

First Communion for 19 Young People at St. John's

The 11 a.m. service of worship at St. John's United Church on Sunday, December 17, was one of great significance for nineteen young people who were confirmed and received their first communion. Confirmation, which follows several weeks of special instruction in matters of faith and doctrine, marks the point at which the communicant makes, for himself, the vows which were made for him at Baptism.

In the service on Sunday each candidate for confirmation was presented to the minister and to the congregation by a sponsor; Elder. The young people confirmed and their sponsoring Elders were:

- Grace Bird, Mr. Hector Bird; Edward Bird, Mr. G. Farnell; Henry Breeschooten, Mr. J. Hamilton; Mike Broomhead, Mr. R. Broomhead; David Hall, Mr. S. Hall; Betty Hamilton, Mr. H. Holmes; Cathy Lince, Mrs. W. Brownridge; Heather McDonald, Mr. V. Sier; Elizabeth McKee, Mr. R. Hansen; Judy Monckton, Mrs. J. Evans; Judy Nichols, Mr. W. Kinrade; Bill Neil, Mr. G. Armistage; Bob Runham, Mr. J. Runham; Glenda Scarrow, Mr. J. Layman; Allan Stuttard, Dr. K. McCauley; Linda Stuttard, Mrs. R. McKeown; Chris Todd, Mr. J. Todd; Carol Walsh, Mr. E. Forgrave; Hugh Williams, Mr. R. McMenemy.

Rev. Robert Scrivens conducted the service of confirmation assisted by Mr. S. Wright, Clerk of Session.

Those Elders assisting Mr. Scrivens with the serving of the Sacrament were: Messrs J. Addy, H. Bird, K. McCauley, D. Hastings, S. Wright, R. McKeown, A. Prouse, D. Latimer, V. McCumber and C. McManara.

A reception, arranged by Mr. W. Kinrade, Mr. E. Forgrave

and Mr. S. Hall, in honour of the young people who were confirmed was held in the church hall following the service. Those serving at the reception were Mrs. V. McCumber, Mrs. W. Fiebig, Mrs. G. Farnell, Mrs. J. Evans and Mrs. C. Schenk.

Check These Safety Tips For A Fire-Safe Christmas

Special precautions against fire should head the list of every sensible family's preparations for Christmas. Fire Chief Erwin Lewis warned today that a happy Christmas can change in a few seconds into family tragedy, in homes where such precautions are neglected. He urged the public to exercise special care in the setting up and decoration of Christmas trees, and drew attention to the following points:

Only fresh green trees should be bought and they should be kept outdoors in an unheated garage before being brought into the home for decorating. Then, a tree should have one or two inches cut diagonally from the butt, and should be set up with the butt in water, which should be maintained above the level of the cut.

CHECK LIGHTS
Electrical lighting strings should be checked for frayed cords or short circuits. Only CSA-approved lighting sets, and only non-flammable decorations should be used. Declare the tree a no-smoking area, and keep matches out of the hands of children.

On Christmas Day, do not allow gift wrappings to accumulate under the tree. Dispose of wrappings as soon as gifts are opened. Even a moist tree will burn if ignited by burning wrappings or similar material around the base.

NOT NEAR FIREPLACE
Set up the tree away from such sources of heat as a fireplace, TV set or radiator. Be sure it does not block access to doors or windows in the event of fire. Switch off tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS
Throughout the Christian world, Christmas is THE holiday, universally celebrated, universally recognized. Probably no library in the world could house the volume of material that is written about this great holiday in a single season.

Because so much has been written — and will again be written this holiday season — we must consider it remarkable that the story of the Nativity has continued a simple and unaffected narrative — "For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten son."

Traditions and customs are subject to the changing times. Yet, amid the laughter and festivities, whatever carols are sung, however gifts are exchanged, there remains forever unaffected the simple story of the birth at Bethlehem. This is the story of Christmas — an event which took place nearly 2,000 years ago — the birth of a Redeemer and the promise of eternal salvation.

Through centuries of translation, of telling and re-telling, the meaning of Christmas remains simple and universal. Christmas is the birthright of every man.

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The Story of Bethlehem

by Charles Bradley

No one knows for how many thousands of years men have lived in Bethlehem.

It was there — a tiny triangle of stone houses spreading sparsely over a limestone hill six miles from Jerusalem on the road to Jerusaleim — when Moses led the Jews out of Egypt.

