



A Light to the Nations

Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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Squirrel-Proof? No Way!

By Sheila Graham

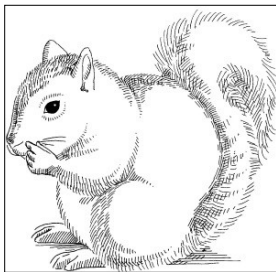
I've declared war on squirrels at my house. Sure, I know some of you think they are cute, and they can be funny and entertaining. But take away those fur coats and fuzzy tails and they're just rats!

The pesky rodents eat the bird seed no matter how we try to prevent it. Bird seed is expensive and we would like the birds to have some, thank you very much!

I've tried various squirrel-proof bird feeders. How deceptive can you be in advertising: squirrel-proof bird feeders? There's no such thing!

I read somewhere that putting up squirrel feeders would help, so Ed put up a feeder that involved a gallon jar hooked in a wood holder attached to a tree. They had to crawl down into the jar to get the corn in it. At first they were suspicious, but it didn't take them long to figure it out.

Sure, that worked well. Now they ate the corn in their own feeder and the bird seed too.



Next, I bought a sling shot. That's when I discovered how hard it is to hit a squirrel with a sling shot. (I have a lot more respect for young King David now.) Then I tried a water gun but that was just a joke. They were off and running before I could get close enough. Very little, if any, water ever got on a squirrel.

Then I got a little more serious. I didn't want to alarm our neighbors so when I bought the bb-gun I bought a short-range toy one. It couldn't kill a squirrel or anything else, but it's black and looks like a revolver, so I had to be careful.

I put a target against the wood pile in our back yard and practiced. I'm not as good a shot as I used to be, but I figured I could still hit close enough to sting their little behinds.

If you're wondering: Nope, didn't work either. Those squirrels are quicker on the draw than I am.

Actually the squirrels in our yard haven't done us the damage the squirrels in some of my neighbors' homes have done (maybe because they're so well fed at our place.) Those ornery critters have gotten into garages and attics and chewed up items stored there. Speaking of gar-

Contents

- *Tam 2U*
What God's Love Really Looks Like page 3
- *God's Ever-Changing Palette*
By Senior Pulley page 4
- *Briefly Speaking*
I'm Worried
By Sheila Graham page 5
- *A Time to Mourn*
By Trish Clauson page 6
- *Is It Possible?*
By Trish Clauson page 7
- *Zorro and Me*
Family Games
By Barbara Dahlgren . . . page 8
- *Memories—Looking Back, Then Forward*
By Lila Millhuff page 9
- *The Birth of Jesus*
By Senior Pulley page 10

Continued on page 2

Squirrel-Proof? No Way!

Continued from page 1

ages, someone told me the other day squirrels had gotten into her car and chewed up some of the wires around her engine. No wonder the check-engine light was on!

I know God knows every sparrow that falls and cares for all his little creatures. When we replenish the water in the bird baths and refill the bird feeders, I feel we are playing a part in his concern for his creation, but squirrels?

Maybe that's where the understanding that God sends rain on both the just and the unjust comes in. The bird seed at our place benefits both the birds we want around and the squirrels we would just as soon go elsewhere.

God is a loving, merciful and most generous God, and you know what, I have a sneaky feeling he likes squirrels better than I do.



Sheila says now the squirrels are rushing around burying acorns in the yard, which they never seem to be able to find come springtime. You may email Sheila at grahams@ntin.net.

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Connections

Mission Statement

Primary: The Connections for Clergy Support Department provides intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual support and encouragement in the personal lives of GCI ministry families.

Three primary means of serving are the *Connections* journal, the Connections for a Successful Ministry and Life web pages, and the Nurturernet forum. We highlight women in ministry but are inclusive of the needs of the entire family.

Secondary: To promote respect, understanding and support for women, their personal ministries and ministries that serve them.

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• CALIFORNIA •
TAM 2 U

What God's Love Really Looks Like

So much has been written about love, you're probably wondering if we really need another article about it. You may be right—everyone knows what love is. I certainly can't improve upon Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, so I won't even try. But I do think in this world where words and actions are distorted, manipulated and massaged for political correctness, revisiting what love looks like might not hurt. As a wise woman once said, we all need to be reminded and then reminded again.

John tells us in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. He doesn't merely show love or perform acts of love, he is love. Love defines who he is. John 1:1 affirms that Jesus or the Word, is God. It follows that Jesus is love.

