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The <sup>+</sup> Seminarian

# the Seminarian

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"In no strange Land"

O world invisible, we view thee,  
O world intangible, we touch thee,  
O world unknowable, we know thee,  
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,  
The eagle plunge to find the air--  
That we ask of the stars in motion  
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,  
And our benumbed conceiving soars!--  
The drift of pinions, would we harken,  
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;--  
Turn but a stone and start a wing!  
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,  
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)  
Cry;--and upon thy sore loss  
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder  
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,  
Cry,--clinging Heaven by the hems;  
And lo, Christ walking on the water  
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

Francis Thompson (1859-1907)

## THE ADVENT WREATH, LIGHT FOR OUR DARKNESS

By George Leedom

One day during the Thanksgiving vacation last year my pastor telephoned to invite me to accompany him on a tramp in the woods. It was to be a short trip for the purpose of gathering evergreen for the Advent Wreath, that strangely Lutheran adornment for the pre-Christmas season.

It is very unfortunate that this decoration, this symbolic wreath, with its four candles and its almost devotional function, does not receive greater acceptance in the American Church. For this wreath presents us with one cure for an ill that besets the Church during the period from Thanksgiving to December 25.

In a season when ma renata is the word and preparation is the theme, not anticipation, then the Christmas Carols and decorations so dear to the hearts of the pre-Christmas celebrators have no place. For in the Advent season the Christian heart must devote itself to contemplation and introspection in preparation to receive the Holy Child of Bethlehem.

Even so the purple vestments upon our altars and the hangings on our pulpits, the Advent hymns: O come, O come, Emmanuel; Wake, awake, for night is flying; and Paul Gerhardt's O how shall I receive Thee, How greet Thee, Lord, aright?, and the Gospels concerning S. John the Baptist -- the forerunner of our Lord, these all point us to reflection upon our preparedness.

Let us see how a wreath of evergreen and four candles may raise the pall of liturgical confusion that so often makes holy places resemble department stores during the forepart of December.

The Advent Wreath finds its Christian origin in Scandinavian and Germanic countries where it is an adaptation of a very ancient pagan practice.

"In the dark days of winter, when the sun seemed farthest removed from the earth, the sun-worshippers prayed to the hidden god to turn back the wheels of the sun wagon and return once more. They took a wheel from their own wagon and, decorating it with lights and greens, hung it up in their homes. This custom was carried over into the Christian era and incorporated into Christian symbolism. The Advent wreath tells in a dramatic way of the dark and waiting world, and of the first dawning light which grows brighter and brighter as the days and weeks pass until it merges at last into the brilliance of the crib

and tree."\*

This beautiful symbolism, this contrast of darkness and light, is carried over today in our Church as we interpret the ancient liturgy of the Church on each Sunday in Advent. The acolyte with his taper takes a flame from the Gospel light and lights one of the candles in the wreath as the pastor reads a prophecy concerning our Lord's Nativity. One candle for each Sunday until the end of the four weeks when the wreath glows with the light that has led us, heart and soul, to the joy of Christmas.

The wreath itself may be constructed quite simply. In our Church at home it is made of evergreen branches wired to a wooden frame -- the wheel of pagan times -- and laid upon a stand about three and one half feet above the floor. But often the wreath is hung from the ceiling or suspended from a stand with the center post extending up through the center of the wreath.

If the wreath hangs from the ceiling or from a stand, it may be suspended by purple ribbons, or, if it be large and elaborate it is well to make use of chains for support.

The wreath of evergreen is set with red or white candles. Four candles, one for each of the weeks in Advent, or one for each day of the season, in which case white is used for weekdays and red for Sundays.

As a general thing, when the wreath is used in our churches, four candles are used. The method of lighting a candle for each day lends itself well to use in the home or in institutions. The Advent Wreath in the Philadelphia Motherhouse has a candle for each day of the Advent season.

If the wreath is used in the home a delightful adaptation may be made by hanging a small paper star from the wreath for each day with the prophecy for the day written on it. The lighting of the candle becomes all the more a family activity if the prophecy is read each day of the Advent season.

