



# MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN

## God is love!

There's a song you've probably heard, if you've ever watch Christian entertainment, that goes like this: "Oh how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus because He first loved me."



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola  
District President

Poetically it's pretty weak, and theologically speaking, it's not something I'd encourage anyone to sing at church because it really doesn't speak about God's unconditional love. But there's a line in it that strikes a chord about the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ.

"Because He first loved me" maybe sounds alright, but when we place it in the template of the Pauline Epistles, it's a square peg in a round hole. It doesn't fit. Paul makes it quite clear that before any one of us could do anything; before we were able to even think about trying to do anything, Jesus loved us. We were loved *before* we breathed our first breath, as it says in Isaiah's prophecy: "God knew me in the womb." That's precisely what the Gospels declare. We're His sons and daughters, the beloved with whom He is well pleased. Even more amazingly, that all happens before we're able to speak, think or breathe because God is love.

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River. It was then that He began His formal earthly ministry.

Before Jesus did anything to work in His messianic ministry, God the Father spoke the words anointing His Son and the ministry of our reconciliation:

"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." **Matt. 3:17**

All this He says just before Jesus went into the wilderness to prepare for His earthly ministry and where He was tempted by Satan.

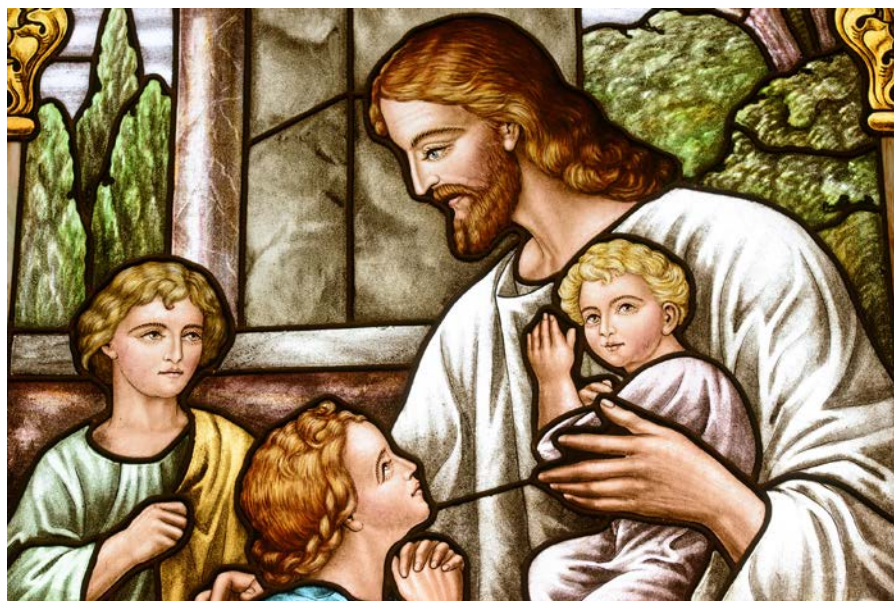
Only after a 40-day ordeal in the desert did Jesus return to heal the sick, make the lame to walk, raise the dead, give sight to the blind and comfort the lost. What's so interesting is that before all

these miracles that point to Jesus as the Christ — the promised One of God — God the Father says of Him: "My beloved and well pleasing to God."

That pretty much destroys any false argument that posits that Jesus became God, but a lesser god than the Father. Undoubtedly in these words, God's declaration demonstrates that He knew Christ — the Second Person of the Trinity from eternity — before time and creation. So when Jesus returned from the wilderness, He returned to give life and hope to people out of the love of God. No price, no terms or condition ... simply the love of Christ for all people because God loves us first.

This manifestation of divine love shows the purpose of creation and, later, its redemption through Christ. God didn't create beings so that they could praise

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## GOD IS LOVE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

and make Him feel good about Himself, as some would suppose. No, the entire creation and all its creatures are a manifestation that the very essence of God is love. It's an uncreated, non-material love that can only come from God, undeserved by us and not as a result of what we can do or say to God.