So if we look through the New Testament at how Jesus treated people, we see love in action. It's especially informative to notice how he interacted with women. Remember, women during Jesus' time were considered the same as property—they couldn't own

property, vote, testify in court (unless another woman agreed and the two testified together) and could be divorced at the drop of a hat. They were second class citizens in every way.

Enter Jesus, who accepted a cup of water from and conversed with a Samaritan woman (John 4), who would have been shunned by any self-respecting Jewish man. He showed love by treating her as a fellow human being and as someone in need of acceptance and compassion.

Jesus came to the rescue of the woman in John 8, who was caught in adultery. When everyone else would have stoned her to death, he turned the tables on those men and gave her back her dignity and self-respect.

In Luke 7, the widow of Nain had just lost her son. Jesus and his disciples came across this woman as she followed the men carrying him out for burial. Without being asked, he healed her only son, who would continue to take care of her into her old age. Jesus understood her grief and what losing her son would mean for her life and livelihood.

Luke 13 tells of a crippled woman, bent over and unable to function normally for 18 years. Again without being asked, he set her free from her condition. Jesus' compassion was amazing and annoying too, as the religious people who saw this condemned him for healing on the Sabbath. To Jesus, people were always more important than rules and traditions.

Of course, the greatest expression of his love was giving himself as the ultimate sacrifice for all of humankind—he laid down his life for us. That's why he was born, lived, died and rose to be our forever savior. Love looks like Jesus—self-sacrificing, non-judgmental, merciful, compassionate, caring, sharing and giving.



Tammy

Fail not to call to mind, in the course of the twenty-fifth of this month, that the Divinest Heart that ever walked the earth was born on that day; and then smile and enjoy yourselves for the rest of it; for mirth is also of Heaven's making.

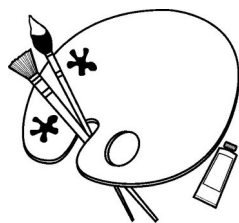


—Leigh Hunt

God's Ever-Changing Palette

By Senior Pulley

I love the Psalm 19:1-4a passage: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world” (NKJV).



Each day and every night the heavens teach us about the glory of God. A perpetual heavenly lesson is taught across every culture, place, nation, people and language. These “words” reach to the ends of the earth and expound, “*God Is!*”

When we think of the heavens declaring the glory of God, our minds may think of a golden sunset, a low-hanging full moon or countless stars glowing against the night sky. Indeed, each of these teaches us a lesson of power and beauty. However, I’ve observed a most wondrous part of the heavens that also teaches powerful lessons about God’s glory. These lessons are in the clouds.

This past year, I have been riding the ferry to and from work, giving me the chance to attend a host of heavenly classes taught by the clouds. Have you ever watched or studied the clouds? Have you ever been lulled into relaxation by watching these light, airy fluffs drift by? Each day, the constantly moving patterns and designs create an ever-changing portrait of God’s creation up against a beautiful blue backdrop.

I have seen images of bunny rabbits, poodles, bears with outstretched arms, even Mickey Mouse. I’ve also seen huge puffs of hurling white smoke standing majestically still, chariots, maps of England, Africa, Bermuda, and my favorite—floating mountains!

I am especially intrigued by clouds that spread across the sky appearing to rest on an invisible glass floor.

At times, multiple rows appear on different levels, and each row is straight, as if underlined by a heavenly straightedge. I’ve even seen a likeness of a city set on a hill that could not be hidden. What an amazing phenomenon!

Scripture reveals that God uses clouds for some pretty significant reasons:

- He set the rainbow *in the cloud* as a sign of his covenant with mankind and the earth (Genesis 9:12-16).
- He led the Israelites through the desert *with the cloud* (Psalm 78:14).
- When Jesus was transfigured, God used a *bright cloud* to announce Jesus as his beloved Son in whom he was well pleased (Matthew 17:5).
- When Jesus ascended, his disciples saw him taken up and *a cloud received him* (Acts 1:9).
- The Son of Man will come *in a cloud* with power and glory (Luke 21:27) and *he is coming with clouds* and every eye will see him (Revelation 1:7).

Clouds are more than the scientific “visible mass of particles of condensed vapor suspended in the atmosphere.” They are part of my Father’s ever-changing artistic palette,

Continued on page 5

Christmas gift suggestions: To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect.



—Oren Arnold

God's Palette

Continued from page 4

a never-ending masterpiece where each and every day he displays his handiwork for us to observe and admire. Clouds are some of the most unique and beautiful parts of the heavenly firmament, whose voices utter speech in every language, declaring the glory of the great Creator God.



