

NEWS AND ARTICLES
 TO BE SENT TO
ENGLISH
THAMIL } Editor
 NO. 17, FRANCIS
 ROAD, COLOMBO 6

THE MORNING STAR

Registered as a Newspaper at the General Post Office, Sri Lanka.
 Under No. Q / J / 104 / News
Established 1841 : A Christian Weekly : Published Every Friday
Volume 157 December 1996 No. 10
RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE

Annual Subscription Inland
 250/=

For advertisements
 contact
 The Manager,
THE MORNING STAR
17, FRANCIS ROAD,
COLOMBO 6

Give Peace A Chance

We are told that just before the Soviet troops occupied Vienna in 1945, the Vienna Philharmonic gave one of its scheduled concerts. There was fighting in the immediate proximity of the city, and the concertgoers could hear the rumbling of the guns in the distance. The entry of the Soviet army interrupted the concert schedule for about a week . Then the concerts resumed as scheduled . To the world of the Vienna Philharmonic, the world - shattering events of the Soviet Union, the overthrow of one empire and the cataclysmic appearance of another, meant a small interruption in the programme. The writer who refers to the above episode wrote it in the late sixties. If he were writing today, he would have added, the Soviet empire has come and gone but the Vienna Philharmonic goes on with its schedule. It was not a case of foolhardiness, indifference or just brave defiance but rather an affirmation of the ultimate triumph of all human gestures of creative beauty over the gestures of destruction, and even over the ugliness of war and death.

The Jaffna Schools for many decades now have been conducting a Combined School Carol Festival ushering in the Christmas Season every year. Choirs from Christian, Catholic and also from many Government Schools, joined in the event with great fervour and enthusiasm affirming the Christmas hope, expressing the Christmas joy and echoing the Angels message of Peace and Good will. Between October and November 1995 there was the large scale displacement of the population from Valigamam and Jaffna Town and the annual event just could not take place that year. This year with about half the population back and most of the schools functioning again though with somewhat diminished numbers, the schools got together to organise the Festival of Carols again

There was still one snag. The hazards and inconvenience of crossing the security bund which separates the Jaffna Town and Thenmaraadchy areas from Valigamam had to be taken into consideration. The solution was to hold the Festival at two centres on either side of the bund. One at St. John's, Jaffna and the other at Uduvil Girls' College . Sixteen schools in all joined at the Festival . The theme at Uduvil was, " Give Peace A Chance. "It was moving to hear the little ones sing:

" All we are saying is give Peace a chance"
 " All we are praying is give Peace a chance"
 " All we are singing is give Peace a chance"

At Festivals of Christmas Carols one never fails to hear again and again the words of the first Christmas carol - the song of the Angels on the first Christmas day.

"Glory to God in the highest. On earth Peace. Goodwill among men."But we should not forget that the opening words of the Angel's message to the terrified shepherds were, " Be not afraid". Zechariah earlier heard the same angel's message, " Do not be afraid Zechariah" Mary heard from the Angel the same reassuring words " Do not be afraid Mary " It was to a people filled with fear that " the good news of great joy" was announced by the Angels - the good news of Peace and Goodwill among men that comes through the Saviour , Christ the Lord. At the first encounter of God with man in the garden of Eden, Adam's first word to his Creator was " I heard the sound of thee in the garden , and I was afraid." Fear has marked the life of man throughout history and the story of every civilisation has been man's attempt to overcome fear and yet become tragically more and more the victim of his fears.

The people to whom the Angel's message came had many a reason to fear. They lived in a country with an army of occupation. The Roman soldiers could not be missed in the streets of Palestine. Their barracks were all over the country. They recruited their local agents to extort taxes from the people. There was the arch collaborator Herod who joined hands with the oppressive power to keep his own people down.

The Christmas song of Peace and joy was sadly followed by the slaughter of the innocents and " the weeping of Rachel for her children.... because they were no more"

Today the Angel's message of Peace and joy comes to peoples and nations caught up in their fears and anxieties. People keep hearing the sounds of guns, shells and bombs, the rumblings of tanks and armoured cars, the booming of the supersonic bombers, the cries of the hungry and the homeless, the groans of the injured and displaced, the weeping of mothers for their children , because they are no more. People are filled with fear but Christians as they celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace believe in the ultimate triumph of the divine initiative over the forces of destruction, war and death when that initiative evokes the appropriate human response. The one who came as the prince of Peace is also the one who challenged his followers " to be peacemakers." St. Augustine said, " it is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded ridge... and another to tread the road that leads to it. " Let us " give Peace a chance " by treading that road.