Whether the wreath hangs in the midst of the most intimate family circle or whether it hangs besides the lectern of the largest church in the land, its purpose remains the same. On the first Sunday in Advent the first candle is lighted and its prophecy is read. Each day or each Sunday thereafter another candle and another prophecy -- until on the Eve of the Nativity the lights all burn brightly, the darkness is dispelled, and Christ's Church stands readied, prepared for the joy of the Christmas tide.

Then and only then should the preparations made in secret; the plays and pageants painstakingly rehearsed by the children, old and young; the new hymns and carols learned at great cost;

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\* Sr. Grace Frances. "Advent and Christmas Customs." UNA SANCTA. S. Andrew's, 1952.

the girts, decoration, the tree and the holly, and most of all the creche in its reverent dignity; then and only then should these be brought forward to decorate our homes and Churches in expression of our joy in Christ. For it is first in the contemplative reading and rereading of the prophecies that we prepare our hearts to receive Him aright.

And regarding the prophecies themselves, there should be little difficulty in choosing a series. The alternate lectioneries in the General rubrics of the Common Service Book provide Old Testament lections for Advent that may be adapted for use in connection with the wreath.

Professor George Seltzer of the Philadelphia Seminary has suggested Isaiah 11:1-10, Micah 5:2-4, Jeremiah 33:10-16, and Isaiah 9:6-7 to be used on the four Sundays in the above order. Another series read in one Church, with some success, uses Zechariah 9:9-10 -- the Triumphant Entry -- on the First Sunday, and Isaiah 40:1-5,9,10, Isaiah 7:14 or Micah 5:2, and Isaiah 60:1-6 on the succeeding Sundays.

The choice of prophecies is not the greatest problem. The major problem lies in the fact that the Advent Wreath is not known to many of our Churches and is seldom used in our homes.

There is hope to be drawn from the fact that there is an increased interest in the wreath as a part of our Advent preparation. Our publication houses and Church furnishing houses have stocks of imitation wreaths that may be purchased and used in our homes and even if used in our Churches. Though the imitation wreath lacks, not only warmth and originality, but also what we might call downright consecrated effort, still it may point our people to a more proper observance of the pre-Christmas period.

It is this simple act of reverently reading the Advent scriptures and lighting the Advent candles, as the season progresses in home and Church, that witnesses to our heartfelt preparation for the coming of our Christ into our hearts.

This renewed interest in the Advent Wreath, even as it has prompted the writing of this article, gives us hope that the day may come when the shopkeeper and housewife may face his or her Christmas Eve in reel joy and expectation rather than the extreme weariness of body and soul so prevalent today.

This wreath of evergreen with its twinkling candles will aid us to this end for it progressively points us to the Birth of Him who is the Light of the world.

Report of the Student Members  
of the Student-Faculty  
Committee--

By recent faculty action, January 4 and 5 have been set aside as a reading and review period. The examination schedule has been postponed two days and no classes will be scheduled in order to give each student an opportunity to finish up his semester's work in a manner most satisfactory to himself.

This action concluded a concern which, arising in the student body, had been brought to the attention of the Student-Faculty Committee. The Seminary calendar originally called for the scheduling of first semester examinations immediately upon return from the Christmas recess. It was felt that such a testing schedule would deny the integrity of the Christmas recess as a period of rest and family reunion. Accordingly, the Student-Faculty Committee suggested to the Administrative Committee of the faculty that the two days following the Christmas recess be set aside for the purposes of reading and review. This suggestion was concurred in by the Administrative Committee and presented to the Faculty for its approval.

The problem which the Seminary administration faces in scheduling first semester examinations is difficult. By action of the Board of Trustees the school year must be for a duration of 32 weeks. These 32 weeks must then be calculated back from the dates of the meetings of the Ministerium of

Pennsylvania and the New Jersey Synod in May to the Labor Day Week, allowing for appropriate recesses. The mid-point usually falls in the third week of January. At the time that point is reached the work of the first semester must be terminated, and the second semester commence. This determines the first semester examinations be set for early January.

