

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE
PROCLAMATION OF THE
WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

WEBSITE READY: see pg. 20

DECEMBER 2011



OF NEW BIRTH, BAPTISM, AND CHILDREN

The history of the Christian Church has often been marked by discussions, disagreements and divisions over points of

Scripture and interpretations of the will of God in certain areas. One of these concerns the question of whether infants and young children are children of God from the womb, or are in need of a "new birth" experience. This leads further to the matter of baptism—should it be performed on infants or must some adult comprehension or decision be involved? I believe we can come to a clear understanding through study of God's Word as expressed in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Word makes abundantly clear that Jesus is a lover of children. He would often hold a young child and use the child as an example of faith and a proper heart condition to those who were assembled to hear Him. In *Mark 10:16*, Jesus gathered children to Himself ...*he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.* In this way He was claiming them as His own, putting His blessing upon them, making it clear that in His eyes, they belonged to Him. We see the abundant and unconditional love of God demonstrated

through this simple and forceful act of Jesus, for He claimed them without regard to their lineage, the condition of their parents, or even their own thoughts. Jesus' blood was shed for all, and He was that Light described in *John 1:9 ...that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*. Jesus could therefore claim any child as His own, knowing that He would die to save them, and knowing that they belong to no one else.

God has also always instructed that His children be marked with the seal of His love at a young age. This was accomplished through circumcision in the Old Testament, and is accomplished through baptism in the New. Hebrew parents were instructed to bring their male children to be physically circumcised and named on the eighth day after their birth. *Genesis 17:11-12: And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. Luke 2:21: And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS...*

In the New Testament, baptism (understood to be the visible sacrament of baptism with water) is to be applied soon after one becomes a believer. In Matthew 28:19 we read: *Go ye therefore, and teach*

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all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Recall that the first desire of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) after he became a believer was to be baptized with water by Philip, and Acts contains several other examples of people being baptized unto Jesus Christ immediately after they believed. So, if baptism is to be performed soon after faith comes, where does that leave an infant?

It cannot be emphasized forcefully enough that all people are children of God (believers by faith in Christ) in the womb. The reaction of John the Baptist, who leapt for joy in his mother's womb upon hearing of Jesus in the salutation of Mary, is an example. *Luke 1:41: And it came to pass, that,*

when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. This is a vivid depiction of how even the unborn, with no apparent capacity for thought or reason, respond by faith to the love message of their Creator. To suggest otherwise is to imply that all, or some, unborn are children of the devil. This is impossible, as the devil has no ability to create life, and he only accumulates children who fall from faith into unbelief at some point—perhaps years—after birth.

The newborn, however, is a believing child of God to whom the covenant of baptism applies, and this covenant has nothing to do with the opinion or decision-making ability of the child! The Hebrew children were not asked for their views on whether they should be circumcised (marked), Jesus did not ask the children if they wanted to be blessed, and we are not to be concerned about whether an infant wishes to be baptized (marked). Why? Because it is entirely the work of God, who marks children as belonging to Himself with a seal that is good for life. In other words, **God's** view of the child is constant and unchanging, and even if the covenant is later broken through adult unbelief, it is clear that God did not break it. The beauty of infant baptism is that it is applied when man is at his most helpless and incapable state, leaving the work entirely in the hands of God. Baptism has also been compared to the natural example of the branding of a calf in a cattle herd—the calf will forever carry the mark of original ownership, though it may later be sold to another master. As Luther noted, "to suggest that an adult decision is required for baptism contorts the Sacrament, converting it from the work of God into the work of man." Baptism, once applied, is valid for life, and there is no need to repeat it in adulthood.

