

5B

## RELIGION

Emancipation service planned

Rev. William Jones, former head of Progressive National Baptist Convention to speak Jan. 3 at First Baptist-West. See Church News, page 6B.

Sunday  
School  
LESSON

## The Message of Christmas

Who doesn't like Christmas? As the song says, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" The festive decorations, the music, the anticipation and excitement — these all combine to make our hearts light and our attitudes cheerful, unless we're trying to find a parking place at the mall!

Of course, we who know Christ ought to display more of this joy all through the year. It is not only at Christmas that Jesus lives in our hearts. But it may be only at Christmas that some of our neighbors will listen to us tell of him. This lesson will help your students to present a clear picture of the one who came so "that we might live through him!"

Someone has said: "The message of Easter is, 'Think of Heaven,' the message of Thanksgiving is, 'Think of your blessings,' the message of New Year's Day is, 'Think of the passing of time,' but the message of Christmas is, 'Think of Others.'" As God was thinking of us when he sent Jesus, all who have the true Christmas spirit think in terms of others.

Mary and Joseph were neighbors in the village of Nazareth in Galilee. They were both descendants of King David. Joseph's genealogy from Abraham is recorded in Matthew 1:2-16. Luke 3:23-38 records Mary's genealogy back to Adam — though we must understand the last clause of verse 23 as "son-in-law" of Heli.) Joseph and Mary were engaged, which was a binding agreement. Mad/ possibly a year before the actual wedding, the engagement was as binding as the actual marriage vows. Dissolving this agreement required a legal divorce.

Sometime before the time of our text, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the coming virgin birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). He also told her of the miraculous pregnancy of her relative Elizabeth, who was to bear John the Baptist. Mary hastily left on a trip to visit Elizabeth, who lived in the hill country of Judea He Jerusalem, some seventy miles away.

Somehow, Joseph became aware of Mary's condition. We do not know how he came to this knowledge, perhaps her condition was evident by the time she resumed from Elizabeth's home. Maybe Mary told him of the angel's visit. If so, I evidently did not believe her story.

We can imagine his feeling — of shock, of disappointment, of sorrow. But he did love Mary, so he determined to save her embarrassment and punishment be fore a court. He would make the separation as private as possible. Our printed text begins at this point in Joseph's considerations.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a

After a study of this lesson the student ought to be able to:

1. Tell how the life of Jesus demonstrates God's love to us.
2. Explain how the Christian's life can also be a demonstration of God's love.
3. Plan some deliberate expression of God's love to be added to one's traditional celebration of Christmas.

For those who live in North America or Europe or anywhere else in the northern hemisphere, Christmas is only a few days removed from the shortest day of the year (Dec. 21). But for those who live in the southern hemisphere, in Australia, m New Zealand, and in South America, Dec. 21 is the longest day of the year. Since Christmas is always associated with lights, it seems to them appropriate that it should be celebrated when there is the most light of the whole year. They do not have to depend on artificial lights. For them the day is never brighter, the sun never shines longer, than at the season of celebrating Christ's birth.

## Church of Christ holds ties to La Amistad

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — Members of the United Church of Christ don't need to see Steven Spielberg's movie to learn the story of the slave ship La Amistad.

Oil paintings of kidnapped Africans' struggle to win their freedom hang on the walls of a conference room at the Cleveland-based denomination.

That's because a missionary group that sprang from the

## Missionary group which formed from Amistad case still exists within United Church of Christ

Amistad case is still around today as part of the 1.5-million member UCC. The church held a news conference Monday to note its Amistad connection.

"Although the issues today extend beyond race, the bottom line remains ironically the same," said the Rev. Thomas Dipko. "If we say we love God and do not

love our neighbors as ourselves, as equals, all of them, then injustice triumphs."

The Amistad story began in 1839 when Africans on a Spanish slave ship off the coast of Cuba rebelled and took control of the vessel.

The slaves' leader, Joseph Cinque, ordered the remaining

members of the crew to steer the ship east toward Africa. Instead, the Spaniards hugged the American coast and were eventually captured off Long Island, N.Y.

After a legal battle that climaxed with arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Africans won passage back to their homeland.

Abolitionist New Englanders formed a group called the Amistad Committee to help the

Africans get home. After the fight was won, the committee helped form the American Missionary Association, which opened schools for blacks, Indians and other groups that suffered from discrimination.

The original association is now part of the United Church of Christ of Homeland Ministries, which still performs social justice work today, said Dipko, its executive vice president.

## A century of service



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Rev. Walter Howard greets new parishioners during recent 100th anniversary celebration at Greater Bethel AME Church, 201 Grandin Road in Charlotte. Howard was assigned to the church last month, replacing Rev. Conrad Pridgen, who has been assigned to the Bethel AME Church in Greensboro.

## Seminary opens Florida campus

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WILMORE, Ky. — Saying it is reaching enrollment capacity at its central Kentucky campus, Asbury Theological Seminary will open an extension campus in Florida which could begin offering classes as early as the fall of 1999.

Asbury seminary, which marks its 75th anniversary next year as a separate institution from Asbury College, has nearly reached its capacity of 1,200 students.

"We're simply responding to a need. Our enrollment has gone up

over 60 percent in that last six years," said Robert Bridges, vice president for seminary advancement.

