold on to these manger moments. We have weeks of anticipation, and then a short time to savor the stories of the arrival of the long awaited one. Like Mary, we should keep all these things, and ponder them in our hearts.

How clever of God to sneak into the world as a baby, a child who tenderly wins our hearts before turning the world upside down.

Lehoma Goode

December 19

Shine Little Candle...

When I was growing up in Cleveland, my father drove my sister and me to the Unitarian church every Sunday. I remember many things about that church – the youth group that helped shape my values, the sermons that gave birth to my faith, the beautiful music that inspired me. But my most poignant and lasting memory was the candlelight service on the Sunday evening before Christmas. Several elements remain vivid in my mind: the candelabras with real candles in each stained-glass window, the tableau with Jesus, Mary and Joseph and the baby, the little girl or boy (chosen from among those who could carry the tune, I suppose) who stood on the altar, holding a lighted candle. The church was quiet while the child sang a simple tune with no accompaniment.

I wish you could hear the song as its lovely message carried the meaning of Christmas to all present:

*Shine, little candle,
Shine, stars above.
Shine for the Christ Child
God's gift of love.*

From that little candle came the light for all the candles, lit one by one, from row to row. When all the candles were lit, the congregation sang "Silent Night," led by a single choir member, a capella.

When I hear our children sing "Morning Star," I think not so much of the differences that separate us, but rather of the special ties that bind us together in loving worship of Jesus, the Christ Child, God's gift of love.

Lynne Wells

December 20

"Oh, that's just what I wanted!"

When my daughter was two or three years old, she was very excited about Christmas but really didn't express what gifts she wanted. She loved the mystery of not knowing what Santa and family would bring her. Surely, he would know.

On Christmas morning, she awoke early, very excited about the day. She, our family, her cousins, aunts and uncles all assembled in the living room around the Christmas tree where a multitude of gifts had been left. She opened her first gift: a gift from her aunt and uncle in Seattle who had no children of their own. It was a corduroy visor with the ears, nose and eyes of a donkey. "Oh, that's just what I wanted!" she exclaimed and put it on immediately. She opened her second gift: a gift from another aunt and uncle. It was a Fischer Price play vacuum cleaner. "Oh, that's just what I wanted!" she exclaimed, and pulled out every last part from the box. This continued. Whatever she opened was "Oh, just what I wanted!" This was Christmas!

Who knew what the very first Christmas would bring: the birth of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Prince of Peace, Christ the Lord.

Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy dark and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Oh, that's just what I wanted.

Beverly Moore

December 21

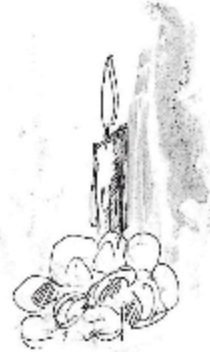
December 21 – St. Thomas Day

December 21 was celebrated as St. Thomas Day in 18th and 19th century Salem. There were liturgies and special events, especially for children. Our knowledge of "Thomasabend" (Thomas Evening or Eve) came from lifelong Home Church member Margaret McCuiston. As she told it, her extended family gathered at the home of an elder family member, where the children were seated on the parlor floor and the doors closed. Just at dusk, their parents came in with trays of edible treats, each centered with a lighted candle. Every child got his/her own tray—no sharing. She called it "eating Thomasabend," and it obviously became a treasured memory.

Her story made such a vivid impression that for the rest of her life we were blessed to present her with "Thomasabend trays" which, we understand, she did not share!

We urge you to make a special day for someone during Advent. You will remember it much longer than what you get in your stocking!

Jane and Bill Van Hoven



December 22

Preparation

Scriptures: Jeremiah 33:14-15 John 1:1-14

It's about here! Christmas, that is.

The candles have been molded and trimmed. Candle Tea has been completed. Wreaths and garlands have been hung with care. Cakes and cookies have been baked, Christmas cards written and mailed. The house has been made to look festive with all its decorations, and the Christmas tree has beautiful ornaments hanging from its branches. Shopping has been completed, or almost. I do remember one year on my way to the Christmas Eve Lovefeast that I had to stop and buy one last minute gift.

With all of our activities, even the good ones, do we have time to sit quietly and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas? Advent and Christmas are about the coming of Christ into the world. Indeed, the word, Advent, means coming. Christ came into the world as a baby, but he comes to each of us in the present in different ways. He may come in prayer, Bible study, communion, baptism, confirmation, sermons, music, poetry, conversation, reflection, in the smile of a child or the murmuring of a brook. Are we listening and preparing ourselves to hear him when he comes?

Prayer: Dear God, help us to stop in the middle of our busy, hurried lives, and take time to listen to the one who has come, the one who loved us enough to die for us. In our hearts we know we should not be too busy for you, so help us to prepare ourselves to listen for you in whatever way you choose to speak to us. Amen

Hessie Williams

December 23

Come, Lord Jesus, Be Present at Our Table

I know that moment will come at approximately 7:00 p.m., December 25 each year! It comes every Christmas Day at that time, although I always tell my family that dinner will be served at 6:00 p.m. The moment I'm referring to is not the dinner, though, but my extended family gathered in a large circle in my kitchen holding hands and singing *Be Present at our Table, Lord*. Each of us is, I know, remembering those who are with Christ while we enjoy the company of one another. This moment for me is when I let go of "Christmas" and let God. I can no longer make or trim one more candle, buy and wrap one more present, attend one more Christmas event, bake one more cookie, cook one more pan of stuffing, hang one more stocking or ornament.