This also clarifies who is in need of new birth, or of being "born again." New birth is only required in those who are dead spiritually, those whose spiritual portion, which was alive at birth, has starved, withered and died through lack of nourishment. This can occur at any point after birth, and one who has lost their pure God-given faith in Christ must be reborn. Such was the state of the Jewish leader Nicodemus and those he represented, and Jesus admonished him ... *ye must be born again (John 3:7)*. We cannot, however, require new birth of a

childhood Christian, one who has never denied nor lost their faith. No spiritual death has occurred, and therefore it is not possible to require new birth. Such a requirement is a heavy burden of man and is not edifying to the believer. I believe that childhood Christians do, and must, and will experience a "piercing of the heart," similar to that which Mary experienced (Luke 2:35), wherein the fallen condition of our flesh, our own failures, forgiveness and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ are brought home to the heart in a very personal and special way. It is impossible to assess at what age this should happen, and we must therefore leave the timing of such an experience in the hands of God. He is faithful, and may His Word ever be a blessing among His people.

*In Christ,
Pastor Stephen J. Wuori
Calgary, Alberta*

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Rejoice that the immortal God is born
that mortal men may live in eternity.

John Huss

***The Word was made flesh,
and dwelt among us...***

The Gospel of John 1:14

Just as when we speak, in order that what we have in our minds may enter through the ear into the mind of the hearer, the word which we have in our hearts becomes an outward sound and is called speech; and yet our thought does not lose itself in the sound, but remains complete in itself, and takes the form of speech without being modified in its own nature by the change: so the Divine Word, though suffering no change of nature, yet became flesh, that He might dwell among us.

St. Augustine

FOR YOU!

On the first Christmas, the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)* Hear what the angel of the Lord says to you: it is for you! God in His great love for you, sinner, gave His only begotten Son as a free gift for you. This message is pure Gospel for us this season and always.

The angels are messengers sent from God. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to tell Mary that she would conceive in her womb and bring forth a Son and call His name JESUS. When it became known to Joseph that Mary was with child, he was going to put her away from him privately. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost.

**Hear what the angel
of the Lord says to you:
it is for you!**

The angels glorify and praise God. At the birth of Jesus, the multitude of the heavenly host praised God and said, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:14)* The angels saw the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and now they rejoiced that Jesus was born into this world as a Savior.

The angels are ministering spirits and testifiers. They ministered to Jesus after He was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:11). An angel strengthened Jesus in the agony of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). An angel rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulcher to show that it was empty and testified of the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:2-7). The angels were at the ascension of Jesus and asked the disciples why they were gazing up into heaven and told them that Jesus would return in the same manner as He had gone up (Acts 1:10-11).

The angels watch children. Jesus said, *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)* Jesus calls them "their angels," angels that have been assigned to watch them for the

children's benefit. I believe that we older ones, who are just as helpless as little children, have angels assigned to us for our benefit. Not one of us is preserved by our own strength; we need the Spirit of God.

Jesus spoke parables about the rejoicing that commenced when the man found his one lost sheep, though he had ninety nine others, and when the woman found her one lost piece of silver, though she had nine others. Jesus concluded: *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:10)* There is joy in the presence of the angels of God when one wayward soul returns in repentance, and when Christians walk in faith today. The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost all work in the heart of the sinner and have joy when one sinner repents. Has there been joy in the presence of the angels because of you? Listen again to the angel of the Lord: FOR YOU!

*Pastor Gary Bertram
New Ipswich, New Hampshire*

The Lord, Our Dwelling Place

It is of vital importance that we find out definitely where our souls are living. The Lord declares that He has been our dwelling place in all generations, but the question is: Are we living in our dwelling place? The psalmist says of the children of Israel: *They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. (Psalm 107:4-5)*

I am afraid there are many wandering souls in the church, whom this description of the wandering Israelites would exactly fit. All their Christian lives they have been wandering in a spiritual wilderness and have found no city to dwell in, and, hungry and thirsty, their souls have fainted in them. And yet all the while the dwelling place of God has been standing wide open, inviting them to come in and take up their abode there forever. Our Lord Himself urges this invitation upon us. "Abide in me," He says, "and I in you."

Hannah Whitall Smith

IN LOVING MEMORY OF REV. ALVIN C. HOLMGREN

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Alvin Conrad was born on July 20, 1930, in the small farming community of Carpio, ND to Chris and Carrie Holmgren. He was the seventh in their family of five sons and four daughters. Alvin's father was a farmer and served as pastor for the Apostolic Lutheran Church congregation in Carpio.