Brazil

(Mission yearbook, Presby terian U.S.A)

Brazil is a country of contrasts, exaggerations, and extremes," writes Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Mission Co-worker the Rev. Sherron K. George, until recently professor of Christian Education at the Seminary of the South in Campinas. "Here we have the planet's largest rain forest, the river with the greatest volume, the most extensive hydroelectric facility, the loveliest waterfalls, one of the longest and most breathtaking stretches of beach, the largest soccer stadium and most famous soccer player, the largest slum, the bus station with the most traffic, the greatest gap between the salaries of politicians and minimum wages, and the most elaborate parade and party in the world!

"One reporter describes Brazilian culture as one of exaggeration. For example, statistics are often exaggerated. A recent report revealed that instead of 32 million starving people in Brazil, there are only half that many. Instead of 15 million homeless people, Brazil has 5 million. And rather than half a million street children in Sao Paulo, there are about 4,500. A popular expression, 'either eight or eighty,' means that we go to one extreme or the other," says Ms. George.

One of the great challenges in Brazilian society has been to avoid the dangers of polarization that accompany an "eight or eighty" culture--in economics, in politics, and in the faith life of Brazilians. One economic manifestation of this danger is the gap between the richest and the poorest people in the country--one of the largest disparities in any country in the world. Another challenge is the difficulty of trying to stimulate real economic growth without triggering the massive hyperinflation that periodically convulses the economy of the country and the lives of millions of vulnerable people. In the last several years, the economic struggle has been at the forefront of Brazilian life. Inflation has sometimes risen from 50 to 100 percent in a month.

In politics it has been difficult to avoid careening toward either mass chaos in the streets or a repressive and brutal military dictatorship. When he was minister of finance, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso tried to tame the voracious inflation with a plan that included creating a new currency, the real. His plan showed sufficient signs of success that he won the presidential election in mid - 1994 and replaced Fernando de Mello Collor. This ensured the first succession between democratically elected presidents in nearly three decades, relieving those who feared the crisis might send the public back in to the secure but repressive arms of the military

from the UCC Calendar of Prayer Dec. 26.

Revs. Jane and George Sullivan Davis serving in Chile, report that between 30 and 60 percent of the working people in several Latin American countries are minors. They are not protected by any insurance or controls on employers. In Peru they visited the Movement of Working Children and Adolescent Sons and Daughter of Christian workers (MANTHOC). The organization is run entirely by working children. It provides meals, teaches skills such as sewing and basic health care. MANTHOC has 11 chapters in 11 different regions of Peru

GOD WITH US

'...When Quirinius was governor of Syria ...' (St Luke ii, 2)
 Three years form the millennium the name of Publius Sulpicius Quirinius is hardly a name with which to conjure. Yet in his day this minor Roman official in a distant part of the Roman Empire would have had distinction. He was a senior member of the greatest occupying force the world had then seen. He was charged with restructuring Judaea as a Roman province. He was a fully attested historical figure. Two thousand years later his name is deeply embedded in history, not because of anything he did but because of the obscure birth of an obscure child in an outhouse at Bethlehem. St Luke, who tells the story of that birth in his Gospel, tells it not as a fairy-story, " once upon a time", but as part of the true history of his time. And Luke sets the birth of Jesus not just in Jewish history, but in Roman - in the history of the secular world, of emperors, governors and a taxation census. Caught up into this history are a man and his betrothed, Joseph and Mary, journeying from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where her child is born and is laid in the sharp and piercing straw of a feeding trough for animals.

The birth of that child, which we celebrate this Christmas, was a birth in a promised land, in a town which was the birth place of David, the most renowned of Israel's kings. That land embodied the identity of the people of God as a sign of their freedom and a sign of the providential care of God for them. But at the time of the birth of Jesus that promised land was occupied territory. And as in all occupation that meant a land in which suspicion was rife, where loyalties were strained, and where collaboration was a dirty word. The child whose life began in an outhouse became the man who was an outsider, keeping company with prostitutes, lepers and quisling tax-farmers. It did not commend Him to his religious contemporaries. He was destined to die as a criminal outside the walls of the Holy City.

But for a land of divine destiny to be occupied and subject to foreign rule meant not just the problems of collaboration, it also involved the sharp question: where was God? How could faith in God be sustained if He permitted the occupation of the land of Israel? Why was the God who had delivered His people from Egypt, and brought them back from exile in Babylon, once more abandoning His people to tyranny, oppression and foreign domination?