In suggesting that a reading period be established, the Student-Faculty Committee expected that the students will return to campus on January 4. The availability of library facilities and a number of other advantages make the carrying out of this period on campus particularly advisable. The reading period is a consideration which has been granted to graduate students and should be recognized as such.

An expression that the opportunity to engage in seminar research should be extended to a greater number of students has also been brought to the attention of the Student-Faculty Committee. After lengthy consideration a report was made and submitted to the Administrative Committee. Essentially, this report proposed an increase in the number of seminars offered each semester and suggested a new method of determining seminar eligibility, which would have the effect of opening the seminars to a greater number of students while still insisting that a certain level of achievement be maintained before the opportunity  
 (Continued on page 12)

THE SEMINARIAN

DECEMBER 1953, VOL. XVII, NO. 3

THE STAFF

Kenneth Shirk, Editor; John Bellingham, James Harrison, John Scherch, Alex Black, Ray Best, Don Bravin, Fred Auman, Paul Bosch, Marion Hinmale

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TO THINK ABOUT, AS YOU GO and COME

The campus "inter-com" has probably long since spread the word that, in response to a request from the students which was first considered by the Faculty-Student Body Committee, the Faculty has arranged for a two-day "reading and review" period following the Christmas recess and preceding the semester examinations. January 4th and 5th will, therefore, see the Seminary in session but no examinations scheduled. Just what advantage will be taken of the opportunity remains to be seen!

With that last sentence I find myself confronting again,

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as happens now and then, the question of our use of that liberty which is part of the Seminary principle and practice. Now, it is highly desirable that we live in an academic, social, and devotional fellowship of as few legislated requirements and regulations as possible and that the compulsions laid upon us shall ordinarily be from within rather than from without. This assumes, however, that the inner compulsions are really there! But if they are, there's one that likes to hide a bit.

I refer to a sense of loyalty to the Seminary program just because it is the Seminary program. Such a sense of loyalty ought to discipline our liberty and insure that no worthy effort or offering on the part of the Seminary should be allowed to fall short, whether it be a special service or lecture, or program of a general character. Here each one has a part to play. And it may be remarked in passing, that in after years as pastors, you will come to value very highly just those very souls who, the free agents, manifest that kind of loyalty to your congregational program because it is your congregational program.

A blessed Christmas to you all and to your loved ones, too! Travel safely, eat sensibly, worship faithfully, and come back refreshed and renewed in body and soul. We, whose lives are knit with yours by our fellowship in the Christ of Bethlehem, will be eager to see you again!

Henry H. Bagger.

SEMINARIAN CONFERENCE HAILED  
AS "GREATEST" IN ALL RESPECTS

Both from attendance and reaction to the speakers and the theme, the recent Association of Lutheran Seminarians conference, held at Mt. Airy over the Thanksgiving vacation, has been judged as, perhaps, the best conference the group has ever held.

There were 97 men in attendance at all the sessions, and there were 13 "specials" who attended only some of the programs offered. This was the largest attendance ever recorded at an ALS conference, since for the first time, the meeting was held over a vacation, and the entire body of students at the host seminary was not, in theory, included.

From the very first address, Dr. Tappert's, which introduced the conference theme, "The 20th Century Pastor," to the closing meditation by Dr. Doberstein, interest in, and appreciation for, the theme ran high.

The four study sections met for three discussions, and results and conclusions were presented in mimeographed reports and summarized by Dr. Heinecken at the closing assembly.

Of 17 member seminaries, only Pacific was unable to be represented, and Southern, who was present but not a member, has decided now to take steps to join.

Especially pleasing to the Mt. Airy men in attendance was the fine appreciation of our faculty that was evident in the attitudes of our visitors. Remarks concerned: the high qual-

ity of the formal parts of the program presented by our men, the fine support given the conference by the faculty not on the program, and the high quality of student-faculty relations. As one man put it, "Your faculty isn't aloof; you can approach them."