In 1940, following years of economic depression and crop losses, the family left their farm and moved to Alderwood Manor, WA. Ten-year-old Alvin was permitted to bring his toy typewriter in the family's crowded car, an indulgence that turned out to be fitting for his life's work. In high school Alvin focused on business classes and, later, in the Army and in the offices of the railroad, he worked as a secretary. Over the decades, he would labor over the keys of manual, electric and computer keyboards in his pastoral work, drafting Gospel messages and orders of service for weddings and funerals and keeping up a wide correspondence of counseling and friendship.

After graduating from Edmonds High School in 1948 and working a couple years for the Northern Pacific Railway Company in their offices in the Smith Tower in downtown Seattle, Alvin was drafted into military service. Because of the shortage of experienced secretarial staff, partway through basic training in Fort Ord, CA Alvin was assigned to The Adjutant General's School in Indianapolis, IN. Upon finishing the prescribed secretarial courses, he spent 14 months of his 24-month tour of duty in Japan, fulfilling a secretarial assignment at Camp Sendai, northern Honshu. In the summer of 1953, Alvin returned to his civilian job with the Northern Pacific Railroad.

During Alvin's school years and even when he entered the Army, he was a retiring type of person. One of his major difficulties was speaking in public—even answering a question in class. That was not only his problem in school, but also in church. However, because of his responsibilities in the military, he possessed greater freedom when he returned to civilian life. In 1954 the congregation of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of Seattle, of which he was a part, elected him as the superintendent of the Sunday school. Later in the year he was asked

to assist his dad and Isaac Seppala with their ministerial duties as both were advanced in age. The following summer, en route to the national church convention with his childhood friend Ivan Seppala, 24-year-old Alvin gave what he remembered as his first sermon when Pastor Carl Neimitalo urged him to speak at a house gathering in Belden, ND. Upon arriving in Ironwood, MI, a young and inexperienced Alvin found himself speaking at the convention, a task that seemed insurmountable. He gave a simple testimony of faith.

In 1958 Alvin was ordained into the ministry. At this time and in later years when he questioned his qualifications for the ministry, Alvin would recall a special memory: Back in the family farmhouse in ND, while Chris Holmgren was visiting with Preacher Andrew Wirkkala around the big old heating stove, Alvin climbed into his dad's lap. Preacher Wirkkala paused and laid his hand on Alvin and said: "When your dad gets too old to preach the Word of God anymore, then you are going to take his place."

In the mid-1960s as God was pointing Alvin in the direction of full-time ministry, Alvin was troubled about leaving the seeming material security of his longtime railroad employer. One day when he was riding the transit downtown to his job in the Smith Tower, he was again prayerfully seeking the will of God. Suddenly the Lord Himself appeared before him: Alvin saw Him with his own eyes (Alvin said He looked as the artists portray Him), and the Lord spoke to him, saying, "Don't worry about all these things (the material); I will take care of them." And He was gone. Alvin was overwhelmed. The lady sitting in the seat next to him turned suddenly and looked at him with such a startled expression. She said nothing; Alvin could say nothing! He felt that God had spoken to him. God had given him the answer. True to the insight of Preacher Wirkkala, in February 1965, after many years balancing office work, church work, and a growing family, Alvin resigned at the railroad and entered the ministry full-time as pastor of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of Seattle, where he served until 2005.

Alvin's nearly fifty years of ministry were shared by his beloved wife, Mary. Alvin Conrad Holmgren and Mary Ann Johnson were married July 18, 1959, at the Ballard church. The two met as children at church services. Both would recall working together in the dining room at the 1947 church convention held in Hockinson, WA. Somehow Alvin and Mary always managed to serve at the same tables.

