

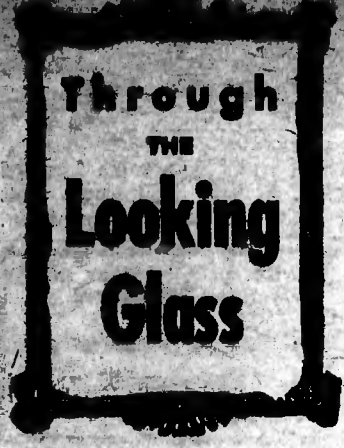
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All New Bernians agree that the Living Nativity presented each year by the Sara Kee class of Centenary Methodist church makes Christmas more meaningful for this town of ours.

Speaking as one of the characters—a not so wise Wise Man—the editor of The Mirror can testify that those who take part in the Manger Scene are as deeply impressed by the sacredness of the occasion as are those who see it from their vantage point on Middle street.

Remaining motionless for a 20-minute period isn't the easiest thing in the world to do, and it's doubly taxing if you're one of the two Wise Men who kneel. But, for that matter, the angels perched high above the tableau, where they bear the full brunt of chill winds, don't fair too well either.

For everyone, however, it is a labor of love, and you get an opportunity for worthwhile meditation under ideal surroundings as the minutes pass slowly by. Like everything else in life, the performers and the loyal workers behind the scene get a great deal out of the Living Nativity because they put something into it.

It all began seven years ago, while the Rev. John Russell was pastor at Centenary. He and his daughter, Mrs. Mildred Russell Duncan Smith, talked about the possibility of such a project, and became quite enthusiastic. Mildred discussed it with Jimmie Smith and his wife, Jane. And they agreed to present the suggestion to the Sara Kee Young Adult class.

There too, the idea caught on quickly. A delegation from the class, headed by Jimmie and Jane, who were picked to head the venture, visited a Presbyterian church in Wilmington, where a Living Nativity had been staged annually for a number of years.

The pastor's wife in Wilmington was very cooperative. She showed the costumes used by that church to the visiting Methodists, and gave them pointers on how to avoid pitfalls in planning and presenting the Living Nativity here. Fortunately, the local project had been planned early enough to organize a Nativity scene for that Christmas.

Everybody in the Sara Kee class pitched in, and got the job done. Mrs. Eugene Stowell made the costumes, Paul Cox, who was the assistant Craven county agent, arranged to get the animals for the manger, and others helped in many ways.

Mrs. Stowell and Cox still perform the duties first assigned to them, and Jimmie and Jane Smith still serve as co-chairmen. Although the Living Nativity is sponsored by the class that originated it, all members of the church cooperate.

There are 27 characters in the tableau, if you exclude the animals that add so much to the setting's authenticity. Performers are replaced at 20-minute intervals, one at a time, and these changes are made so inconspicuously that they detract nothing from the scene.

Presented, as New Bernians know, on the three nights prior to Christmas, the Living Nativity has been viewed by countless thousands. Year after year, the same people come back to see the opening chapter in the Greatest Story Ever Told. For them, Christmas wouldn't be complete if they failed to include it on their agenda for the Yuletide.

Those who present the Living Nativity have warm praise for the New Bern police department and city officials. "Everything possible has been done to help us," one of the performers says. "It's deeply gratifying to see so many citizens go out of their way to make our job easier and the results more



PEACE ON EARTH—Somehow, this placid market scene in our mother city of Berne typifies the serenity so desperately needed by mortals everywhere. If mankind, shackled by hates and fears, takes heed at last to the song the angels sang over Bethlehem, the goal of universal brotherhood may become, in truth, a glowing reality.

New Bern's World in Rhyme, For It Is Now Christmas Time

Near and far, to the ends of the earth,
The world is observing the Christ Child's birth;
Thrilling anew to the Christmas story
Of the manger-born King and the wondrous glory
That Bethlehem's star proclaimed in the sky,
While heavenly hosts sang carols on high.
No sweeter day has been given to man
Than Christmas, part of God's great plan;
In this grand old city, mid historic scenes,
May we pause and reflect on all that it means.
If God so loved us that He gave His Son,
A ransom for the sins of everyone,
How shall we value Christmas—count its worth?
Let's take care not to desecrate, As in our joy we celebrate
The anniversary of the Christ Child's birth.
Be merry, yes, and may all woes take wing,
But most of all proclaim the

new-born King.
The brilliance of even the rarest gem
Is dimmed by the star of Bethlehem;
And precious platinum or glittering gold
Can't challenge the halo that all behold.
With such treasure we're wonderfully blessed,
As we worship the Child at

Mary's breast;
A Holy Babe, Whose Heaven-sent charms
Found haven in a Virgin's arms.
Glory to God in the highest,
Again the angel song
Is echoing down thru the ages,
Its notes are clear and strong.
In this old town of ours, may we
Open our hearts and therein see
A star wondrous and so bright
That Time can never dim its

light.
Joy to the world, the Lord is come,
Let earth receive her King;
Let little children romp and play,
And song and laughter ring.
Let gratitude ascend new heights,
And selfishness depart;
And kindly thoughts, like candlelight,
Illuminate each heart.
New Bernians all, by sharing
Our blessings, me and you;
We'll find the Yuletide's happiness
In everything we do.
Sweetly pealing Christmas bells
Bring a message, each one tells
How a stable housed a new-born King;
Sleepy cattle, softly lowing,
Stood and watched a manger glowing;
And 'tis said they kneeled, a wondrous thing.
We hope here in New Bern, right where you are,
Your heart will be reached by Bethlehem's star;
And that, with faith and appreciation,
You too will kneel in adoration.
As our town observes the birthday
Of One called Prince of Peace,
Let's lift our hearts in fervent prayer
That wars and hates may cease.
Man's inhumanity to man
Must vanish from the earth,
And this deserves our serious thought
Amid our Christmas mirth.
For New Bern may the Yuletide bring
Blessings, large and small;
But a world where peace can reign supreme,
Pray for most of all.



Drive safely

satisfying."
Just as the folks at Centenary Methodist hoped, the entire town has embraced the Living Nativity as a community presentation. "We just happened to be the ones who started it here," the Methodists say, "but a Living Nativity would fall short of the objective if all denominations didn't find joy and inspiration as they witnessed it year after year."
Yes, even as the Christ Child, it belongs to us all.