An ancient people, still only dimly known to archaeologists, had named it Ephrata. The Jews, when they came to the promised land, named it Bethlehem, or house of bread. They did not, apparently, reflect long over the choice of name.

It appears to be a simple translation of old Ephrata.

Perhaps the name came originally from the richness of the cornfields on the field below. There was always bread in Bethlehem.

It had not changed at all by the time of the Book of Ruth, one of the literary gems of the Old Testament. The Book of Ruth is a simple moral tale — the story of a young widow who returned to Bethlehem in order to be with her husband's people and who toiled 'amid the alien corn' to support her mother-in-law.

Curious
Life in Bethlehem, we learn from the story of Ruth, was good and the complicated mores of the people it described served to lay down a practical code of morals by which man could live with a man with a minimum of friction.

It seems curious, now, to think of the rich and important Boaz marrying Ruth in order to do his duty by his deceased brother — but it was an arrangement, apparently which served well.

Ruth was the great grandmother of David, the greatest of the Hebrew kings and nearly, perhaps the greatest of the Hebrew poets.

It was from Bethlehem, the village of his birth, that David went forth as a water boy on the dreadful day that Saul and his men faced Goliath and the Phillistine Army.

Goliath dared any man to face him and no man, at first, dared.

David, the youngest, smallest, and least impressive of a large and important family, did dare — because he had faith in the rightness of his cause and believed that God would see him through.

The same sense of security and of the fitness of things which runs through the Book of Ruth seems to have infected David.

Simple Community

Perhaps he understood that the simple community in Bethlehem was better left undisturbed. In any case, after he became king, he did not as other kings had done, glorify his native village or endeavour to rebuild it into a great city.

It is strange, in fact, that Bethlehem never did become an important town. From its hill, it commands a great plain and a main road. To a military tactician, it bristles with possibilities.

(Once, indeed, in a remote period never properly identified, the Phillistines did build a fort there. It does not, however, seem to have lasted long.)

The explanation seems to be that it was set apart. As far back as the Book of Ruth, at least, it had a spiritual significance and was not to be tampered with.

At the time of Christ's birth, David or even Ruth would have been quite at home in the village.

Poverty Emphasized

Christ, so the story goes, was born in a manger located in a cave (the New Testament is not clear about the cave), while in the nearby fields, according to St. Luke, angels appeared in certain poor shepherds watching their flocks by night.

For reasons which are now difficult to follow, the chroniclers of Christ's birth seem to have gone out of their way to emphasize the poverty of the situation. The cave in the limestone, was no doubt simple enough and no doubt it was used by the thrifty villagers as a natural stable.

But St. Luke appears to have been misled about the poor shepherds. Historians are convinced that, then as now, the fields were rich and grew corn. It is entirely unlikely that the shepherds were watching their flocks just there.

More likely they were watching their flocks on the hill which slopes down behind the village to the plain. 'Poor' probably was intended to designate the fact that they were unimportant, humble men of Christ's mission by making it clear that it was to ordinary men that the angels chose to reveal themselves.

There is, too, a story to the effect that Christ, in fact, was a descendant of David and of Ruth. If true it would establish an interesting continuity both in the history of the Bible and the history of Bethlehem.

The records, do not, however, confirm or deny the story and, since Joseph and Mary

were driven to stay in a stable, it seems reasonable, at least, to conclude that neither had any close relatives in the village.

Little more is heard of Bethlehem until the year 127 when the Emperor became interested in it. He apparently believed that the village, itself, had some strange mystical significance.

In any case he had a grove planted for the worship in which he believed Christ was born.

The Grove of Adonis remained until the year 330 when Constantine determined to erase what he believed to be a serious blasphemy. The grove was taken down and a church built on the site.

Distinguishing Mark

Other Christian Churches and several monasteries followed until now the distinguishing mark of the village is the abundance of Christian institutions. Gradually, until now they are Christian almost to a man.

The final chapter in the history of the village came with arrival of St. Jerome. Jerome was determined to translate the Bible into Latin.

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GREETINGS

Here's hoping your Christmas Day arrives just filled with all the happiness the season can bring.

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His stately, exact Latin, reflects the calm and quiet of the village and the continuity of style which runs through his classic translation parallels the continuity he must have found in Bethlehem.

Sitting there in his bare study he must have been able to feel the atmosphere of the Old and New Testaments.

Probably no other village in the world has been the scene of so much history — and no other has changed he world with so little change in its own character over the scores of centuries.

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