



The Weekly Parish Paper

Springs of Grace Lutheran Church



SPECIAL EDITION

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2006

O Holy Night'

"So where do you think we will be going to church next month?" That became a common inquiry from my husband. We had moved to this mid-Atlantic hinterland and found ourselves in search of a new church. This mission was compounded by the fact that we knew no one. Weekly, we checked out a different church to find the perfect place to worship.

After months, we found the perfect place (or so we thought). It was close to home, had a great children's program, and seemed to have an appropriate amount of young, growing families. I spoke with the greeter and found out who to call. The next day, Monday, I did just that.

"Hello, may I speak with Reverend Coleman?...Oh, well is there a better time to reach him? My family and I have been relocated to this area, and we really like your church and your congregation and would like the appropriate paperwork to formally join."

The receptionist, who had been taking Reverend Coleman's calls, told me that we could not join the church because too many families were enrolled. A new congregation was forming, however. "Perhaps you could speak with someone there," she said.

I was to call a man whom I did not know, at a place that did not exist, for a congregation that was only being formed...somewhere.

"Okay, we will go back to the church one more time, and maybe we can find out where this new group meets," I told my husband and children. They were agreeable, mainly because we always went to breakfast after church. The draw was not the worship but the fellowship and the feast afterward. At the next Sunday mass, the homily was actually given by the new leader of the scattered

flock of people. Thus, we now had a contact; her name was Mary Lou. I called her the next day.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" she said. "We would love to have you join our congregation. May I stop over and introduce myself and bring the paperwork for you and your family? We are still looking for a permanent place to have

our weekly church gatherings, but we are delighted that you will be joining us." Mary Lou chattered on for a while longer, and I knew we were going in the right direction, although I was not sure where.

"Mommy, I thought we were going to church," Jay questioned the following Sunday as we pulled into the parking lot of a movie theater.

"We are, sweetheart," I answered, as his daddy parked the car. Jason's eyes lit up, and he was not about to let this drop, thinking one or both of his parents had lost their minds. "Why are we here if we are supposed to be going to church?"

"The church is not a church yet, and we do not have anywhere else to go, so we are going to the movie theater," I explained. None of us really cared where we went after a few weeks, especially because on these days we began going to the movies after church, which took the place of breakfast. Pop and popcorn began to substitute for ham and eggs.

As the summer wore into autumn, and the leaves began to drop from the trees, the congregation continued to grow and the accommodations in the movie theater became too small. It was time to move on again, and the new location was, again, due to the generosity of a community member. This time we were shuffled to an old, gray barn. It was not much to look at, but it served the purpose -- and our active, hard-working, and still-growing community gathered at this rustic spot, now filled with folding chairs.



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It took a long time to get wiring into this dimly lit structure to supply us with light, heat, and a microphone. Reverend Appleby fortunately had a sense of humor and a booming voice. However, as October transitioned into November, and Thanksgiving ushered in Advent, our necessity for heavy coats during church became more apparent.

"Jim, make sure the kids have their gloves this morning," I said. "It is really cold. I know we should expect December weather, but the wind seems brutal today."

"Check. We have gloves and hats, and I grabbed a blanket, just in case we need it. We can wrap these little monkeys up; they'll stay warm for the hour."

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The cold weather brought preparation but still no permanent church. December wore on and Christmas Eve appeared in a flash.

Again, we had the checklist before church. "Honey, let's keep the kids extra warm. It may snow tonight. Can you help me get Katie's boots on?"

Robby, our second child, mumbled, "Mommy, do we have to go? It's too cold."

"Yes, honey, we do. It is Christmas Eve, and if we have time to wait for Santa, we have time to go to church and remember Jesus' birthday."

So we packed up the children and drove to the barn. "This is an exceptionally blustery night," I remarked. "It is a good thing that Daddy remembered the blanket, isn't it?"

"Yes!" the three children yelled in unison. Dusk slipped into darkness as we parked along the old country road and trudged along to the barn, children in tow, wrapped up so much that they could barely walk. We entered our familiar "church."

The old, gray barn was no longer just an old, gray barn. It had been transformed into a nativity scene -- a real one, with a real manger and real sheep and a cow and a donkey. Hay was everywhere. The eyes of the children were filled with sheer wonder. Amid the animals were people. The woman wore a blue robe, and the man was in old, brown sackcloth tied with a rope. He held a staff, and she held an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes. They were not just people; they were the Holy Family. They

were surrounded by shepherds tending the flock. I don't remember what the music was, if there was any. Nor do I remember what the homily was, if one was given. I don't even know if we stayed warm enough. I do remember being in the presence of the true spirit of Christmas. It was magnificent.

That Christmas Eve celebration could have lasted forever. We finally left the barn to find that snow was lightly falling and the stars were announcing the birth of Jesus. We all felt a silent joy at the miraculous event we had been witness to. Eventually, we did find a church to call our own. But nothing ever came close to that Christmas Eve of wonder, with Jesus in the old, gray barn.

--- By Elizabeth Toole

Taken from <http://christmas.howstuffworks.com>



In the works – we are planning our **Growing God's Mission** event for January 14th. This exciting Sunday afternoon event will give us all a chance to help build our new mission for Springs of Grace in the Boiling Springs community. A catered dinner is included so please plan to attend!

Our Mission - Inviting all to gather and grow in service to Christ

We will be accepting members at our next **New Member Service** on February 4, 2007. Please see any member of Council if you are interesting in joining.

Our **Altar Flowers** today are given to the Glory of God by Doris Giese.

"How many observe Christ's birthday! How few, his precepts! O! 'tis easier to keep Holidays than Commandments." — *Benjamin Franklin*