This is the love God showers on us through His means of grace. In Holy Baptism, the simple water joined together with God's Word becomes the waters of regeneration, covering us in the righteousness of Christ, washing away our sins, giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith and declaring us to be heirs of God's eternal promise and heaven — the promise even though we do nothing to deserve God's love.

Of course we love Jesus. But as that silly little song implies, we can't love Jesus by our natural human condition. From the time of our conception of natural means, we're born enemies of God — sinners. There's nothing we can do to make God love us because His love is unconditional and, because of its essence, unconditional love (*Agape*) was with God and is of God before creation. But with our identity with God and worth determined in Jesus Christ, we're free to live as God's Word proclaims. We live by God's design, not our decision or any feeble attempt to offer ourselves to God. He already "owns" us and everyone else ever born by creating us and giving us life! In baptism, led by the Holy Spirit, we've committed ourselves to God, to live a life in response to His great love. Without His love as the foundation of our love for others, we could never truly love unconditionally. If God has accepted us unconditionally, how could we not love others as He has loved us?

That's why we commit ourselves to teach our children of God's love when we bring them to worship, Sunday school and family devotions. We can't expect a child to physically live if we only give them birth but then never feed them. The same is true for the new birth in Christ through Holy Baptism. Simply bringing a child to baptism because we think it



might just be the right thing to do, but then never nurture, feed and instruct through worship and Bible study is cruel and irresponsible.

By the same token, our ministry begins at baptism as well. Look at the people when a baptism occurs. Their ministry has already started! But just as Jesus was tempted in the desert, soon after our baptisms, Satan will begin pitching his fiery darts in our direction. There'll be trials. There'll be pain. We open ourselves up to the needs of others, fully knowing that the commitment on our part makes us vulnerable for those who would take advantage of any Christian love. We respond to those who are sick, hungry, naked and in prison in a literal sense, but so much more in a spiritual sense.

Unfortunately, there are those who take baptism lightly or misunderstand it as God's action toward us. It's considered the thing to do .... well, because our parents did it for us. The rite of Baptism becomes repetitive, routine unless we stop to think about the Word and what it promises. It begins with our declaration of our worth, forgetting God's view of the world and yet, ironically, His foundation of love. But Baptism is not an end, but the very beginning of our life ... a life in the promise of God that has no end.

We begin funeral services with these words from Romans 6: "When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death. We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into

death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life."

Baptism is new life given in accordance with God's will. Our new life is driven by His unconditional love ... the One who is love before He laid the foundations of the world. In Baptism, we're given a ministry — our own ministry in the priesthood of believers. Our identity to the world is either based on the new life of our Holy Baptism in Christ; or it's based on the corrupt, sinful nature into

which we were born.

At His baptism: "Jesus said, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And, a voice from heaven said, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.'"

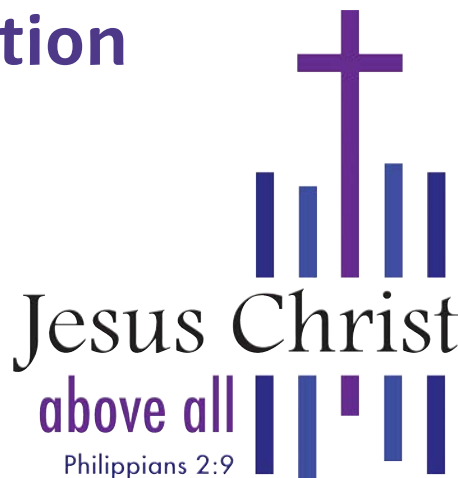
Since Christ was righteous in Himself, we're certain — because He repeats the command for Baptism at His glorious Ascension — that Jesus meant His Baptism for our righteousness. Joining those two passages together makes us certain the evidence of the Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is present in the mystery of Holy Baptism for our sake. We're completely certain that Christ takes on the responsibility and requirements under God's Law to fulfill them perfectly for our sake. We're completely certain that, following the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, our shattered and imperfect natural image is restored, renewed and made alive strictly through the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is just one of the many mysteries of the Incarnation of Christ. The divine nature of God took on our human image, to suffer and die in our place and rise to life in flesh so that we may be made anew in the image of God's own Son, Jesus Christ — the manifestation of God's love for us.