The Mt. Airy men received many compliments on our attitude of friendliness and on the hard work and adequate planning which made the meeting the success that it was. If the conference did nothing else from our viewpoint, it dispersed the "stuffed shirt" idea which many of the other seminarians had about us before attending the meeting.

Highlights for the visiting delegates included a midnight visit to Father Divine and an afternoon tour of the city.

Next year's conference is set for Wartburg (ALC) Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and already efforts are being made to get at least two car loads of men from Mt. Airy to attend.

Elected President for the coming year was George E. Handley, while the Newsletter Editor (succeeding Mt. Airy's Ernest Pretsch) is Charles Lutz of Capital. Also serving from Mt. Airy is L. Alex Black, who has been appointed to serve as secretary.

The treasurer and conference chairman will be selected by Wartburg, next year's host. In all, it was a great conference, and the men who attended really "got" something. Our visitors, especially, certainly returned home feeling that it was good to have been here. (AB)



**EXAMINATION SCHEDULE**  
January 4 through 15

	Mon. 4th	Tues. 5th	Wed. 6th	Thurs. 7th	Fri. 8th	Mon. 11th.	Tues. 12th	Wed. 13th	Thurs. 14th	Fri. 15th
9 a.m. Seniors	Reading	Reading	Epiphany	803	432	504	606	129		628
Middlers	and Study	and Study	The Communion:	201	432	503	601	129	401	628
Juniors	Period	Period	10 a.m.		501			604	400	301
12 M.	Chapel	Chapel		Chapel	Chapel	Chapel	Chapel	Chapel	Chapel	Chapel
2 p.m. Seniors			727						203	
Juniors			101			120				

All senior examinations in Room 3 (and Room 4).  
All middler examinations in Room 1 (and Room 2).  
All junior examinations in Room 4 (and Room 3).  
All elective examinations in Room 1 (and Room 2).

<u>Seniors</u>	<u>Middlers</u>	<u>Juniors</u>	<u>Electives</u>
203 Old Testament	201 Old Testament	101 New Testament	129 Sermon on Mt.
504 Confessions	401 Dogmatics	301 English Bible	432 Sacraments
606 Church Ad.	503 History	400 Intrc. to Syst.	628 Past. Encounter
803 Education	601 Homiletics	604 Pastoral Theol.	727 Devotional Classics
		120 Greek I	
		501 Church Hist.	

The Christmas recess ends at 9 a.m., Monday, January 4, with the first meal in the Refectory at 12:30 that day. No examinations have been scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, permitting students to utilize this time for study purposes.

### COMMITTEE SELECTS JOYCE AS BOOKSTORE MANAGER

The Student Co-operative Bookstore Committee announced recently their choice of Mr. W. Gordon Joyce as the bookstore manager for the year 1954. Mr. Joyce, a Middler, is a graduate of Susquehanna, and spent one year at Rider College where he majored in Business Administration.

Before entering college, "Gordie" had considerable experience, for several years, in the business world.

Upon being interviewed, the new manager stated that the policy of the establishment would remain relatively unchanged and that many Heuemanisms would still be evident. He feels confident that business will continue to flourish. At least, both he and Jean hope so. And He's probably right. After all, who could resist that ear-to-ear grin that reveals every inch of those pearly whites?

### WIVES CLUB SPONSORS ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

The Wives Club held its annual Christmas party for married couples last Friday evening in the social hall of Ascension Church.

Tonight, at the third "workshop" meeting of the group, Dr. Edmund Steimle will discuss "The Pastor's Wife in Relation to the Young People." The first "workshop" was held on November 17 when Dr. Emil

### ALS CONFERENCE ELECTS HANDLEY AS NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Highest honor of all to come to Mt. Airy from the recent convention of the Association of Lutheran Seminarians was the election of George E. Handley, a Mt. Airy middler, to the position of President for 1954.