Into such a "death of God" situation this child is born, a child whose life is destined to change the world's history long after Quirinius and the empire he served is no more. The Gospel writers tell the story of that child's birth in the light of that child's death, and His mysterious raising to life. Without Good Friday and Easter there would be no Christmas story to be told, and no church to tell that story. For that story is no less than the story of "God-with-us".

And the way God is with us is not in wordly power but by an emptying of Himself, a self-giving in love and in humility, a coming down to the very heart of our fragile humanity. At Bethelhem God is with us in weakness, coming into all the human chaos and confusion, as a helpless newborn child. He does not stand apart but chooses to know from within our human life from the dependence of childhood to the darkness of death. Such a God is a God whose love does not let us down and does not let us go, a God whose being with us is the promise of unconquerable hope to the sinful, the despairing and the dying. Mary's child is the crucified Lord who know s the agony of a Dunblane or a Rwanda from the inside. He is now and always the God who is with us.

- Courtesy The Times - 24.12.96.

Apologies
Book Review November 1996 edition
 Pg 3 line 4 - The name Robert Thomas should read as **Robert Holmes.**
 Shiranee Mills - Editor

Mary, Mother of Jesus

With Christmas 1996 just behind us, we venture into a new year. Thoughts of our Christmas celebrations must surely spill into our new year. Playing a prominent role in any Christmas activity is the picture/ the portrayal of Mary the Mother of Jesus. The Magnificat sung and read at each Carol service is a must at Christmas. Mary is thus rightly praised and celebrated as the mother of Jesus, a woman who is the personification of humility, obedience and submission to God's will. Her picture is painted as a gentle woman, her face and eyes raised to the heavens or looking tenderly at the Babe she holds in her arms.

This Christmas I saw a different Mary. Mary the woman. The woman of the Hebrew society - a society which was highly patriarchal and rigid in the observance of rituals and religious practices.

Behind Mary's words "Behold the handmaid of God. Be it unto me as you say" uttered to the Angel Gabriel lies not only Mary's obedience to God and her humility before God but also her courage the courage to take on criticism, the doubts and suspicion of her betrothed and others too. Her courage to believe and carry out God's ministry of bearing the Christ Child in circumstances outside normal societal happenings. There is determination, courage and strength behind these words. Mary, the courageous woman.

The Magnificat sung by Mary is a powerful hymn. A hymn seeking human dignity and freedom. It celebrates the setting free of the downtrodden and proclaims God's compassion towards humanity. This song contains the entire message of Christ's mission amongst humanity. If St. John the Baptist is called the herald of Christ, so too must Mary for Mary emerges here as the herald of Christ's mission on earth. She had the perception and the wisdom, and the courage to hope and wait for redemption in the coming of Christ. No wonder then that God chose Mary as the bearer of the Christchild. She had insight into God's plan which brought about a revolutionary world order - an order which would do away with inequalities and oppression. Mary here is seen as, a theologian and a powerful prophet.

Mary at Cana enlists the help of Christ to bring wine into the wedding banquet. Jesus is brought into the domestic sphere. He understands the difficulties in the running of the domestic world - a world traditionally allotted only to the woman. Once again at the Wedding in Cana, Mary acts as the liberator of woman from house hold chores.

Immediately after the Wedding at Cana they proceed with Jesus "After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days." John 2:1 - 12

This verse in the bible speaks a profound message, for it shows us women who accompany Jesus on his mission. His followers are travellers and they are both men and women Mary was a follower of Jesus.

We see her at the site of Jesus' crucifixion - a courageous act an act which breaks the myth of the frailty of women. She is also there in the Upper Room with the disciples - she is seen as a source of strength and wisdom to these men and women who are in despair after Jesus' death.

These qualities of strength and power abound in Mary. This is the Mary I saw this Christmas - Mary the theologian, the prophet, and the disciple. Mary a woman of courage and immense wisdom.

Shiranee Mills

Church Women's Declaration

The National Christian Council - Women's Commission together with a representative gathering of women from the Anglican Church (Colombo and Kurunegala Diocese), Methodist Church, Church of South India, Dutch Reformed Church, The Student Christian Movement, some members of the Roman Catholic Church were at Ampitiya, Kandy from 13 - 15 September 1996 to grapple with the theme "Spirituality, Creativity and Energy: Women in the Church."

We experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we studied the Bible and discussed issues pertinent to women from all walks of life.

In our discussions about the Ministry of Women in the Church, we realized as we shared our stories that we experience the same joys and pains. However, we felt we can no more endure this pain. We need to address the situation and take our full place as those created in God's image in the Community of believers and participate in a meaningful Ministry. Hence, we commit ourselves:-

1. To move towards a full participation of women in the total Ministry of the Church.
2. To encourage training and empowering of women to be in the decision making process, recognizing that they are hardly visible in the decision making bodies of the Church.
3. To commit ourselves to work in partnership with each other within an ecumenical framework, sharing our concerns and goals.

William Bertram Mather

A service of remembrance and thanksgiving for the life of William Bertram Mather was held at the C.S.I. Church, Colombo on Thursday the 7th of November, 1996 at 6.00 p.m.

The scriptures were read by Premini Gnanapragasam his daughter and the tribute was given by Mrs. S. Anandanayagam, Rev. Sam Alfred lead the litany of Thanksgiving and Rev. C.T. Roberts offered the opening prayer. The message was given by Rev. A. Jeyakumaran, the pastor of the Colombo Church.

Sanjay Atputharajah's tribute to his grandfather was a poem titled "To My Grandpa."

Ms. Gnanamalar Gunanayagam

A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Ms. Gnanamalar Gunanayagam, Erlalai South Church, was held at the Colombo, C.S.I. Church on Saturday the 23rd of November 1996, at 5.00 p.m.

The service was lead by Rev. A. Jeyakumaran, Pastor of the Colombo Church.

A Solo was sung by Ms. Dayalini Suganthan and the Scriptures were read by Mr. G. A. Suganthan and Mr. J. S. Jeyaruban.

The tribute was given by Rev. Sevak Sam Alfred and the Sermon by Rev. A. Jeyakumaran.

TOWARDS TRUE HEALING...

Two recent entries in my prayer calendars struck me as being pertinent to our situation in Sri Lanka, pertinent to our need to share experiences:

During the 1980's, when an estimated 110,000 Guatemalans were slain and 440 villages destroyed, hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans fled to Mexico in search of safety. Paula Bidle, a UCC/Disciples missionary says that during their time in Mexico, the refugees organized themselves and, as an exile people, carefully thought about the presence of God in their midst. "They fled Guatemala in terror," she says, "yet they return in dignity and strength, ready for the work ahead."

Argentina was once a model of stability, cosmopolitan culture, and economic prosperity in Latin America. The country, however, has suffered deeply during the past three decades. First there was the military's "dirty war" in which thousands of Argentine people were killed, disappeared, or were forced into exile. Then there was the disastrous war with Great Britain for control of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands which ended the military's direct power. The economic and political problems that followed have left this once-proud nation a pale shadow of itself.

These factors "along with the neo-liberal economic system that has widened the gap all over Latin America between the very rich and the extremely poor," says Dr. Beatriz Melano Couch, a Presbyterian mission co-worker, "have extinguished the formerly strong middle class in Argentina. While the cost of living in Buenos Aires is higher than in Germany or the United States, many people earn less than \$140 a month, which won't even pay for a roof over their heads. Instead of the First World country it once was, Argentina is becoming a Fourth World country."

President Carlos Menem, re-elected in May 1995, has at least been able to keep inflation under control. And among the signs of deep pain, there are signs of hope as well. Shortly before the last year's elections, army chief of staff Martin Balza broke the military's twenty-year pact of silence, apologizing to the nation for the "dirty war"-- the torture, disappearance, and murder not only of left-wing militants, but of many innocent people. Mr. Balza said the country was engaging in a "painful dialogue with the past, a past that rises like a ghost and remains in our conscience." He implied that while the military bore primary responsibility, no person in the nation escaped guilt: "some through complicity, some through omission, some through excess, and others through fear. We all carry this guilt in our consciousness." Now that this guilt is a topic for open discussion, Dr. Couch hopes the nation can begin to seek true healing.

In the hope of the New Year let us apply what we can of the lessons, the experiences these two countries can teach.

R.G. Porter.

The 175th Anniversary Celebration of the Uduvil Church

As our Uduvil Church celebrates its 175th Anniversary on the 26th, 27th, 28th, of Dec, it is but with a deep sense of gratitude that we remember the pioneers of our faith.

Unmindful of the dangers ahead, they ventured out from the west, on a hazardous journey by sea. They have served with indomitable faith in God, steadfast love and deep devotion. Some had even lost their lives in their prime, due to illness and lack of medical facilities.