Senior continues to be awed as she learns more each day about the Lord's beautiful heavens and is enjoying "having her head in the clouds!" You can share your cloud experiences with her at cjpulley@logic.bm or cec-il.pulley@gci.org.

In the old days, it was not called the Holiday Season; the Christians called it "Christmas" and went to church; the Jews called it "Hanukka" and went to synagogue; the atheists went to parties and drank.

People passing each other on the street would say "Merry Christmas!" or "Happy Hanukka!" or (to the atheists) "Look out for the wall!"

—Dave Barry,
*Christmas Shopping:
A Survivor's Guide*



Briefly Speaking...

I'm Worried

I've said before when you don't know what to write about, just start writing. Now, I'm practicing my own advice. I've got too many *things* (I hate that word, so unspecific) on my mind.

Yes, I worry a lot. I know better. I just read in Matthew where Jesus said don't worry about *things* (there's that word again); God will take care of our *things*.

Is your mind like that, so full of various worrisome problems or perhaps more often what might turn out to be problems that you can't enjoy your day?

My children are grown. What am I saying? Even my grandchildren are grown! But I still worry that they are all right.

Not everyone is like that. Ed doesn't worry about much of anything. He tells me not to worry. I tell him if I don't, who will?

Back to Jesus and Matthew, it's not food or clothing or shelter I worry about. I'm blessed beyond measure with physical necessities. It's what is outside my control and that's where faith comes in. Not the kind of faith that believes everything is always going to be all right in my life, but the faith that whatever God allows he will be right there alongside me, supporting me throughout. I love you, Lord!



You may email Sheila Graham at grahams@ntin.net.

Great little One! whose all-embracing birth Lifts Earth to Heaven, stoops Heaven to Earth.

—Richard Crashaw

A Time to Mourn

By Trish Clauson

It has always been there. I have read it many times. “To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under the heaven ...a time to be born ...a time to die ...a time to laugh ...a time to mourn (Ecclesiastes 3).”

To *mourn*—the word itself almost seems to inflict its meaning on us—a time to pay homage to the unfathomable pain of losing a loved one. No other loss requires that we mourn as deeply as we do over death. And eventually we all pass through this season of mourning. For me time is now.

Just before dawn, April 26, 2014, my husband of nearly 45 years passed from my arms into the arms of Jesus. Never have I known a

pain so deeply unforgiving as the permanence of death. I was flung into a space I could not grasp. The loss was almost paralyzing. I wasn’t prepared for it, even though I watched it sneak itself into our lives and steal him away. A beautiful caring life simply was no more.

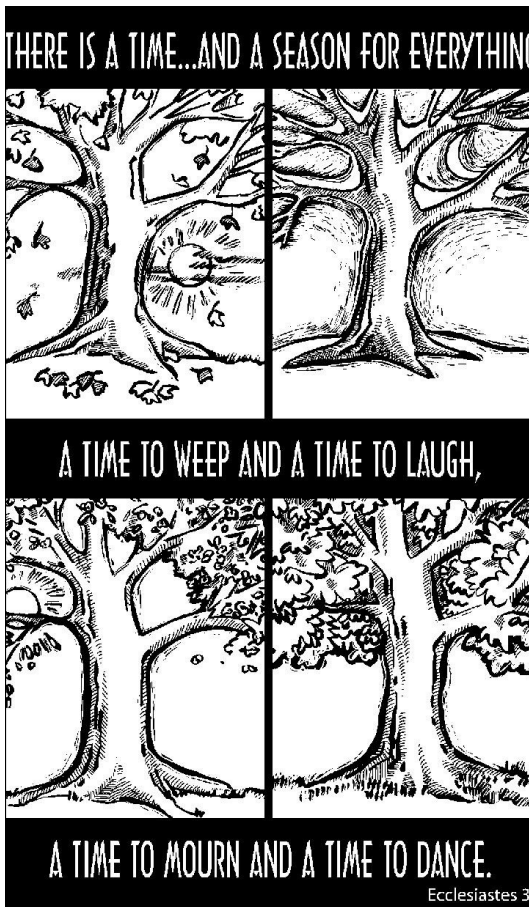
I have heard it said many times when you lose a loved one you are left with a hole in your heart. But this seems more like a hole in the universe. My heart was not able to hold the enormity of it sufficiently. It was much too big.