George, who has served the ALS during the past year as both national treasurer and chairman of the recent confab, will hold office until the 1954 meeting of the group.

A native of Newburgh, N.Y., George is a communicant member of Christ Church there. He is a graduate of the Newburgh Free Academy, 1948, and received his A.B. degree from Wagner in '52. At college he was active in the choir, the Christian Association, which he served as treasurer and president, and Phi Nu Alpha, national music frat.

### GRADUATION FOR CLASS OF SEVEN PLANNED FOR JANUARY 18

Formal graduation ceremonies for the Class of January, 1954, will be held in connection with the regular chapel service on Monday, January 18, at 11 a.m.

The service will include a faculty procession, and the families and friends of the seven members of the class are being invited to attend.

Leaving the Seminary community at that time will be: Jack Bellingham, Crosby Deaton, Ray Hartman, Jim Hayes, Paul Hoffman, Wally Kemp, and Otis Zirkle. With them go our best wishes and prayers for a long and strong ministry.

SCHERCH PROMISES 'HAPPY TIME'  
AT CHRISTMAS BANQUET

A happy and memorable experience is in store for all at the Seminary Christmas Banquet, announces Mr. Jack Scherch, head waiter at the Refectory.

The banquet is to be served on Thursday, December 17, and students are urged to sign up for it at the office as soon as possible. All are invited as guests of the Seminary -- faculty and staff of the Seminary, students, and their wives.

Preceding the banquet will be a Christmas carol sing, conducted by Mr. Zieber. This will start in the Refectory shortly after Vespers. The banquet, a turkey dinner, will be served at about 6:15 p.m.

After the banquet, there will be more carol singing, to be followed by the words of greeting from our President, Dr. Bagger. The evening will be closed by the singing of "Silent Night."

ANNUAL ADVENT VESPERS SLATED  
FOR DECEMBER 17, CHOIR TO  
FEATURE SEVERAL ANTHEMS

The Seminary community's annual Advent Vespers, including the lighting of the Advent wreath, will take place this year on Thursday, December 17, at 5 p.m. Highlighting the service will be the singing of the Seminary choir, under the direction of Mr. Zieber.

Following the lighting of the Advent wreath, the choir will sing the Advent responsory "Behold the Days Come" by Max

CHURCH HISTORY LECTURE SERIES  
SET FOR JANUARY, FEBRUARY

A second series of lectures, planned for the beginning of the second semester, will bring to campus three lecturers in the field of church history. These lectures will be given on the last Wednesday of January and the first two Wednesdays of February, immediately following the chapel services on those days.

On January 27, the Rev. Dr. Hagen Staack, an Allentown pastor and part-time instructor at Muhlenberg, will speak on "Neo-Platonism in Early Christian Theology." February 3 will bring the Rev. Dr. J.V. Knudsen of Grandview Seminary in Des Moines, Iowa, who will present a lecture on the topic "Disciplina Arcani."

Concluding the series on February 10 will be the Rev. Dr. M.E. Lehmann, pastor of Bethany Church in Burlington, Iowa, whose subject will be "John Henry Newman's Quest for Religious Certainty."

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Reger.

After the reading of the Christmas Gospel, the choir will offer several selections: "Come Thou, O Come," Bach; "Break Forth, O Beautiful Heavenly Light," Bach; "Dearest Lord Jesus," Bach; and "The Virgin Slumber Song," Reger.

Liturgist will be Dr. Steimle.

Following the service, the annual Christmas banquet will be served in the Refectory.

STUDENT FACULTY

(Continued from page 5)

ity be granted. Because of the number of serious problems which this report posed, it has been referred to the Curriculum Committee for further study.

In a further consideration the Student-faculty Committee agreed that both because of the difficulties involved in procuring outside facilities and of the seminary tradition, the annual Christmas banquet should be held in the Refectory. In view of the complications resulting from Mrs. vasant's disability, it is hoped that the patience and co-operation of all will be extended to make of this annual celebration one long to be remembered.