They started their missionary activity, staying in dilapidated huts, experiencing immense hardships. They had to face severe challenges from the village folk, who were strongly against the spread of Christian doctrines.

But undaunted, these missionaries, The Winslows, Howlands, Spauldings and Eliza Agnew (to mention a few) went about into even the remote villages, spreading the gospel with steadfast faith in God and love for all mankind. They had their meetings under the shady trees and taught lively songs, psalms and the "golden text" and brought many a lost sheep into God's fold.

Let us remember with grateful hearts, all the other ministers, lay preachers and deacons who have laboured whole heartedly with dedication and love and have passed through the portals of our church.

Our Uduvil Church with its long and renowned history of so many years, hath withstood many a calamity, the ravages of wars, bombing, shelling and loss of lives and property. But thank God, it continues to stand as a living monument, serving all the Christians and the community around.

The winds of war hath caused havoc and misery. Thousands have got shaken, scattered unable to pick up the threads of life.

We hope and pray that God will bring a lasting solution we have yearned for so long. We thank you Lord, for the pioneers and propagators of our faith, for the privilege of belonging to the Christian family and the strength we derive from one another.

Lord, shower thy blessings with thy loving hand and let Peace and Prosperity reign in our war torn land.

We Thank Thee O God

*With grateful hearts we thank thee for the pioneers from the west,
In Thy faithful service, they have given of their best
As our "oodooville" Church celebrates its hundred and seventy fifth year of its
birth,*

We remember the revered founders with gratitude and mirth.

*Rev. Myron Winslow wife Harriet daringly took the lead,
Ploughed the Field and scattered the good seed,
Mid tribulation sickness, loss of lives so dear,
Laboured with indomitable faith dedication and cheer.*

*Came the Levi Spauldings, into the mission field,
Was Pastor, Physician, Guardian, a Friend in need.
For four decades a guiding face so bold
Brought many a lost sheep into this fold.*

*Veteran Rev. Spaulding Miss Eliza Agnew
with Howlands shone in the firmament as stars anew
Contributed immensely to the mission field,
In the crucial hours of its dearth and need.*

*Mr. Hoisington, the first ordained native to our parish,
Handed down a long indigenous heritage for us to cherish.
"We must do our full inch" he did uphold
'Let God take care of the other eleven' was his watch - word*

*Rev. S. Eliathamby one of the brightest spots, an undeniable fact,
As the 20th century Elizah, he made a great impact.
For thirty one years as Pastor and confidante to his congregation,
Warned his flock of redemption and need of Salvation.*

*Rev Isaac Paul, wife Elizabeth journeyed in a pony cart.
Into neighbouring villages, playing an active part
Harnessing many a talent, laid hidden for long,
Enlivened their meetings with music and song.*

*Rev. G.D. Thomas, laboured for two periods as our guide
Work among children was his forte and pride
Founder of the Christian Endeavour Society, Producer of plays
Enlightened his messages with pictures and Visual aids.*

*Laymen, catechists, native pastors followed
Women of U.G.C and "Bible Women" we're told,
Ventured even into "uncharted" fields.
Spreading the gospel, through "golden texts" and songs under trees.*

*The Uduvil "Y" Youth League, Sabbath School, Ladies Guild,
They delighted in dreams, visions fulfilled,
We thank thee O God, for their love and devotion
They've led many in the path of Salvation*

*Misses Lulu Bookwalter, Lucy Clark, last in the mission scene
With Miss Hudson Paramasamy, our first native principal, strong pillars they've
been*

*Women, Youth, Girls of U.G.C, they brought in to the lime light
As 'torch bearers' in the way of Jesus Christ.*

*Our revered Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. S. Kulendran we remember with deep gratitude
He fought a good battle with Love, Faith and Fortitude
For our J.D.C.S.I. he's laid a firm foundation
And left us a priceless legacy of wisdom and dedication*

*Now our Uduvil Church with its heritage renowned
Stands a living witness to the community around
Though the storms of late are raging high
We pledge not to let the kindled flames flicker and die.*

*The ruthless war is claiming innocent lives each day
Rendering millions homeless in panic and dismay
Orphans, disabled, destitute, a heart breaking sight
Oh God, save Thy children from this sorrowful plight*

*As we enter a new phase this memorable year
We thank thee for our Bishops and Pastors for guidance and care
We yearn for lasting peace in our war torn land
Shower on us rich blessings with Thy mighty Hand.*

-Suganthi Vyrasinghe

Obituary

Dorothy Appleby

We regret to record the death of Miss Dorothy Appleby, a former Missionary Nurse in the Mission Hospitals in Jaffna. She died on the 19th of November, 1996 at a Nursing Home in Eastbourne, England, where she had been in failing health for the last few years.