The entirety of it feels incomprehensible, as if the whole universe should be reeling on its axis. But in truth, how can we as mere mortals begin to explain the soul and the spirit of a man or the hole that remains at death? How can we put words to a void that is so formidable it demands to be filled or the universe will never be the same?

Arnold’s death not only left a hole, it also broke the pathway of our love. No matter how much I loved him, I could not hold him here. My heart still desires to find ways to keep loving him, but my physical efforts are in vain. I long to hold him, to honor him, to complete him, to embrace the love once so fluid between us. But instead, now only an impenetrable vacuum of time and space remains.

But how can this be? How can a place that once held the breath and being of a man become a vacuum? How can love be broken? How can we absorb any part of it, when death defies our senses? No earthly gauges quantify or offer any logic to its void. It simply leaves us who remain to wrestle with our incredulity.

So I mourn. I mourn the loss of the life we built together, which is now no more and never will be in this lifetime. I mourn the loss of the part of me now buried in a grave. I mourn the love I still hold for him that has nowhere to go.



Continued on page 7

A Time to Mourn

Continued from page 6

But in my mourning I hold tightly to this truth: what I long for so intensely from this life is being reserved for eternity only. God now allows people to die, leaving holes in the universe and in our hearts. He may also allow our pathway of love to be broken, but these are not eternal losses.

In eternity there will be no more separation, no more tears and no more death. God will redeem everything. And how could he do otherwise for how could the universe tolerate even one hole remaining? Without total redemption the universe would indeed be forever out of sync with who God Is—*Love*.

Until my beautiful husband once again takes up residence in the space he left vacant, I believe the depth of me will never truly be satisfied. God speed that day.



Trish says: "Right now I am in the middle of dismantling my life of 45 years with Arnold and walking one day at a time toward a future that is completely unknown to me. If I didn't believe I am right where God wants me to be, that he knows the plans he has for me, that he is good and knows exactly what he is doing, I might be a basket case. Instead, I am feeling secure in what he is doing and at peace with where I am." You may email Trish at trishannson@yahoo.com.

Is It Possible?

Have you ever seen a sunrise or a sunset that was so spectacular...
it simply took your breath away?

When you see or imagine a flowering meadow...a snow-capped mountain...
Or the mind-bending expanse of the universe does it leave you speechless?

The sky and earth have always been God's canvas upon which to express his glory and to envelope us within his design of what is truly beautiful.

And yet in all this loveliness, he claims that we are the most exquisite of all his creation.

So, is it possible, when God looks at us, as he sees us for all we are and will be... is it possible

When he looks at you...that it takes his breath away and leaves him speechless?

Whenever you are enraptured by a thing of beauty, always remember

To your Father in heaven...
You are among the "fairest" of them all.

—By Trish Clauson

Nurturennet

Nurturennet is a computer forum for women in ministry. Its purpose is to help you stay connected through digest-mode communication (each day's messages compiled into one email). You may use it for requests for information, prayer requests, to share ideas and resources, to receive updates on *Connections* news or just to stay connected!



**Do we
have
your
mail
address?**

To join or update your email address, please send Tammy a message at tammy.tkach@gci.org. Please do not reply to a post unless you want to address the entire list.

Zorro and Me

By Barbara Dahlgren

Family Games

As we finished an exciting game of Monopoly Junior with our 6-year-old granddaughter Sophia, I was reminded of how much our family has always enjoyed playing games. We love just about all kinds of games—card games, word games, board games—the list goes on and on. While some might consider this a waste of time, we’ve always considered playing games time well spent.

When our son Matthew was about 10 we played a lot of Yahtzee. He spray painted a big bottle blue and made a Yahtzee Cup flag to perch on top. He taped a 4 by 6 index card to the side of the bottle to display the winners’ names. Would you believe we still have that cup and we are still writing names of the winners on it?

When our children were little we often played Twenty Questions in the car. You know the one where you come up with something for everyone to guess; then you tell them whether it’s in the animal, vegetable or mineral category. Guessers can ask up to 20 questions to find out what it is. One time when it was Zorro’s turn, he said, “The category is animal!”

Off we went with our barrage of questions. Is it little? Does it have four legs? Is it found in the jungle? Can we ride it?

We had narrowed it down to a farm animal with long legs that we could ride. Imagine our surprise when Zorro said it was a pig. He thought that was funny—a long-legged pig. Needless to say, I was furious. He had tricked us with some fantasy animal he dreamed up. I thought this was not a good example for the children.