--John Stadtlander

WIVES CLUB

(Continued from page 10)

Fischer, former president of the Ministerium, explained the organization of "The Church at Large." On Dec. 1, Mrs. Richard Sutcliffe led the second "workshop" on the topic "Co-operative Protestantism."

Dr. Edward Horn III, pastor of Trinity, Germantown, is going to speak to the club on Jan. 19, when he will discuss the Lutheran liturgy. Mrs. Andrew Blackwood, author of The Pastor's Wife, has been invited to address the group on March 18.

Next business meeting of the Wives Club will be held on Jan. 14, when the constitution will be revised and completed by the members.

--Marion Hinman.

ADVOCATE, HOPE TRIM ANGELS' WINGS IN BOARD TILTS

After a very impressive opening game, the Mt. Airy Angels found that their wings were not as trusty as they had imagined. They were beaten by Advocate in their second game, 23-22. Then, just before the Thanksgiving vacation, they were defeated by Hope, 53-36.

After the campus hopes were shaken by Hope, however, the Angels justified their existence by Faith, and defeated said team by 55-23.

The Angels feature a lineup that has changed little since the opener. Larry Hand, former Muhlenberg player, is the mainstay of the team and the only one on the squad with college varsity experience. The remainder of the team had only intramural experience.

Only non-juniors on the team are seniors Paul Sitler and Don Gebert.

If the Angels can continue flexing their wings and can play steady ball, they should do a lot better from now on. They may not win all their remaining games, but as each game passes, they learn to work together better.

Whether they win or lose, however, the team is doing its best, and it's worth an hour of study to watch them in action, and, even, to offer them some unangelic vocal encouragement.

--Ray Wolfert.

NEXT ISSUE  
THE SEMINARIAN  
February, 1954



## EARTH RECEIVE YOUR KING

By Kenneth S. Ensminger

Christmas—what an important word this has become in the vocabulary of the average twentieth century American. Even a passing reference to this word brings to mind a variety of scenes and colors and impressions. The busy streets, the colored lights. The cheerful voices, the tinkling bells on every street corner. The cold winds, the warm houses with the smoke circling from their chimneys. The green spruce fresh with the smell of the forest, the white snow. The word Christmas means so many things to so many people regardless of the age or station in life, but does Christmas really mean to these people what it ought to mean? Does Christmas really mean to these people what the word signifies, Christ's Mass, Christ's feast? Is Christ really at the center of our Christmas activities, at the center of the lights, the bells, the cards, the gifts, or has man once again in rebellion against God placed himself and his own interests where God alone has a right to stand?

No finer explanation of the real meaning of Christmas has ever been given than that found in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. Here the historical is made symbolic and realistic. Here the great mystery of the incarnation is presented simply and directly. Christmas, the incarnation - This is one of the great magnetic poles around which all our doctrines are attracted and arranged in systematic patterns. If we could properly understand these two words, then we could properly understand the whole Christian faith. Is this statement too bold? Certainly it is not, for Christmas is Christianity.



"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." Like one of the great creeds of our Church these words declare the pure and simple truth of our Christian faith. Here there is no apology, there is no polemic. Here there is only a simple confession of Christian truth. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. Christ, the only Son of God, is eternal. Not created, not made, but begotten of the Father before the foundations of the world were laid. Here there is no room for any Super-Protestantism, there is no room for any Unitarian heresy. Here there is no room for any sentimental gospel of Jesus, the good man, now let us all follow his example and create a heaven here on earth. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.

There, is, however, a danger here, some people may say. There is a danger that this could become simply an expression of a kind of Platonic philosophy, eternal ideas and all that. St. John, however, leaves no room for any such criticism, for he declares that, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The eternal became temporal and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of God full of grace and truth. Platonic ideas? Where in all of Plato's dialogues do you find any gospel like this? Where in Platonic philosophy does the idea become flesh. No, this is not Platonic philosophy. This is pure Christianity. This is the expression of the fact of the incarnation, God in the flesh. Christ, the only begotten Son of God became man. God became one of us through love in order that we might become one with him in love. The incarnation made possible the revelation of God's real nature, love. This is Christianity and we can call it no other. The eternal Word of God, the eternal Son of God became flesh, became man.

