



JOY MENNONITE CHURCH NEWSLETTER
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**PASTOR'S
CORNER**

Christmas with the Salvadoran refugees

In Central America, there is no dream of a white Christmas. Christmas day is likely to be a warm,

sunny day.

The Salvadoran people approach the Christmas season with great anticipation like we do, but very differently. One has to celebrate with the resources one has. Food is an important part of their celebration, but not with a family dinner. Their food for celebration is tamales. "What else?" you ask. More tamales. Simple? Not as simple as we imagine. You cannot just go to the store and buy what you want. You must first collect the banana leaves to wrap the tamales in. You must pre-cook the whole corn, then grind it to get cornmeal. You must butcher the chickens for the meat in the tamales. Then you must shape the tamales, wrap them in banana leaves and toss them in the pot to cook. Instead of a Christmas dinner, people went from house to house and ate tamales with friends and neighbors.

In our traditions we seek to create replicas of the scenes surrounding Jesus birth. We put hay in the manger and dress the shepherds in peasant garb. The Salvadorans dressed the shepherds in colorful clothes with bright ribbons hanging from pretty hats. Each family would arrange a manger scene in their home. Instead of hay in the manger, they arranged flowers and other decorations around the manger. Then, on Christmas morning, they would visit each other to view each others manger arrangement.

In our tradition, we put the emphasis on remembering. In the Salvadoran tradition, the focus was more on the beauty and majesty of the Christ child. We do not need to judge which tradition is best, each celebrates from the experience and resources they have and each contributes to the world's celebration of the Christ event.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Some of our congregation have shared their favorite memories and traditions this season

Bill Klassen - A Memorable Christmas - 1953

My parents always attached themselves to foreign exchange students at Bethel College - especially those from Germany. Shortly after one such year, I found myself in Germany receiving and accepting an invitation to experience the hospitality with a family of a former exchange student for Christmas. Their love and hospitality transcended the language barrier - my "German" was still in infancy. Christmas was celebrated Christmas Eve, following the church program, the

tree having been put up earlier in the day. That family acceptance and celebration was the perfect antidote for my "18-year-old homesickness". I still have the gift from that Christmas - my wooden shoes, and still (or again) have contact with that foreign student from 1950.

Thea Janz Klasson - Christmas traditions in the Janz Family

I come from a large family with often meager means at our disposal, so Christmas presents were few and not very elaborate. Our parents focused more on the celebration of Christmas as the birth of Christ. As a child I missed not getting more presents, as most of my classmates did. Looking back now, I feel my parents had the right idea about Christmas. We, as all of Germany, celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve. Several days before Christmas my father would take a horse and buggy into the nearby woods and cut down a tree. It wasn't always a perfect tree, so he would cut off some branches from the bottom and splice them into some of the upper, empty spaces. Then he would place it into a tree stand which consisted of a plain wooden cross with a hole in the middle where he implanted the tree. On Christmas eve in the afternoon it was brought into the house and set up in the "good room" (gute Stubc). My mother and older sisters would trim it. They locked the door to the good room so we smaller children could not get in. After supper the door to the good room flew open, the candles had been lit (no electric Christmas lights in those days) with the presents unwrapped under the tree. My father would read the Christmas story, we would sing a Christmas carol or two and then would kneel down with our father offering a prayer. We children would keep looking under the tree to see which present was ours. The devotional period seemed awfully long. After enjoying our Christmas presents (often only one per child) the candles were blown out and we would go to bed. On Christmas day the candles were lit one more time, and the tree was taken out a few days later. By then it was quite dry. One time I remember it caught fire from the candles. Not plentiful Christmases, but, to me they hold wonderful warm memories of my parents, a blind aunt who lived with us and was dear to us, and my brothers and sisters.

Peter Brueckner - My Best Christmas Present

I grew up in a village in central Germany. Shortly before Christmas 1946, when I was nine years old, my father came home to stay. He had left home in 1939 to serve in the war, and I had seen him since that time only 3 or 4 times for a few days. I was not sure what to make of that strange man. To be sure, he was kind, but he was terribly quiet. He spoke only rarely. My mother told me that I should be happy because I still had a father, while many of my friends had lost theirs. I knew that, but it didn't help much. I was afraid of him.