However, at this moment I embrace the essence of the preparation and celebration of Christmas: the life-giving gift of God's Son for each of us. Whether we speak or sing a Moravian blessing, we invite the Triune God not only to our table but also into our lives.

Each of us has high points in our Christmas experience. It is those moments that bring clarity to this joyous season and provide the assurance of God's grace. Let us "Let go and let God" as we journey together into the New Year.

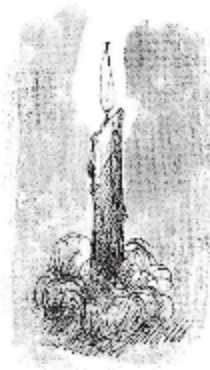
Peggy Dodson

December 24

A Poem for Christmas Eve

In my years of growing up, each Christmas Eve the family gathered at the fireplace in the living room. My father sat in a wicker rocking chair, with me, as the youngest child, in his lap, and the other three children gathered around. He told stories and read poems and Bible passages that conveyed Christmas messages.

Years later, after the deaths of my parents, my brother Burton was preparing a Christmas Eve message for his congregation when he remembered one of the poems that had always been a part of the fireside gathering. It was about keeping Christmas alive throughout the year. He wanted to share the poem with his congregation and began to look for it. He went through our father's Christmas books; not there. He searched the county library; not there. He continued the search for ten years, until, one day, while rummaging through a dusty box of our dad's papers, he finally found the poem. He not only discovered the poem, but also the author, whose name was typed at the bottom of the yellowed page - "Douglas L. Rights" - our father. Here's the poem for your Christmas Eve this year:



December 24

Christmas Came to Our House and Never Went Away

Used to think that Christmas was nothing but a day
To get a lot of presents and to give a lot away.
Shouted, "Merry Christmas," and helped to trim the tree -
Just a day of Christmas was all that I could see.
But I found that Christmas is more than any day -
Since Christmas came to our house and never went away.

Struck me of a sudden that friendliness and cheer
Were meant to be on duty more than one day in a year;
If you're happy Christmas, why not the day before
And the day that follows, and so on, evermore?
Got to thinkin' of it, an' that is why I say,
Christmas came to our house and never went away.

Lots of us go plodding along the road of life
An' think one day of gladness will make up for all the strife,
But the Christmas spirit can show you how you need
To make each day a Christmas in thought and word and deed.
Used to pack the kindness in camphor balls next day,
Till Christmas came to our house and never went away.

We just keep on givin' to strangers and to kin
An' find that what is going out is always comin' in;
Makes the sunshine brighter, where we've got to live,
To learn that givin's keepin'; what you have, you give.
Holly in December, violets in May,
And Christmas came to our house, and never went away.

Graham Rights

December 25

Miami Beach Christmas

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2

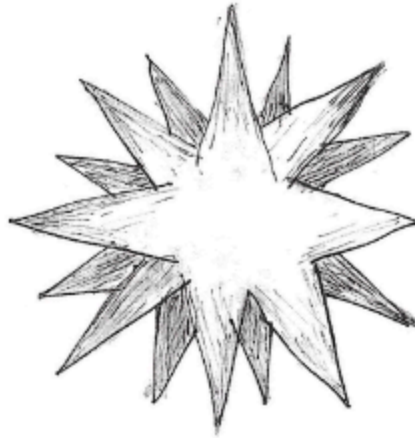
It is one of my earliest memories. Soldiers and sailors are coming into our house in Miami Beach all the time, sometimes meeting on the third floor in a kind of parsonage USO, sometimes introducing us to their families who have come to be near them until they ship out. I am not aware that some of them will not return. I sense only part of the anxiety of their families. And then there is Christmas.

Long tables are brought out of the church fellowship hall and covered with tablecloths. About 35 people would come for Christmas dinner under the palm trees. I don't know where the food came from, but there was plenty, despite rationing. There is a picture in my mind of soldiers feeling perfectly at home cooking in our kitchen, one chopping cabbage for coleslaw and putting it in the refrigerator. Maybe their families helped to pile the table full. Mother would have made sure there were fried chicken, potatoes, and lots of vegetables. There had to have been a fresh fruit salad, perhaps with coconut from our own trees. More important than the food was the sense that we were all family. Our nuclear family of five expanded to include anybody we could coax into meeting us and becoming church for one another.

For years after the war, our little family visited our extended wartime family all over the United States. Our hospitality was more than repaid as time after time, we found ourselves welcome in the homes that were represented at each Miami Beach Christmas.

Lehoma Goode

Thank you, thank you, thank you to all the folks who responded graciously and creatively to the invitation to be a part of this endeavor. Thank you for your patience in enduring edits and rewrites to fit the page!



A special thanks to Gerrii Spach and Bill Gramley for graciously providing the cover art and sketches.