Miss Appleby who is a member of the English Baptist Church and a trained Nurse came out to India to work in a Mission Hospital. As part of the preparation she joined the Missionary Language School at the United Theological College, Bangalore to study Tamil. When she finished her Tamil course her plans to work in a Mission Hospital did not materialise and she opted to come out to Ceylon. The U. C. B. W. M. accepted her as a missionary and she joined the Green Memorial Hospital, Manipay in 1950 as a Senior Missionary Nurse and Nursing Superintendent. She helped to improve the standard of nursing in the Hospital and worked with an energetic and enthusiastic spirit to inculcate a Christian sense of vocation and high professional skills among the Nursing Staff. She was also deeply committed to the cause of Mission and was actively involved in the Manipay Church and evangelistic outreach programmes of the Diocese.

It was her qualities of commitment and devotion to her tasks that led the Diocese to send her as its pioneer missionary to the area South of Elephant Pass in 1960. Miss Appleby with an assistant Nurse proceeded to Murusumoddai, Paranthan and set up our first mission centre and Medical Clinic there. She was fortunate to have the fellowship of two other missionaries in that area. Miss Muriel Hutchins the C. M. S. missionary at Karuna Nilayam and Sister Elizabeth Baker the Methodist Missionary at Navajeevanam. This missionary trio were a quiet but powerful witness to the spirit of selfless missionary service in the Wanni. Miss Appleby worked with zeal, courage and devotion and endeared herself to the community. She was affectionately referred to as "Apple Amma" by her patients and the people of the area. After twenty years of service as a missionary with the Jaffna Diocese she returned to England in 1971. The Mission Hospital in Murusumoddai, Paranthan will be a lasting monument to Dorothy Appleby's pioneering services. After her return to England she maintained her links with the Diocese and the many friends she had made here. As long as she was in good health and could travel around, she made it a point to attend the monthly Tamil services at the Putney Church in London where she enjoyed the fellowship of her numerous Jaffna friends. God be praised for her life of faith and missionary labours.

Nativity story still wins our attention

SOCIETY may be increasingly secular but knowledge of the Bible's Nativity story remains almost universal.

The Gallup Poll conducted 915 interviews with people aged 16 and over between December 5 and 11 in more than 100 districts across Great Britain.

More than three quarters of Gallup's respondents know that Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem and that his mother, Mary, put him in a manger.

They also know that the three wise men - described as "astrologers" in the latest version of the New Testament - presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Perhaps more remarkably, nearly two-thirds know that the angel sent by God to tell Mary that she would conceive, was called Gabriel.

There is substantial ignorance on only two points. Scarcely half of Gallup's sample can name King Herod as the king of Judaea at the time of Jesus.

And fewer than one quarter of those questioned knows that Egypt was the country into which Joseph and Mary fled with their new born child.

Among the members of today's various Christian denominations, Non-conformists and members of the various Free Churches exhibit considerably more familiarity with the circumstances of Jesus's birth than either Anglicans or Roman Catholics.

For example, 41 per cent of Non-conformists know that the Holy Family fled into Egypt compared with 27 per cent of Roman Catholic and only 24 per cent of self-professed Anglicans.

However, the various creeds were united in finding Silent Night Holy Night their favourite carol in a fitting tribute to the endeavours of a parish priest and his organist in the Austrian alps almost 200 years ago.

On Christmas Eve, 1818, the organ in their parish church of Oberndorf, in Lower Austria, broke down.

The parish priest, Josef Mohr, and the organist, Felix Gruber, found that they had no music to play.

Forced to improvise, Father Mohr wrote the words of Still Nacht, Heilige nacht in a few hours, while Felix Gruber equally hurriedly composed the music.

The next day it was sung in their church by the only forces available: two voices, Mohr's and Gruber's and the church choir.

Instead of the broken organ, Father Mohr accompanied his meagre forces on the guitar.

By the middle of the 19th century, the carol, which was performed in a variety of arrangements, most of which included the organ, was famous throughout much of Europe.