# LWML 37th Biennial Convention

**Join us** in Albuquerque, N.M., June 22-25  
**Register** by March 14 and save \$20

(Forms are available in the Winter 2016 issue of *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* magazine, or register at [lwml.org/2017-convention](http://lwml.org/2017-convention))



**Theme**

Jesus Christ Above All

**Scripture Verse**

"Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name." Phil. 2:9

**Convention Goal**

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, I will proclaim Jesus Christ above all

**Convention Objectives**

Each convention attendee will be:

- ▶ Encouraged through worship and Bible study.

- ▶ Equipped to share His message of salvation.
- ▶ Engaged in celebrating God's faithfulness while serving the Lord with gladness.



## is "Invite a Friend" month

**By Julie Keck**

Media/Marketing  
LWML Mid-South District

I teach kids in a Monday night Bible class. Every February, we have an "Invite A Friend" month to put some fresh excitement in the program during the dreary winter days. Each child is encouraged to ask God to show them a friend from their neighborhood or school that they can invite to class.

In John 1:43-46, there is a perfect example of someone inviting a friend

to meet Jesus as Philip invites skeptical Nathanael to "come and see."

By now I imagine your church's women's group has the whole year planned out. You too can invite a friend to "come and see." Ask God to show you that one woman who is new or lonely or needs a mentor. There must be someone who can be given a personal invitation (along with a willingness to pick them up!) to come to your next month's meeting or event. True, announcements are put in the church newsletter and Sunday bulletin, but a friendly personal invitation works so much better.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." **John 15:13 NIV**

Jesus did just that when He died on the cross for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life. Now, more than likely, you won't be asked to lay down your life for someone, but you certainly can invite someone to your next women's gathering.

God blessings!

### Congregation mission commitment receipts as of Nov. 30, 2016 (11 months)

Anticipated amount (83.33% of budget)	\$1,522,602
Actual receipts	1,413,920
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$108,682)

#### Use of mission commitment receipts (11 months)

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$401,259
Allocated to Tanzania	22,917
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	989,744
<b>Total receipts</b>	<b>\$1,413,920</b>

#### Mission commitment receipts comparison (11 months)

Actual receipts as of Nov. 30, 2016	\$1,413,920
Actual receipts as of Nov. 30, 2015	\$1,508,202
Over (under) prior year receipts	(\$94,282)

## Evidence of early church exists still today



By Rev. Robert Portier  
Pastor, St. Paul, Sevierville, Tenn.

### “All roads lead to Rome.”

In my wife’s home town of Fussen, Germany, is evidence of this interesting little phrase. The 700-plus-year-old town has a historic marker on one of its many beautiful walking trails that displays evidence of a Roman road that once passed on that location.

By the time Christ came to redeem the world, Rome had built more than 53,000 miles of roads around their empire, which promoted trade and communication throughout the entire Mediterranean and up into the British Isles.

God’s timing was perfect for Christ to come — a time when His great Gospel could travel 53,000 miles of newly constructed roads to carry His light into a dark and dying world.

Let’s look at some great examples of this early church growth.

### Antioch

In America we have six places called Antioch. There are also six places called Antioch in Asia. Of the 19 times Antioch is mentioned in Scripture, however, most are in Acts and most have to do with the work of Paul and Barnabas during the former’s first missionary journey, starting what became one of the earliest

### The remains of the forum (main square) of the ancient town of Philippi, Greece.

and largest Christian communities in the early Church.

This town — which today is called Antakya in southern Turkey, on the Orontes River with a population of about 200,000 — was a major Roman crossroad connecting many peoples, roads, a river and the Mediterranean.

Antioch was a main center of early Christianity. The city had a large population of those with Jewish origin in a quarter called the Kerateion, attracting early missionaries evangelized, among others, by Peter himself, according to the tradition upon which the Antiochene patriarchate still rests its claim for primacy.