Evidently I must have voiced my opinion more vocally than I thought because a few days later I heard our 7-year-old daughter

Sherisa tell her grandmother, “And Mommy said if Daddy doesn’t play fair, she’s not going to let him play games with us anymore.”

Well, Zorro repented (and I decided not to shoot my mouth off in earshot of the kids) so we once again became a happy game-playing family.

We found family games were an excellent avenue for teaching our children life lessons such as how to follow directions, learn new skills, take turns, interact with others, win or lose graciously and play fair. Spiritual parallels could be drawn as well, such as developing patience, kindness, self-control and joy.

Of all the benefits of playing family games the most important was spending time together. Family time is almost a lost art form. Today, many families don’t even eat together. Oh, they may be in the same room but one child might be watching TV, another playing video games, another texting, while mom is on her computer and dad is talking on his cell phone. However, with family games, all participants are engaged together.

Our kids are grown now but when the family gets together we still love to play family games. While playing we talk, we share, we bond, we love and we laugh. I thank God all the time for the gift of laughter.

When I think of talking, sharing, bonding, loving and laughing, I think of God. These are what I like to do on my daily walk with him. Many picture God as a fuddy-duddy incapable of having fun. I can’t help but wonder if Jesus were to visit our family today, would he join us in a rousing game of Nertz, one of our family favorites? I think he would. He might just consider it time well spent.



Be sure to check out Barbara’s weekly blog: at www.barbdahlgren.com. You can email Barbara at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you.

Memories—Looking Back, Then Forward

By Lila Millhuff

A friend sent me “Mailboxes and Old Barns: ‘Treasures of Age’” by Stella (theconservativetreehouse.com), an account of farm life in the 20th century. It is absolutely delightful and brings back good memories.

My birth family consisted of five boys and three girls. My older sister Wanda was quite bossy, all because she was put in charge of us girls. Mother forgot to tell her she was only in charge on a part-time basis, not for the rest of my life.

Later in life, I had to tell Wanda plainly that I was a grown woman, married with teen-aged children of my own. If I was ever in trouble or needed help, she would be the first person I would call on. But for now, I’d been handling things for a long time myself and I liked it that way. Wanda and I man-



aged to make our way through that skirmish and still love one another dearly. That’s what sisters do!

It’s true I’m an independent woman. As the youngest, I appreciated knowing I could reach out for help if I needed it. But often I got too much advice, so I left the area to live my own life and make my own decisions. I joined the

May you have the gladness of
Christmas which is hope;
the spirit of Christmas
which is peace;
the heart of Christmas which is love.



—Ada V. Hendricks

Navy, went to aviation school, married my sweetheart and had many opportunities to learn and grow.

I quickly learned that making my own decisions meant I had to live with those decisions. So I began to think things through more thoroughly before taking action. I think it’s called OJT—On the Job Training, which is the best way to learn.

As I think back on those memories, I recognize God’s hand in my life. I could see where he opened doors for me, wonderful work opportunities in the aviation field: Navy air traffic controller, Boeing Aircraft Company in many different capacities for 17 years. Working in the simulators was my favorite and most challenging job there.

I worked at Panasonic for five years and contracted to Honeywell for six years. These jobs in aviation kept me stimulated and constantly challenged in areas of interest that I’ve loved all my life. What a blessing and what a journey!

I could not conceive of a better plan for myself. I would not change anything. I’ve experienced a lot of turbulence and sometimes felt as if I had crash landed, but God was always there, opening yet another door of opportunity, all for my good. It feels wonderful to look back on your life and recognize God has walked beside you.

But the best part is looking back at my family—three sons, two grandsons and their families, who are doing well. They are working hard accomplishing much and doing an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage. And when we are gone, we know they will be in the best of hands, because they are God’s children and he loves them more than we do. I am so very blessed and so very grateful!



Lila and her husband Ted serve the Grace of God Fellowship in Tucson, Arizona. You may email Lila at lmillhuff@att.net.



The Birth of Jesus

(Based on Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-15; Luke 2:1-20; John 3:16-17)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ our Lord came about:

Pledged to Joseph, his mother Mary, with child was soon found out.

Because her husband, a righteous man sought not to see her face.

He quietly planned to let her go and avoid a public disgrace.

But soon after he'd considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared

and said, "Joseph, son of David, take Mary, do not fear...

"...for what's conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit's power;
she will give birth to a holy son at the Lord's appointed hour.