The newlyweds' first residence was the apartment at the back of the church in the Ballard district of Seattle, where they lived with their growing family for eight years before purchasing their first home. Carrie Ann was born in 1960, Juli Louise in 1963, Daniel Alvin in 1966, Kristin Elaine in 1968, Eric Nathan in 1971, and Marit Rebecca in 1976.

Throughout his ministry and family life, Alvin enjoyed above all his relationships with individuals. Alvin cared deeply for people, and consequently many people felt they had a special relationship with him, which in fact they did.

Many will remember fondly that Alvin was known for his formal dress. Uncle Alvin would show up for a baseball game wearing a tie, knowing he would be ribbed lovingly by his nephews, and he would work in the yard in old slacks. In fact he requested his first suit from the Sears Roebuck catalog before the family left the farm in ND. Even in these natural things God has created each of us uniquely. As a teenager, Alvin once came home from town with a lamp table rather than the shirt his mother had sent him to purchase. True to form, one of his and Mary's favorite hobbies throughout their working years was collecting and restoring furniture. Alvin's family had fun counting the chairs in Dad's collection, in use and in the corners of the attic, and while antiquing, he never could easily pass up a table.

Alvin always enjoyed traveling for the ministry, reconnecting with folks around the country. In later years, a highlight for Alvin was making several mission trips to Latvia soon after the fall of the Soviet Union. As his local pastoral responsibilities lessened, he enjoyed editing the *Christian Monthly*, our denomination's magazine, and writing sermons for our U.S. missions radio broadcasts as well as articles for the church newsletter. Many will recall he often quoted from the book of Hebrews, including *Hebrews 2:11: For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*

God was faithful to Alvin and Mary throughout decades of pastoring, and Alvin retired completely in 2005 due to the progression of Alzheimer's disease. God graciously arranged that Alvin's first and last sermons were in Belden, ND, helping bring his ministry full circle.

Even as Alzheimer's stripped Alvin of his abilities and relationships in a difficult and long goodbye to this life on earth, those who

loved him were able to remember many aspects of this precious man. As one of Mary's nephews expressed during Alvin's illness, while Alvin did not have eloquence of words anymore, he still had eloquence of heart and spirit. When even this was no longer accessible by others, we know Alvin's heart was accessible to our Father in heaven and that He never forgot Alvin.

Mary cared capably and lovingly for her husband until last Thanksgiving when her health and his increasing needs made it impossible to continue. He spent eleven months at the Warm Beach Health Care Center north of Seattle, a Christian senior community where Alvin and Mary's daughter-in-law Kay is a registered nurse.

The family gathered with him there on Monday, exactly forty years after the death of his father, Chris Holmgren. In the company of loved ones, Alvin passed away Tuesday, October 18, 2011, at 8:00 a.m., after the sun came up and was shining brightly on the landscape outside his window. "Joy cometh in the morning (Psalm 30:5)." We celebrate with him the end of his struggle and the attainment of all his hopes in Jesus Christ.

Alvin was preceded in death by his parents; granddaughter Abigail Peterson; brothers Henry, Alfred, Leonard, and Clarence; and sisters Inga Questad and Helga Kallio.

He is survived by his wife, Mary; their children and their spouses: Carrie and Bill Kandoll, Juli and Duane Peterson, Dan Holmgren, Kris and Will Matson, Eric and Kay Holmgren, and Marit and Ben Newton; as well as by 16 grandchildren, sisters Sally Carlson and Ida Kumma, and numerous nieces and nephews, each of whom held a special place in his heart.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

The Alvin Holmgren family

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

1 Corinthians 15:55

Hello Children,

Christmas greetings to you!

Mary was a young woman living with her family in Nazareth. She was promised to be married to a man named Joseph. An angel of God visited her one day and said, *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee:*



blessed art thou among women. (Luke 1:28) Mary was troubled at his greeting. She did not understand what he was saying. The angel comforted her by saying, *Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:30-33)* Mary wondered how this could happen as she was not even married yet, but the angel told her, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest (God) shall overshadow (protect) thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:35)* Mary could only say, "May it be as you have said."