21 per cent of Gallup's respondents in 1996 reckon Silent Night is their favourite carol. More than twice as many prefer the joint runners-up Away in a Manger and O Come All Ye Faithful, with nine per cent each.

Other popular carols, such as Good King Wenceslas, O Little Town of Bethlehem and Once in Royal David's City, trail far behind with four per cent each.

Fully 28 per cent of Gallup's sample say they do not have a favourite carol. Some may dislike all carols. More are probably reluctant to choose.

- Courtesy - Daily Telegraph

24th Dec. 96

Death comes at sunset on the Oder.

When inhabitants of the German industrial town of Schwedt plow their boats through the marshy areas on their side of the Oder River which flows along part of the German-Polish border, they frequently see more than birds and fish. Often beer cans or cigarette butts floating on the water provide evidence of human passage. Other times, however, the residents of Schwedt and other towns along the watery border discover human bodies, mute signs of a horror that is hard for most western Europeans to understand.

A check of the bodies usually reveals some sort of identification. The deceased, usually male, is in his 20's or 30's, from Poland or another nearby central or eastern European country, but sometimes from as far away as Pakistan or Sri Lanka. The deceased had come to the banks of the Oder, probably by night, to swim or boat across the border undetected by German authorities. Once across the border, he had probably intended to blend into the large legal immigrant community in Berlin or Hamburg or Frankfurt. Tragically, however, many would-be immigrants underestimate the strength of the Oder River's current. One would-be immigrant, part of a group from Sri Lanka, reported that he tried to wade across the Oder, but after a few steps the water came up to his chin and he was swept away by the current. He managed to swim to shore, but when he looked back into the river all but two of his companions were no longer visible and presumably drowned.

Illegal immigration is perceived as a serious problem everywhere in Europe and voters have frequently demanded that governments take action to close Europe's borders to people from the third world. The result is that only the most dangerous and difficult access routes remain open, resulting each year in the deaths of hundreds of would-be immigrants. During the last four years in Brandenburg, the one German state which records this statistic separately, 45 people have drowned crossing the Oder River as they attempted to enter Germany illegally.

-Duncan Hanson, EUROPE UP DATE
(Pres by terian Church, USA)

For All Who Give You A Face

For all who give you a face Lord Jesus by spreading your love in the world, We praise you.

For all who give your hands by doing their best towards their sisters and brothers we praise you.

For all who give you a mouth, Lord Jesus by defending the weak and the oppressed, we praise you

For all who give you eyes, by seeing every bit of love in the heat of man and woman, we praise you.

For all who give you a heart, Lord Jesus, by preferring the poor to the rich, the weak to the strong, we praise you

For all who give to your poverty the look of hope for your Reign, we praise you.

For all who reveal you simply by what they are, Lord Jesus, because they reflect your beauty in their lives, we praise you

You who are the God of a thousand faces yet whom nothing can reveal completely except the face of the child of Bethlehem, we pray to you.

Continue in our lives the mystery of Christmas.

Let your Son become flesh in us so that we may be for all our brothers and sisters the revelation of your love.

-Lucien Deiss, the 20th century French Catholic liturgist.

CHRISTMAS 1996

**TAKE DOWN THE TREE,
SKIP THE PRESENTS AND PUNCH,
GIVE UP ENTERTAINING
THE USUAL BUNCH.
LEAVE EMPTY THE STOCKINGS;
PUT SANTA AND SLEIGH,
"THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS"-
EVEN CHRISTMAS - AWAY.**

**ALL THAT REMAINS
IS A STORY PASSED DOWN
FROM SHEPHERDS WHO LEFT THEIR
FLOCKS GRAZING AND FOUND
PILGRIMS AND ANIMALS
IN A SHEEPFOLD,
PLUS HOPE OF THE WORLD,
CRYING AND COLD.**

**HOPE OF THE WORLD -
ITS LAST-MINUTE REPRIEVE -
DESCENDING FROM HEAVEN
LIKE SNOW CHRISTMAS EVE.
RELUCTANT THE EARTH,
SAFELY SHELTERED IN NIGHT,
TO OPEN ITS EYES TO
A SMALL, BLINDING LIGHT.**

Linda Jerould

Woodland Park Presbyterian Church, in
Seattle, Washington.

A PRAYER FOR OUR TIMES.