Very interesting! This is truly a marvelous description of an historical event. God became man. At a certain time in a certain place God became man. But this fact is not enough, for by itself this can become quite scholastic. Hard, cold facts have little personal appeal. The average 20th century American says, "So what?" So God became man. Nineteen hundred years ago God became man. What is that to me?

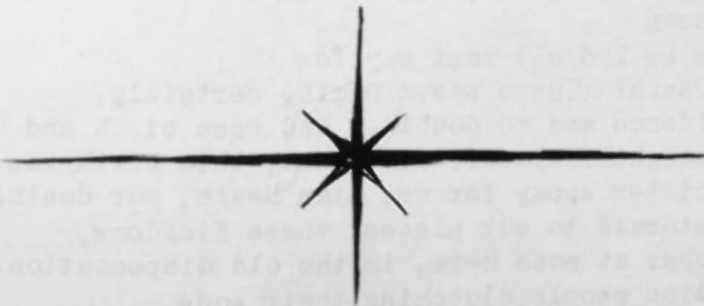
St. John is not content simply with presenting a scholastic statement of fact; the eternal became temporal. The temporal must become personal. St. John makes it quite clear that this is the purpose of his Gospel. Not only are men to be confronted with the fact of the incarnation; they are to be confronted with their incarnate Lord. There is a personal relationship between the Word made flesh and men of flesh. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." In this narrative, the eternal Son of God not only becomes man, but as man he confronts his fellow men. He comes unto his own asking that they might receive him into their hearts. Is this not the whole Christian message,

the message of God's sole activity, and man's sole responsibility? This is not the story only of an abstract concept or an historical event. This is the story of a personal call to decision. The eternal Son of God confronts man asking man to receive him. This is man's decision. God comes in love asking man to love in return. This is Christmas. When we cut away all the frills and tinsel, this is Christmas. The eternal becomes historical and the historical becomes personal.

As a part of the Church Year, Christmas for us is a great drama. Once again we reenact and remember the fullness of God's love. We are not separated from Bethlehem by time and space, for wherever Christian men and women come together to celebrate this feat, behold there is Bethlehem. The church in which we worship becomes the stable where Christ is born anew. The altar, the center of our devotion, becomes the rude crib on which the Christ child rests. And we are the shepherds and wise men who have come to worship the King of Love and Peace. This is Christmas. This is Bethlehem, and Christ, the Word of God, comes to us this day. The eternal enters into time once again and in earthly forms confronts us. He comes to his own in love asking them to love in return. Oh, how quietly he comes in this dark world of sin, as quietly as a mother rocking her new-born baby to sleep in her arms, as quietly as the words spoken over bread and wine. He comes, there can be no doubt of this, to those who receive him in faith, the Redeemer; to those who reject him, the Judge.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word becomes flesh that we might receive him. And as many as receive him to them he gives power to become the Sons of God.

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King.



## JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

'A cold coming we had of it,  
 Just the worst time of the year  
 For a journey, and such a long journey:  
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
 The very dead of the winter.'  
 And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,  
 Lying down in the melting snow.  
 There were times we regretted  
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
 And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,  
 And the night fires going out, and the lack of shelters,  
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices:  
 A hard time we had of it.  
 At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
 Sleeping in snatches,  
 With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
 That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
 With a running stream and water-mill beating the darkness,  
 And the trees on the low sky,  
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,  
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
 But there was no information, and so we continued  
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon  
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
 And I would do it again, but set down  
 This set down  
 This: were we led all that way for  
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,  
 We had evidence and no doubt, I had seen birth and death,  
 But had thought they were different; this birth was  
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
 We have returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
 With an alien people clutching their gods.  
 I should be glad for another death.

T. S. Eliot

(The Complete Poems and Plays.

Harcourt, Brace and Company, pp. 68-9)