About 2,000 years ago, converts here were the first to be called Christians. John Chrysostom, an early church father, estimated the population at about 100,000 people. Between 252 and 300 A.D., 10 assemblies of the church were held at Antioch and it became the seat of one of the four original patriarchates, along with Jerusalem, Alexandria and Rome.

The city grew slowly over the last 2,000 years because it sat on the border between Christianity and Islam for many centuries, not to mention being in and out of the hands of Crusaders.

Because of its rich history, however, it also is a treasure trove of archaeological evidence which affirms its place in the history of the early Christian Church.

### Philippi

Located on the Roman road Via Egnatia, this is the place where the Gospel was first preached on the European continent.

This was also a prominent seat of early Christianity, where today you can still see ancient ruins of the Egnatian way, the Roman Forum, possible locations of Paul’s imprisonment and where he met Lydia, who was one of the first converts to the Gospel Paul was preaching.

### Thessalonica

If you continue another 115 miles southeast on the major east-west corridor of Via Egnatia, you will come to the second largest city in Greece today, Solonika.

Much of ancient Thessalonica lies beneath this modern city. However, the ruins of a number of early-church buildings and other Roman and Christian artifacts affirm this as the same place Paul was expelled for preaching the Gospel and it is the same location where He sent letters that are now part of God’s Holy Word.

### The 7 Churches of Revelation

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea are not fictitious places dreamed up by John. They are real places, four of which have been extensively excavated.

These are now all modern towns or cities with names like Anatolia, Izmir, Akisar, Sart and Alasehir, while the centers of Pergamum and Laodicea are not covered by modern towns.

These churches also show that there is nothing new under the sun, namely, they have the same problems these early congregations had 2,000 years ago — false apostles, false prophets, false teaching, no fruits of faith and being worldly, spiritually poor and blind to the needs of those around them. Sounds sadly like many groups that call themselves the Church today.



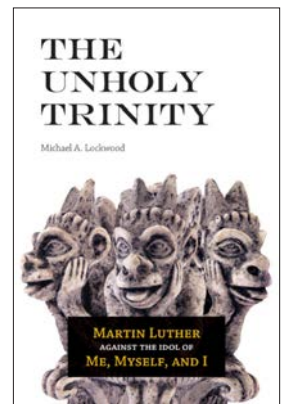
## A growing family of faith

On Sunday, Dec. 11, GracePoint Church, Munford, Tenn., welcomed 26 new members to the congregation.

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE

## Unmasking idol worship

We are all too familiar with the same old human pitfall: we rush after the desires of our hearts and worship ourselves instead of Jesus Christ. And yet, the dangers of inward idolatry are a neglected topic.



Drawing upon Martin Luther's key insights on the theology of idolatry, "The Unholy Trinity: Martin Luther Against the Idol of Me Myself, and I" by the Rev. Dr. Michael Lockwood un-masks contemporary idol worship and its futility. Luther's unparalleled ability to get to the heart of human sin helps us see through the lie of self-sufficiency. Only when walls of man-made security are broken down can we hear the Gospel as Good News — by grace, God gives us every good thing we vainly try to provide for ourselves.

"Saint Augustine spoke of idolatry as worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped," notes Mark P. Ryan, adjunct professor of Religion and Culture at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, and director of the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute. "John Calvin spoke of the human mind as a perpetual forge of idols, daring to imagine a god suited to its own capacity. And now we have mighty Luther, who shares the stance of Augustine and Calvin, but whose many statements on idolatry have never before been gathered together or considered in such a substantial, accessible, and pastorally fruitful manner."

To purchase the book, go to [cph.org/unholytrinity](http://cph.org/unholytrinity) or call customer service at 1-800-325-3040.



## New pastor in Fairfield Bay

The Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola (left), Mid-South District president, installed the Rev. Peter Ave-Lallemant as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Fairfield Bay, Ark., on Dec. 4. The members of Faith feel blessed to benefit from Ave-Lallemant's faithful service to the Lord's kingdom.

## Celebrating the birth of the Savior

Shannon Raines, a teacher and lover of modern organ music, provided debut accompaniment for nine traditional Christmas songs during a special Dec. 18 service at Faith, Union City, Tenn.