Some months later, Joseph and Mary got married and were living in Nazareth. The ruler of the land said all the people were to go to the town of their birth to be counted. The ruler was trying to figure out how many people lived in that part of the country. Joseph took Mary and they began their travel to Bethlehem, the town where Joseph was born.

At this time, Mary was very near to having her Baby, her Baby who was the Son of God. Mary and Joseph had to travel about 100 miles which was a long way to walk, or even to ride on a donkey as Mary may have. It was a long weary trip for Mary. When they finally reached Bethlehem, the town was already full and Joseph could find no place for them to rest. At last they were offered a place in someone's stable where animals were kept and fed. That does not seem like a nice place to sleep, but Mary's Baby was ready to be born. I'm sure Joseph

made her as comfortable as he could. Here in the stable, she brought forth her firstborn Son. Imagine that—this little Baby being born in a stable and His bed was a manger, a box from which animals ate their food. God watched over them and He knew that His Son Jesus would be born in such a lowly place.

God's angel came to shepherds out in the fields that night to tell them the great news. The shepherds went to find Baby Jesus. When they had seen Him, they went back to their sheep, but they told everyone they met on the way about the special Baby that had been born.

The Bible does not tell us much about Jesus as a young child. He lived with Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem for about 2 years, and they lived in Egypt for about 1 year. Then they went back to Nazareth. Jesus was in the temple with the priests, asking and answering questions, when He was just 12 years old. Jesus was a very special Baby, a Boy whose life was to be lived like most children of His day, but yet He was quite different because He was doing God's business at an early age. He grew into a young Man who gave all of Himself so that He could do His Father's will. He gave everything of Himself and at the end of His earthly life, He gave His life to save mankind from sin.

You and I and all believers can thank our God for giving us His only Son. His Son should be very special to us. When we hear the name of Jesus, we can be comforted because this Man named Jesus loves us no matter who we are. In America, we give one another gifts at Christmastime, but none compare to the gift of God's Son. We can tell God this Christmas season, "Thank You very much for the gift of Your loving Son. God, You have given us the very best gift. Please help us to share this gift with others."

Be sure to have someone read the Christmas story to you. If you don't have a Bible story book, you can find it in the Bible in Luke 1 and 2, and Matthew 1 and 2. I love the Christmas story and never get tired of hearing it. My heart rejoices when I think of what happened so long ago in that humble stable.

I pray that God will be with each of you this Christmas season and will bless each of you with even more love for Jesus. We cannot love Jesus enough.

Here is a Christmas song about Jesus' birth. I have never heard the tune, so I made up my own. You can too.

Little children, sing and praise joyous Christmas carols raise.
For our Jesus came to earth, praises for our Savior's birth.
Children, thank our God above, for father's care and mother's love.
Yet is Jesus dearer far, to His little children's hearts.
Jesus' arms are open wide to receive each little child;
Blessing hands on them He lays, bless us too, oh Lord, we pray.
Bless our parents, Lord, today, brothers, sisters too, we pray.
Thou who by Thy lowly birth, brought salvation to the earth.

*God's peace,
Gwen Wilson*



Happy Birthday, Jesus!

At a time of Christmas celebration and cheer,
We often forget the wonderful story, so dear,
Of the real reason for Christmas celebration,
Given to every town, country, and nation.
How You came to fulfill, God's precious will.
How You came to be a King, over everything.
How You came as a Babe in a manger
 that everyone thought to be a stranger.
How You did not come with riches or gold,
 but for the poor, sick, young and old.
How the angels sang proclaiming Your birth
 above the shepherds on this earth.
How the shepherds came to You to see if You were true.
How a star shone bright on that holy night.
How the wisemen followed that star to see who You are.
How Your sweet mother held You tight
 on that glorious night.

Oh, Jesus, I love You and I wish that everyone knew
 that Christmas is Your birthday
And that You're the Truth and the Way!
Happy Birthday, Jesus!

