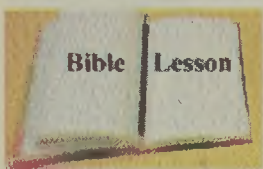


8B

RELIGION



Jesus:
God with us
Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" which means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Study Questions

1. Cite several ways in which Mary and Joseph demonstrated faith in trusting and obeying God.
2. Tell how believers can show trust in God as they make decisions about difficult life situations.
3. Make a commitment to take a risk in being obedient to the Lord.

Separating Christmas meaning from fantasies



ILLUSTRATION/TRINA MONTGOMERY-ARDREY



It's the holiday season. Unlike Bing Crosby, I'm not dreaming of a white Christmas.

My dream consists of a collection of believers that remember, honor and share the real meaning of one of the holiest days of the year for Christians.

Last Saturday I was riding to Monroe Hospital to visit a sick cousin. I was riding down a back street in an unfamiliar area to avoid all of the holiday traffic on Highway 74. Once I got to a four-way crossing at Indian Trail I saw one of the most beautiful nativity scenes lit with white lights. As I sat at the stop light admiring the scene my admiration turned into disgust. Because just as I finished reading the words "Peace On Earth" I saw the multi-colored Santa Claus display right beside it. I have to be honest - it made my skin crawl.

I just don't understand why someone would feel that a

nativity scene and a Santa Claus scene should be mixed.

The representation of the nativity scene is a reminder of the physical birth of Jesus, The Christ who came into the world to redeem mankind. Santa Claus is a fable. It's no wonder why it's difficult for adults to believe the story about the birth of Christ. Once upon a time adults used to be children and more than likely they were probably lied to about Santa Claus and how he rewards all the children of the world with toys or coal depending on how good a child has been all year.

And if your family is anything like mine then as a child you would go to church and recite scriptures like "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son."

Yet the Santa Claus message was the one that continuously was pounded down my throat. So when I learned that the Santa Claus thing was a myth, it also made the birth of Jesus harder to digest.

In order to believe the wonderful birth of Jesus it requires faith. But it's hard to put faith in the words of individuals who have lied to you for years about some fat

Please see **SEPARATING/7B**

Singer rants against abusive priests

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY - Grammy-winning singer Lauryn Hill launched into an unscheduled tirade against priests who abuse children during a Christmas concert at the Vatican attended by top clergymen, news reports said Sunday.

Hill read a lengthy statement criticizing the church and its leaders during the Saturday night concert, where she was one of the featured performers in an annual Christmas benefit to raise money for Roman churches.

Several Italian newspapers on Sunday ran translations of her rant, which was delivered in English. They quoted her as saying there was "no acceptable explanation for defending the church" and that the faithful should ask for blessings from God, not men.

"I realize some of you may be offended by what I'm saying, but what do you say to the families who were betrayed by the people in whom they believed," La Repubblica newspaper quoted her as saying. "And what do you say to those children who were violated in body and mind?"

She was referring to the church sex abuse crisis in the United States, in which the Roman Catholic Church has been rocked by accusations that top church officials knowingly moved known abusers from parish to parish.

Calls placed to Hill's label, Columbia Records, in New York were not returned Sunday.

Among the prelates in the audience Saturday night was Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the pope's vicar for Rome and the head of the Italian bishops' conference, as well as his deputy, Monsignor Rino Fisichella.

La Repubblica quoted Fisichella as saying Hill had betrayed the organizers of the concert by her "insults" and showed she had no respect for the organizers or the place where she was performing. He called her outburst an act of inexplicable "bad manners."

The concert was held in the Vatican's Paul VI auditorium, where Pope John Paul II usually holds his Wednesday audiences. The pope was not in attendance.

The Vatican said Sunday it had no comment on Hill's outburst, and noted that the concert was organized by the Roman vicariate, not the Vatican. The Vatican merely let Ruini's office use the hall because of its size, a Vatican spokesman said.

Hill, a former member of the rap trio the Fugees, set a record for female artists in 1999 when she won five Grammy awards for "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill." Critics praised the album for its incisive lyrics and synthesis of rap and soul. The album sold 6 million copies and influenced a new school of soul singers.

Please see **CHURCH/5B**

Pastor, brother sentenced to prison in beating case

By Jim Vertuno
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN, Texas - A church pastor was sentenced to 26 years in prison Friday for severely beating a Bible studies student with a tree branch after the child misbehaved during a summer class.