The Rev. David Lampman, Faith pastor, opened the service explaining that it was derived from a popular late 19th century English service that combined a choir and pipe organ, and was designed in 1878 to glorify the coming of the Messiah to mankind.

Raines provided the pipe organ, while the congregation provided the chorus. Raines' gifted performance was praised by retired organist Barbara Behnke, who said: "Shannon is a natural on the organ. Her timing, especially before and after the sung music, is professional level."

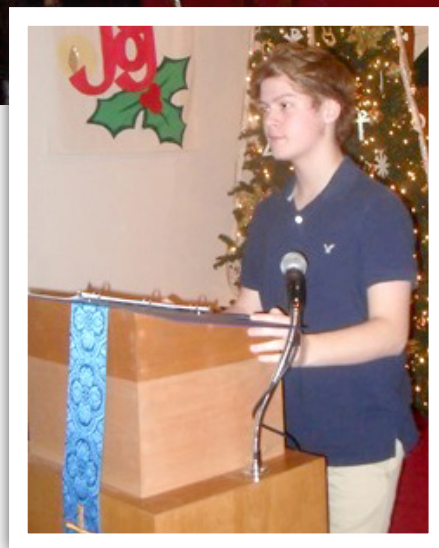
Worshipers sang conventional Christmas songs, beginning with "O Come, All Ye Faithful," through the final favorite, "Stille Nacht" (sung in English), with Scripture lessons delivered between each song.



▲ Organist Shannon Raines, a Union City, Tenn., native, provided electric keyboard tempo for joyous Christmas carols.

Parker McGowan read from  
the book of Isaiah. ▶

Faith youth-group members Parker McGowan and Jace Richardson read selections from Genesis through the New Testament book of John, reminding listeners how the Word of God became flesh in the tiny, little-known town of Bethlehem, in Roman Judea.



## Answered prayer

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;

I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things;

I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;

I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;

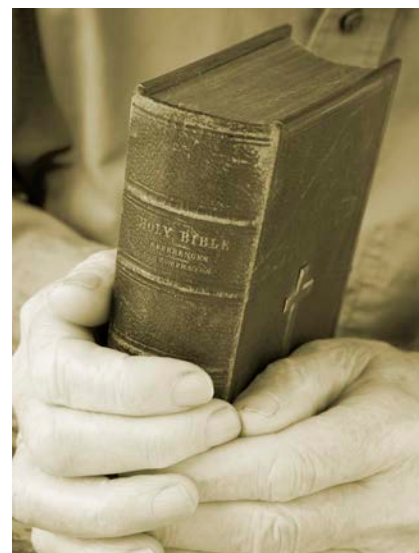
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I am, among men, most richly blessed.

*Found in the pocket of a Confederate soldier after the Civil War, 1865*





# Arts Camp to debut this summer

**By David Cox**  
 Director, Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean

Young campers could find themselves painting, writing short stories, learning guitar chords, making pottery, playing drums, journaling, sculpting or composing music at **Arts Camp**, the newest summer session planned for the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean.

The camp is being organized in cooperation with the Little Rock School of the Arts, a ministry of Christ Little Rock. Logan Brown, director of the School of the Arts and youth minister at Christ, is working with the Lutheran Camp to develop the program.

For students in elementary through junior high school, Arts Camp will allow them to explore their creative nature. The art sessions will be divided into three broad areas: visual arts, performing arts and literary arts.



Bible studies will focus on the Creator who made us in His image. Campers will discover how they reflect God's image when they create.

Campers will also take part in the traditional camp activities of swimming, hiking, large-group games and campfires with messages pointing to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Parents can register or learn more about Arts Camp at the Lutheran Camp website, [lutherancamp.org](http://lutherancamp.org). Parents can also contact the camp ([director@lutherancamp.org](mailto:director@lutherancamp.org) or 501-652-6304) or Little Rock School of the Arts (501-663-5232) for more information.