*Shana Helmes, 1996, age 14
Battle Ground, Washington*

Our Blessed Heritage

Toronto Apostolic Lutheran Church

The 1950s and 60s were a time of great immigration from Europe into North America. In 1958 and 1960, two families moved from Finland to Canada and settled in the Toronto area. The Lampuoti family came in 1958, having been in living faith already in Finland, and wanted to gather with Christians here in the new land. The Valitalo family came in 1960, and only one member of the family was in living faith, although the grandparents remaining in Finland were also believers. During those years, it was very common for new Canadians to gather with kinfolk from their respective fatherlands. The Lampuotis and Valitalos got to know each other through work and other common ground. The Valitalo family members were converted into living faith here in Toronto. (It was wonderful for our grandparents in Finland to hear that their son and his family had been converted, as it had always been their prayer.)

Leevi Lampuoti had written to the Apostolic Lutheran Church Federation asking if there were believers in close proximity to Toronto with whom to gather. They responded by sending believers from the Detroit or Southfield area. Reuben and Amelia Peterson and family made numerous visits, as well as other families from the Detroit area.

We had home services as well as Sunday School in homes. In the early years, many Finnish families gathered. We first were known by the name of "Koti Seurat," and around 1964 we made request to the Apostolic Lutheran Church Federation to become an affiliated congregation. This was granted.

For several years our services were all held in the Finnish language, but as English-speaking newcomers came into our midst, we began translating the services into English. This was quite remarkable as we had been in Canada less than 10 years, having learned to speak English after arriving in Canada.

Our first pastor was Leevi Lampuoti, and others began preaching soon. Matti Valitalo began preaching and translating when he was only about 17 or 18 years old. Jouko Valitalo also began to preach at an early age. Bill Warren and Ken McLachlan began to preach after they were converted.

The families' children grew and started to marry and have families of their own. There were several new converts from the local areas. God's Word drew many into the fold. Many hearts were touched by the spoken Word and came to the realization of their sinfulness, and they were blessed with the reassurance that even their sins were washed away in Jesus' name and by His precious atoning blood. How blessed we were to hear those beautiful sermons and to experience how sinners are truly changed by the blood of the Lamb!

As our homes had limited space, we were looking for a larger gathering place. We rented a chapel at a United Church for about a year, and then rented the Church of All Nations for another couple of years. In 1973, we were blessed to be able to buy our own church at 205 Highfield Road, Toronto, and we were at that location for 4 or 5 years. We sold that building and began looking a little further outside of the city core. In the short interim, we again gathered in Leena and Leif Nyblom's home; they had a large spare room and it was set up as a "church room." In 1978, God blessed us with another church building at 70 Dickson Hill Road, in Markham, where we currently gather.



During these past 50 or so years, many families have grown from the two original families. Some of these descendants have now moved to other parts of North America to other congregations. Some families have stayed and new generations are coming up. Some elders have passed on to their eternal homes.

Many times we wonder and are truly thankful that God has blessed this small congregation with all of our needs. It goes beyond human understanding how a small group such as ours, could "afford" to carry such a building. We all have to agree that it is solely by the grace and blessing of God. He carries us and provides for all of our needs.



Our prayer and hope as a congregation is that God will continue to keep us on the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life, and will protect us from wandering onto the path of destruction. We pray that God's Word will be spoken in its entirety

and in truth, and that He will give us the strength to continue on this journey until the end of time, washing away the sins and shortcomings that befall us in the name and blood of Jesus.

Ken and Laila McLachlan

OUR FATHER!

Who put the sun, moon and stars in the sky? Who made the birds that fly so high? Who put all the water in the oceans? Who knows how many grains of sand are in the world and how many hairs are on our heads? Who are we talking to when we say, "Our Father, Who art in heaven?" Isn't that amazing?! God lets us call Him "Father!"

Jesus tells us we need to be like little children. We can talk to God with the same bold, happy trust that children have toward their moms and dads when asking for a cookie. This is not always easy for adults to do. The older we get, the more we are aware of our sinful hearts, but that is the kind of people Jesus died to save.