In the living room of our house was my father's big oak desk. It was always locked. In my imagination it had to be filled with all sorts of treasures. One day, I observed my father as he opened one of the desk drawers. I saw there 3 absolutely beautiful pencils- one red one, one blue one, and one was half red and half blue. I thought I had never seen anything so wonderful and desirable, and I stared at those pencils until my father closed and locked the desk again. Oh, I would give my right hand for only one of those pencils.

As my parents prepared for Christmas, I noticed how difficult it was to get anything in the stores. Everything had to be bartered for. It took my mother a long time to get the ingredients for a Christmas cake. So, buying Christmas presents was impossible. They simply did not exist. My father was whittling a wooden toy for my brother, who was 4 years old. I was the oldest son, already 9 years old; I could stand not to get a Christmas present. Finally, Christmas Eve came. In our house, the Christmas tree was lit for the first time (it had at least 25 candles) and the presents were distributed. And I had a present!

I could not believe it. I opened it and found 3 pencils- the pencils from my father's desk. I just stared at them. This was the most beautiful present in the world. But more important, I did not have to be afraid of my father anymore. I knew now that he loved me.

D. O'Neal- New Traditions

I don't remember many traditions from my childhood, so our family has made up some for ourselves. One of our favorites is Christmas morning. The children wake up early (surprise!) and we make cups of coffee and cocoa. Then it's time for the party!

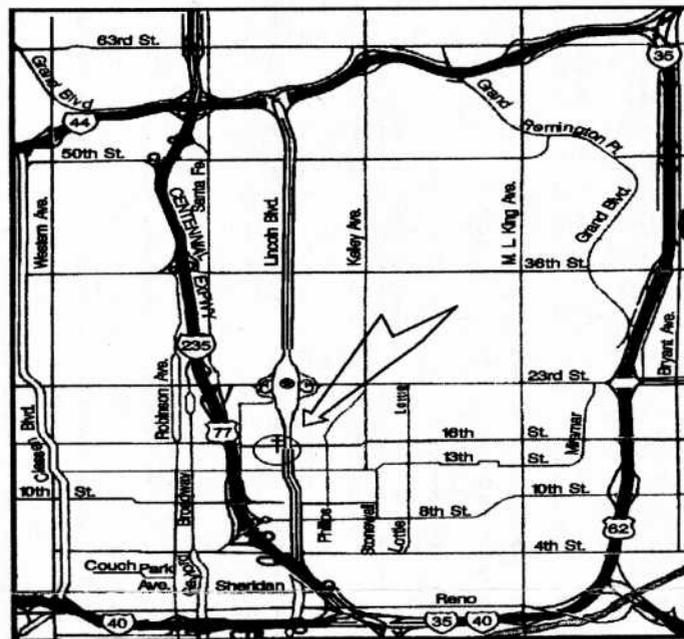
We sing "Happy Birthday" to the baby Jesus in the nativity and read the story of His birth. We give Him presents of things that we want to change in our lives- more time in prayer, more kindnesses to others, more understanding of little aggravations, etc.. This may seem a bit cliché, but we enjoy it and I think the children have a little better understanding of what Christmas is all about.

COMING EVENTS

- Dec. 3 first Sunday of Advent.
- Dec. 10 Re-Commitment Sunday Communion

CONGREGATION COMMENTS

- Charlotte Warkentine has many Ten Thousand Villages items, among other things, for Christmas. Visit her at her shop, Creative Crossing, in Chandler, or online at ccrossings@earthlink.net. If you have placed an order for items, please call, it is probably here.
- Congratulations to the Bliss boys, Scott, Gabe and Brandt, for their successful wrestling tournament.
- Please remember Grace and Chester Rolcy and Ethel Poser in your prayers.
- Christmas caroling plans will be hammered out as to when and how long this month. We have a lot of fun with this and encourage all to participate.



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