"and you are to give him the name of Jesus, a name to be known among men."

All this took place, as the Lord had decreed. He would save his people from sin.

A prophet said "the virgin with child will give birth to a Son

And they will call him 'Immanuel'—which means 'God with us'—He's the One!

When Joseph woke up, he knew from the dream the Lord had entered his life.

And he did just what the Lord had commanded and took Mary home as his wife.

Now in those days, Augustus Caesar a Roman decree did make;

everyone must go to his town for the census that the Romans would take.

So Joseph went to Bethlehem in Judea at that time,

for he belonged to the house of David, which was his ancestral line.

And when he went to register, he took his Mary with him,

and while they were there, her time came for birth, and they looked for a place in the inn.

But, wouldn't you know it, there was no room in the inn for her to give birth,

so she and Joseph went to a stable, a most lowly place on earth.

And from that very lowly place, she birthed her firstborn son.

She wrapped him in cloths, in a manger did place him; besides Joseph, there was none.

Now there were shepherds in the fields watching their flocks at night.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone—what a sight!

They were sorely terrified, but the angel said to them,

Continued on page 11

The Birth of Jesus

Continued from page 10

“Don’t be afraid; I bring good news, and you must go and see him!

“For on this day, there is great joy and good news for everyone!
For there’s been born in the town of David, the Christ, the Lord, the Son!

“This will be a sign to you...a baby wrapped in cloths,
lying in a lowly place—a manger; do not scoff!”

A sudden great company of heavenly hosts appeared with the angel and were praising...
“Glory to God in the highest place!” and their voices, loud and strong, they were raising!

“Peace on earth be on all men on whom His favor rests!”
‘Peace on earth’...can you imagine the whole world being this blessed?

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said one to another,
“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see what’s happened! Soon they found Joseph,
Jesus and his mother.

And when they’d seen the child with their eyes, they went about and spread the good word
And all who heard it were assuredly amazed, the most amazing thing they’d ever heard!

While Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them all in her heart,
the shepherds returned glorifying God for what they’d heard and seen and their part!

After Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, some Magi came from the east.
They went to Jerusalem in search of a king; seeking directions, if you please....

“Where is the one who’s been born king of the Jews? For in the east we have seen his star,
and we have come to worship him, hence, we have come this far.”

But when King Herod heard the news, he was more than a little disturbed.
Along with the chief priests and teachers of law, they sought the Christ—what nerve!

With cunning deceit, King Herod questioned, ‘Where was the Christ to be born?’
He had in mind to kill the child, rip the Savior, from earth be torn!

He found out from them...that a ruler would come...who would shepherd the people he’d call;
found out the exact time the star had appeared; sought to do mischief, that’s all!

So he sent them on a careful search and told them to soon make report
of where he, too, could find the child and worship him in a way of some sort!

Continued on page 12

The Birth of Jesus

Continued from page 11

After hearing the king, they went on their way, and the star they'd seen in the east
went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was at peace.

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy, such joy they'd never found!
They came to a house, saw the child with his mother and worshipped and humbly
bowed down.

They opened their treasures to present to him; gifts of incense, myrrh and gold.
What an honor to stand before the King of the Universe; his beauty to behold!

When the Magi were ready to return to their home, the Lord warned them in a dream
to avoid Herod and go not to him; it wasn't as hard as it might seem.

Then God warned Joseph in a dream, "Get up! Go to Egypt at once!
And take the child and his mother with you, for Herod is waiting to pounce!"

So he got up and took the child and his mother sometime during the night.
They left for Egypt, and there they stayed until the time to come back was all right.

This was the beginning of our Savior's days on this demanding earth.
Although just a babe in his mother's arms, the world didn't realize his worth!

As went his birth, so went his life; he always faced opposition.
Remember, as a youth sitting in the temple, men were astounded with his rendition?

He never came to receive accolades; he made himself of no reputation.
Throughout his life, he was rejected; so *what* was God's motivation?

If you're unsure of what I mean, or what the answer could possibly be,
pick up your Bible and turn to John, the Gospel, that is, chapter three.

He died a very lowly death; gave his life of his own free will.
But praise be to God! He's our *Risen Savior*, and he'll return but not until...

...the time is right...the second time, an altogether different thing!
He will return, but not as a babe, but as the *Conquering King!*

So let's celebrate the birth of Christ; it will give your spirit a lift!
He gave you His love. He gave you his life. He's given *you*
the ultimate gift!

—By Senior Pulley
December 23, 2003

