

Praise the Lord!

By Eddie Simon

"Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!" (Psalm 47). Christmas is coming; it is a time of great rejoicing. It is the time we celebrate the birth of our King, Jesus. He is no less than the manifest love of God the Father. Jesus came into our broken world that it might be made whole. The world is broken in many ways and the restoration is accomplished in the manifold miracles that Christmas is. God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. We are made in the image of God. We are made in love. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "A human being without love is a being incomprehensible to himself, he is a being whose life makes no sense." This is why Jesus is the key to understanding our world and ourselves. In this sense Christmas is the door that Jesus (the key) opens to wholeness for a broken world.

My own childhood memories of Christmas are full of wonder and good things. The excited anticipation of gifts I might receive fostered a hope of good things. Making special cookies at the kitchen table taught me to laugh and love with my family. The mystery of the star that appeared that night so long ago over Bethlehem prompted a longing to know more about the wonderous providence of God. Sometimes I would sit and look at the manger scene we had when I was a young boy. I would touch the little figurines, maybe reposition an animal or an angel. For a few brief moments I would be there at the manger in the imaginary way of a child. My life, like that of many children, was more imaginary than real. I didn't realize then how broken the world really was. I was truly blessed to have had the childhood I did.

Now I live in a very different world. More accurately I should say that I live in the same world with a different awareness. It is no secret that the neighborhood that St. Luke's Mission of Mercy is located in is a broken neighborhood. It is like a microcosm of the world in many ways. There is pain, there is fear, there is loneliness, and all the conditions that have plagued mankind since the fall from grace. Many of the people who live here didn't grow up in the kind of happy, loving home that I did. They never made Christmas cookies with mom and dad and their brothers and sisters. Many of them have never had the experience of playing with a manger scene and with the imagination of a child being transported to that little place where the baby Jesus entered the world so long ago.

Even though I had all these blessings as a child I still somehow became quite lost when I got older. I suspect that I'm not so alone in this experience. I remained quite lost until that joy-filled day when "Christmas" happened for me. Oh, it wasn't in December but it was Christmas for sure. It was Christmas because Jesus came into my broken world to make it whole. It's what he did for the world two thousand years ago and it's what He continues to do everyday for all who come to Him. This year at Christmas, at this most special time of the coming of our King, don't miss your blessing. If HE is really your King, then follow Him. He gave us a new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you." He told us this because it is the way our broken world can be made whole. It is the way because God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him.

At St. Luke's Mission of Mercy we're here to do just that. We're here to follow our King and we'd love nothing more than to have you join us. It may be that it's your own neighborhood that's broken; it may be that it's your own home that's broken, or it may be just your own heart that is broken. Whatever it is, follow your King and bring the love of God into it and witness the true miracle of Christmas begin to happen. When you do this, don't be surprised if you find yourself singing, "Praise to the King!" Praise the Lord!

Eddie Simon's book, "Mercy Triumphs over Judgement", is a captivating spiritual journey through the first decade of ministry at St. Luke's, and is available at a Catholic book store near you or by calling St. Luke's at 894-4476.



**Norbert
Bentkowski**
"Norb!"

Norb Bentkowski, a WNY native, has been a missionary for a very, very long time! He has had his hand in many of our ministries. Before St. Luke's Norb has appeared in many feature films in small parts, and has a great love for the cinema of yesteryear! Norb is most comfortable in the background, serving in the kitchen and doing those tasks that need to be done to keep the mission running day to day. But don't let his reserved manner fool you! In his holy heart is a true son of God.

For many years Norb has been housemate to some of our most challenging residents, offering guidance and supervision. Recently he has begun a new chapter in his ministry. Read his reflection on this important change:

"As I reflect on my ministry there is a new dawn, a better dawn ahead as I leave my present home for a new place. As I have a chance to reflect on the old challenges I set them aside and consider them learning experiences, a spiritual "growing up". If you don't water a plant, it will not grow. In dealing with people who are not always nice to me, I have been "watered", and have grown stronger. To take the good and the bad and to remain kind and loving was my challenge, and it was all worth it. Through it all I am still able to love."



All I want for Christmas is...

Would you consider a donation of an over-the-counter, unopened cold and flu medication this "sneezin' season"? As the cold sets in so do the wheezes, the sneezes, the fevers and the coughs. Your donation keeps folks out of the emergency rooms and keeps us at work and school! Check the website for a list of medications needed under the heading "Our Lady of Good Remedy Health Services". God bless you, and thanks for the gift of health!
www.stlukesmissionofmercy.org