The summer schedule also includes other sessions added in the last two years. This will be the third year for **Voyagers Adventure Camp**, a session that takes high school students and new graduates off site for a river float trip, tent camping and rock climbing

Petit Jean campers express themselves creatively and learn how their creativity expresses God's image.

or rappelling. Campers will also explore God's Word in search of answers to difficult questions. This session is limited to the first 16 applicants.

**Family Camp**, new in 2016, is also on the schedule. This two-night session allows children not yet old enough for regular sessions to get a taste of camp with their parents, grandparents and older siblings.

Traditional sessions also remain on the schedule. Sessions are divided by grades, starting with students entering second grade. The schedule, prices, online registration and other details are on the camp website.

The Lutheran Camp is also looking for high school students who want to serve God by serving others as counselors-in-training.

Though still small relative to most LCMS camps around the country, the Lutheran Camp on Petit Jean has seen significant growth in recent years, with 2016 camp registrations up 75 percent from 2013. The camp has seen comparable growth in the overall number of camp users throughout the year for retreats, reunions and other events, reaching 2,000 campers and guests in 2016.

## Growing old, staying young

*by an anonymous 89-year-old*

- > Applaud others' successes
- > Exercise daily
- > Maintain a positive attitude
- > Read widely and often
- > Play with children
- > Enjoy nature
- > Laugh heartily
- > Take a class
- > Plant a garden
- > Take risks
- > Get a pet
- > Eat healthy
- > Sing from your heart
- > Give generously to others
- > Count your blessings...
- > ...and thank God often for them

## CELEBRATIONS

# Three times the blessings

By Rev. David R. Appold

Associate Pastor, St. Paul, Paducah, Ky.

On Sunday, Nov. 27, we had the joy of welcoming three new additions into our congregation at St. Paul, Paducah, Ky., through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. God has blessed these three families with the gift of children and has now brought them into His family of faith.

It is a wonderful joy to see the Church grow in this way. Praise the Lord who gives the gift of birth and the new birth from above! May He continue to bless these families and these children with His grace.



Moms and baptized babies are, from left, Janel (Chuck) and James Grant Tate, Elizabeth (David) and Margaret Elizabeth Appold and Katie (Jason) and Oliver Holmes Anderson.



Three infants share the blessing of Baptism: Rev. Appold administers the Sacrament to Oliver Holmes Anderson while James Grant Tate (far left) and Margaret Elizabeth Appold (the pastor's daughter) observe.

## ANNIVERSARIES *(50 or more years)*

- **Alex and Frankie Berlanga**, Faith, Hot Springs Village, Ark, celebrated 50 years of marriage on Dec. 10.
- **Richard and Carol Mawhinney**, Faith, Hot Springs Village, Ark., celebrated 55 years of marriage on Dec. 29.

## Deadline for the April issue is Feb. 15



Digital files, sent via email, are preferred. Email submissions to [lw@mid-southlcms.com](mailto:lw@mid-southlcms.com), or mail via U.S. Postal Service to:

Judy Otto  
150 N. Maury St.  
Holly Springs, MS 38635

Our submission deadline is the 15th of each month, two months before publication.

# Miracles

*A poem of praise for the year*

Have you listened to a robin telling  
Spring's eternal story  
While all Nature wakes from slumber,  
bursting forth in timeless glory?  
Have you watched the stars a-twinkling,  
jewels gleaming in the sky  
As they shine through night's dark cover,  
and a patient moon hangs high?

Have you seen the saffron orange,  
golden yellow, and bright red,  
As the trees, all dressed for autumn,  
flaunt their colors overhead?  
Have you heard the crunch of new  
snow underfoot, when all is still;  
Felt the crisp, cold air bring shivers,  
painting cheeks with Winter's chill?

Seasons pass by, oh, so quickly as the  
months turn into years,  
And our old friends seem much dear-



er, sharing laughter, sharing tears.  
It's good to find a quiet time somewhere  
in a busy day;  
A time for rest, for tranquil thoughts,  
a peaceful time to pray:  
Reflecting on the wonders, Daily  
challenges and strife,  
Thanking God for all his blessings,  
and the miracle of life.

*Author unknown*