O God, we are a people of our time
and our situation,
Around us are the signs of fear,
hatred and death.
We have tried to find ways to
peace and reconciliation, but
always too little, too late.
Always our hopes have been
destroyed.
We become perplexed, angry, and
hopeless.
At times we want to walk away
from it all, to wash our
hands of it, to get out.
Every time we try to turn our backs
our way is blocked by Jesus
on his cross.
Lord, make us people of hope, Save
us from cynicism and despair,
Our hope is founded in your
victory over evil and
hatred.

Today our Lord Jesus floods into
this shattered world, as a
light shining out of deep
darkness, as a seed
growing in a wasteland
O God, we are people
of our time, yet to us, you
are Lord and God!
You are alive in our world, building
your eternal Kingdom.
As your people, we are prisoners
of this hope.
Thanks be to God! Amen.
(Selected)

Grace Parimalam Chellappah.

A service of Praise and Thanksgiving for the life of Ms. Grace Parimalam Chellappah was held at the C.S.I. Church, Colombo on Saturday the 28th of September 1996, at 5.00 p.m.

The tribute was given by Rev. A. Aiyadurai and the Sermon by Rev. A. Jeyakumaran, Presbyter, Colombo Church.

WALDENSIAN SYNOD SUPPORTS REFUGEES

Three and a half centuries before Martin Luther, the Waldensians of Southern France, known as the Poor Men of Lyon, formed a very early Protestant church. Their deeply felt conviction was that if they did not try to live Jesus' plain teaching about love and service, surely no one else would either.

By the 1300's most had moved into the valleys of northwestern Italy. This year the Synod met in Torre Pellice, with 150 pastors and 30 guests present from around the world. The issue, debated at the Synod, which was perhaps the most representative, concerned 'uprooted people.'

As a minority religious community in an overwhelming Roman Catholic nation, Waldensians have long shared a deeply felt empathy for people they have recognized to be excluded or powerless. At many points in the last 700 years, in ways that have left a profound mark on contemporary Waldensian spirituality, they have offered refuge or sanctuary or shelter to others whom they recognized to be even more oppressed than they. After considerable discussion, the Waldensians, who in modern democratic Italy are no longer marginalized, voted to ask the government to take new efforts to integrate immigrants and refugees, including illegally or undocumented immigrants, into the normal flow of Italian life.

Discussing new models of ministry, many Waldensians believe their church is moving closer and closer to assigning teams of pastors to work together in serving circuits of eight to ten congregations each. This model would allow even the smallest congregations to be served by several pastors, and alleviate their severe clergy shortage.

DUNCAN HANSON, EUROPE UPDATE,
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Kingsley Chelliah

The untimely death of Mr. K.V. Chelliah occurred on the first of November 1996 at the National Hospital Colombo. His death came as a shock to all as he was progressing in his health and was about to be discharged.

He retired prematurely in 1990 as the chief clerk of the Jaffna Police Office when the office was transferred to Vavuniya.

Mr. Chelliah though quiet and unassuming, was a man of very high principles and adhered strictly to his principles whether it be at office or at home or with the public.

At work he was very conscientious and faithful. As an administrator he was strict but fair in his dealings with his subordinates and co-workers and was much loved and respected by his superiors.

He was well known in his community for the sound advice and help he rendered to those who sought his help. He was non interfering but was alert to the needs of people in distress.

In retirement he spent much of his time in communing with the Lord. He loved the Lord deeply and received his strength from Him.

To the family he was a loving husband and a true friend and confidante to his sons.

He leaves behind his wife Mrs. R. P. Chelliah of Uduvil and two sons Ajithkumar, Dilkumar and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his loss.

The song of the Magi

There is dignity here -
We will exalt it.
There is courage here -
we will support it.
There is humanity here -
We will enjoy it.
There is a universe in every child -
we will share in it.
There is a voice calling through the
chaos of our time;
there is a spirit moving across the
waters of our world;
there is movement,
a light,
a promise of hope.
Let them that have eyes to see,
see
Let them that have ears to hear,
hear.
But
look not for Armageddon,
nor listen for a trumpet.
Behold we bring you good tidings
of great joy:
The Incarnation.

Philip Andrews
Australia.

WHO IS POOR?

Sam Weisbrod, the 10 - year old son of Revs. Ben and Beth Weisbrod, shared his perception of stewardship while still with his parents in Mozambique. "It's kind of important to have missionaries to America because Americans aren't very good about how to use their money," he said. "They need missionaries who are poor to show them how to use it wisely. What the U.S. needs is love, not just caring for yourself. You can't really say that Mozambique is the poorest country in the world if you look at it like that."

In mission 1996-97
(UCC calendar of prayer)