Jesus died so we can be the sons and daughters of the most powerful Person ever known anywhere. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10) Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God... (1 John 3:1)* Pray that God will teach us how wonderful this is!

*Will Matson
Yacolt, Washington*

GOOD TIMES

If the Lord gives the days, the sun will soon set on another year. For many of us, this is the time when we reminisce a little bit before replacing our old calendars with the new ones. Undoubtedly for many, the past year, when compared with other ones, has been tough to say the least. Many loved ones are not here any longer to welcome in the new year with us, and we miss them. For some, disease, addictions and illnesses cast a shadow over a future that looked so bright just a short time ago. Concerns about finances, jobs and businesses have caused many a sleepless night. Many marriages and families that seemed so solid during the good times now appear to be in shambles. News reports tell us that the economic outlook for the distant future might not change for some time: life as we know it could, in fact, even get a lot worse.

This brings up an important question for us to consider: were the GOOD TIMES really all that good? Or were we so busy making money and having fun that we didn't take the time to enjoy and cherish the things that really matter—things like family, friends, church and, most important of all, our walk and relationship with the Lord? But God has never promised us wealth and a life of ease! In fact, He tells us that it may be just the opposite. He has given us a list of what He considers blessings, and His list is most likely just the opposite of ours. We praise God when things go the way we want them to, and when they don't, we drop to our knees and plead with the Lord to change our circumstances.

If we take the time to study God's Word, we find story after story about the sufferings that God's people went through. God promised these people that He would bless them and care for them no matter what happened in their lives, and yet they experienced hardships that seem unthinkable. Consider Abraham, for example. God finally gives him the son that He had promised and a short time later asks Abraham to offer up that son as a sacrifice. We know that, in the end, Isaac was spared, but the trust and faith that Abraham had is amazing. Isaac and Rebekah's family had its share of sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau. Jacob himself spends seven years working in order to

marry the woman he loves and is tricked by his own uncle. Joseph is sold by his brothers into a life of slavery away from family and friends, knowing full well that he may never see them again. He spends time in prison because of false accusations, and because of a famine and the possibility of starvation he is finally reunited with his father and brothers. Just a few generations later we see God's covenant people, the offspring of Abraham, suffering under terrible conditions as Egyptian slaves.

**Were the GOOD TIMES really
all that good?**

Jump ahead to the New Testament and imagine the life of John the Baptist: a cousin of Jesus whom the Lord used for a six month ministry before his life was taken. Consider that only one of the Lord's disciples died a natural death. They all gave their lives in order to share and encourage others to believe in the one event that is most shocking of all, that God asked His only Son to leave the comforts of heaven and come down here; to be born as an infant; to live a perfect, sinless life; to spend a few years training up a group of selfish, sinful misfits, all the while patiently ministering to the needs of people who at every turn mistreated and scorned Him. He never even owned His own home; he spent many, many sleepless nights praying not for Himself but for everyone else. Rising every day, He knew that He would face increasing ridicule and rejection, and yet He went about His business with a love for every person that He encountered. He never worried about money or food, clothing or shelter; He never went away on a vacation or had any hobbies. His only concern was for the salvation of mankind. He knew as each day passed that He was one day closer to the day of His death, and yet, because of His love for us, He marched forward toward His demise. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God's Son, gave up His life so that we can live. His death on that cross paid for the sins of the entire world. He has risen victorious over sin, death, and the devil.

My friends, the victory is ours. Heaven awaits, the payment for our sins has been paid, and Christ has made our hearts His dwelling place. So when the going seems tough, remember the

hardships that have been endured by God's people throughout the Bible, but most of all remember His Son, Jesus Christ.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)

United with you in Christ!

Ray Stenersen

Hancock, Michigan

May God bless you and yours this Christmas season!

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Gifts

The laughter of children,
The wind in the tree,
The snow softly falling,
A tear flowing free—

The purr of a kitten,
The deer as they flee,
The notes of a songbird,
A hand held to me—

His wonders surround me,
To hear, touch, and see;
Gifts telling me clearly,
Of God's love for me.

Sandy K. Gregorich

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