Asbury officials think spending money to start a new campus in Orlando would be wiser than to embark on an expensive expansion program in Wilmore.

The Wilmore seminary and Orlando site will operate as one school with one president. School officials say relatively inexpensive air fares to Orlando could be helpful to potential commuter students who are entering the min-

istry as a second career.

The Orlando campus may offer courses that would last several weeks rather than several months, Bridges said.

That way, "A person in Charlotte, N.C., may be able to keep their present job, keep their family in North Carolina, and commute to take courses in Orlando, and it will be cheaper than uprooting their family and moving someplace and going to school," Bridges said.

Bridges, a Florida native, and other Asbury administrators and

board members looked closely at the experience of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss., which put an extension campus in Orlando in 1989.

Reformed's Orlando enrollment is now 700 students, 100 more than the parent campus in Jackson, said Lyn Perez, executive vice president at Orlando.

Reformed also opened a third campus in Charlotte in 1992. It has 300 students.

Perez said seminaries, like col-

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## Spirited Full Gospel groups thriving

The Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — The Rev. Tyrone Lister swayed behind the pulpit as an organist played a rhythmic gospel song. Then he began to clap his hands with the beat and dance, urging others to join in.

"I could have danced, danced, danced all night," the black-suited minister from Lewisville chanted as congregation mem-

bers jumped to their feet, clapping and moving to the music.

That spirited style of worship is the trademark of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship, which has burst onto the American religious scene in the past three years and already has ties with about 3,000 congregations.

Lister was master of ceremonies recently when the Rev.

James Brown of Fort Worth was installed as new district overseer of the fellowship. There were formal moments during the installation, but people also shouted and prayed, and one young man began vigorously jerking and jumping as he danced between pews.

Fellowship members pray, shout, jump, dance and run in the church as the spirit moves

them.

"It has brought excitement to our churches," said Brown, pastor of the New Hope Christian Center in the Woodhaven section of Fort Worth, who was a traditional Baptist until he received what many refer to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The fellowship blends traditional Baptist beliefs such as "once saved, always saved" and a strict reliance on the Bible.

## Court refuses to hear religious bias case

By Laurie Asseo  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court refused last week to revive a workplace-bias lawsuit by a Massachusetts woman who says her boss demoted her because she refused to attend a religious seminar.

The court, without comment, turned away the woman's argument that she should have the right to refuse to attend the seminar even if it did not conflict with her own religious beliefs.

Ruth V. Kolodziej of Springfield, Mass., was hired in 1987 as a management-level employee of Electro-Term, a self-described "Christian company" that manufactures and sells electrical connectors.

The company's president, Warren Smith, required management-level workers to attend a week-long seminar each year on resolving conflicts and responding to authority. The seminar was non-denominational, but its workbook included about 1,000

references to Bible verses participants were urged to study.

Kolodziej, a Roman Catholic, began attending the seminar but she objected to a section that portrayed God's "plan" for the family with God on the top, man below God and woman below man.

Kolodziej refused to finish the seminar, and Smith demoted her to a non-management job. She quit and sued, saying the requirement to attend the seminar amounted to religious discrimination in violation of a federal law,

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

A jury ruled that Kolodziej had been required to attend a devotional service, but that the seminar did not conflict with her religious beliefs. As a result, a verdict was entered for Smith.

Kolodziej appealed, but the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled against her last July. To prove discrimination, the state court said, she must show she was punished for refusing to comply with a requirement that conflicted with her religious views.

NBC  
can't pay  
mortgageAsks members for  
two dollars each

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The nation's largest black church, hurt by investigations into its president's finances, needs \$371,000 to make a mortgage payment on its headquarters.

The Rev. Henry J. Lyons told a conference of educators Wednesday night that the denomination needs to raise a total of \$1 million to pay bills and help its struggling college in Nashville.

The embattled president of the National Baptist Convention USA received a polite reception at his first public appearance in Nashville since accounts of his lavish lifestyle and ambitious business deals surfaced last summer.

He did not comment directly about allegations against him but asked church members for their prayers. In a news conference last week, he apologized for "serious mistakes in judgment" but vowed to complete his term.

His supporters told the crowd that Lyons needs their support. "I don't care if Mickey Mouse is president, that note's coming due," said John Rouse, who heads the convention's Sunday School Publishing Board.

In addition to paying the mortgage on the \$12 million World Baptist Center in Nashville, Lyons said the church needs to replace a crumbling dormitory at the city's American Baptist College, where the predominantly black denomination trains pastors and church leaders.

"We do the best we can with what you give us," he said.

Authorities are investigating allegations that Lyons, 55, misused church funds and bought costly cars, clothes and jewelry as gifts for several women other than his wife.

He also is accused of diverting money intended for the restoration of Southern churches damaged by arson to other convention expenses and accepting \$350,000 in secret payments from Nigeria's military rulers.

A federal grand jury took testimony related to Lyons' finances from three witnesses Thursday in Tampa.

The Rev. Roscoe Cooper of Richmond, Va., convention general chairman, refused comment after spending about two hours before the panel.

Cooper signs authorization papers for convention business and has said his name was forged on four documents. His attorney, Anthony LaSpada, said his client is not a target of the probe.

Investigators have asked the convention to turn over "all financial records" for the past several years, everything from bank statements to check stubs.



Lyons