The pastor's twin brother received a 14-year sentence for his role in the beating.

"Justice was served," prosecutor Beth Payan said.

Pastor Joshua Thompson, who ministered to the Spanish-speaking congregation at the fundamentalist Capitol City Baptist Church, was ordered to

serve 26 years for injury to a child and 20 years for aggravated assault of Louie Guerrero.

His twin brother, Caleb, 23, was sentenced to 14-year sentences on the same convictions.

All of the sentences will run concurrently. Both men will be eligible for parole after they serve half their sentences.

The Thompsons had asked for probation. They avoided life in prison.

Defense attorneys said they would appeal the convictions.

Carlos Garcia, one of Caleb Thompson's attorneys, said the sentences did not surprise him. He

worried about the Thompsons' safety in prison, fearing they will be targeted by other inmates because of their religious background and the nature of the crime.

"You never know what a jury is going to do," Garcia said. "It's a volatile subject matter. Was it justice? Only time will tell."

Prosecutors had said the brothers beat Guerrero, now 12, so badly on July 3, 2002, that he spent a week in intensive care under the threat of kidney failure and needed a blood transfusion.

Please see **BLACK TEENS/7B**

John P. Kee's 'Power' ranks with the best in fruitful career



John P. Kee
V.I.P. Music & Arts Seminar
The Power Of Worship
John P. Kee, producer
Tyscott Records



I'm still amazed that John P. Kee does not have a shelf full of Grammy awards. He's churned out a number of songs that have become staples in

Sunday morning worship services. "The Power of Worship" was released too late to be considered for a nomination for next year's Grammys, but that's OK, it's still worthy. It's the fifth in the Victory In Praise series and ranks with the best of them. Kee has the great ability to combine traditional gospel, worship and praise, contemporary and even some club. He writes it all and it always works together.

There are a few who may take exception to the dance remix of "Winner," but it's just one of those excuses for Kee to be silly. It's harmless, but would probably work better in a club than a sanctuary.

The rest of the CD would do well in

anyone's sanctuary. "I Believe I'll Praise," is as traditional as you can get. It's the kind of song that allows Kee to stay close to his humble upbringing. It's true ol' school church. "I Am Blessed" gives Kee the chance to sit at a keyboard and play. He's an accomplished pianist as well as singer. He's at his peak on both with this song. It's touching, moving, uplifting - all that you want from a gospel song.

Kee has a talented group of vocalist which he always lets share the spotlight. Shelia Lankin gives one of her classic heart wrenching performances on "The Blood." It's a classic Kee composition and Lankin feels the song. Shawn McLemore teams with

Kee on "The Righteousness." And of course there's New Life on the uplifting "Blessing Medley."

Kee continues to deliver the kind of gospel his listeners want. Let's see if the power that he will ever get the message.

Ratings

- Classic; ☆☆☆☆☆
- Excellent; ☆☆☆☆☆
- Good; ☆☆☆☆☆
- Fair; ☆☆☆☆☆
- Why? ☆☆☆☆☆
- No stars - A

CHURCH NEWS

The Diocese of Charlotte office for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development is accepting grant applications for the 2004-funding year. CCHD makes small grants from \$500 to \$5,000 to organizations without regard to religious affiliation. Applications must be

postmarked by Feb. 14, 2004. The CCHD Committee solicits programs and projects that:

1. Seek to affect the root causes of poverty in the target community;
2. Involve genuine participation of the people served in the planning and decision

making of the sponsoring organization

3. Indicate potential for institutional change, empowerment for the people and community involved, and the development of local leadership
4. Conform to Catholic Social Teaching

For an application, contact Terri Jarina, Diocesan Director, CCHD, and Office of Justice and Peace, 1123 South Church Street at 704-370-3234 or hit www.cssnc.org/justicepeace.

Pastor John P. Kee received his 7th Grammy nomination last week for his CD "Blessed

by Association." This same work has also received five Stellar Awards nominations.

December 19-20

A live nativity performance will be held at 6:30 pm and 8:30 pm at Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church at 8600 Potter Road, Weddington, NC.

December 20

The United Men and Women of Faith Seminars Ministry will host an afternoon and evening of Christian fellowship, worship, praise and fun. The event will be held at Joseph Grier Academy 7740 Grier Road at 3 pm.

Please see **CHURCH/5B**