



LIVE NATIVITY SCENE - A highlight of the Grace United Methodist Church congregation's celebration of Christmas was a live nativity scene which will become an annual event. Rev. Patricia Stone, pastor, said that members portrayed in costume a nativity scene December 21, 1995 on Cleveland Avenue.

God's ear is open to all His children

From the mouths of babes come words of wisdom. Never was a truer word spoken.

And to take the statement one step further, for those who are open to listening to the religious thoughts and wonders of children, from the mouths of babes come incredible, tender and even amazing words of wisdom about God.

For instance, I remember well listening to a child in Louisiana one Sunday morning speaking about the importance of cleaning up his room. When asked why this cleaning was so important, he responded with an answer which went something like this:

Half-way through the football season, he had heard his father say in disgust that the New Orleans Saints (a traditional loser) would make it to the Super Bowl only when God himself came to Louisiana. (Probably not the most appropriate comment near the ears of a young child). And with the Saints having had a remarkable second half of their season, including a berth in the playoffs, the boy was making sure his room was tidy just in case.

Yet mixed in with the wild and wacky are serious, tender thoughts as well. A former seminary professor told me once of a conversation he stumbled upon with his 14-year-old son while sitting in the front yard of their home. His son began to open up with some incredible thoughts about who God is, and what God is like, and what that meant for human life. It was a real moment of revelation. And not knowing what else to say, the father asked, "Have you ever told anyone else about these thoughts?" To which the boy responded, "Dad, no one ever asked."

That children having something deep and important to speak about their faith is an important lesson for us adults. It is important because their conversations serve them well. But it is also important because they benefit all of us who are privileged to hear.

I mention that fact particularly at this point in the new year because one of the most complex issues with which children wrestle is the concept of time - what "time" means for us, and what it means for God. As

REFLECTIONS

on Religion and Life

Rev. Dick Newsome
Pastor
First Presbyterian Church



each of us has no doubt noticed, the issue of time rises to the surface of our thoughts in early January. We are aware that time waits for none of us and continues to roll along. And so in the heat of the moment, we make a great many resolutions to improve life and to try harder in important endeavors. "If I don't lose weight now," we might say, "I will never lose it. The moment is now or never." And much like children (because in reality, our religious thoughts are fairly much the same), we transfer our concept of time to the Creator.

To a certain extent, this is helpful. After all, any urgency to make a commitment to God or to strengthen our response to his love can be purely beneficial. But at the same time, we must remember that God lives within a freedom from the constraints of time which we do not know. Time might roll along, but not toward an end as we know it. And while the window of opportunity for losing weight or making money or fixing up the house might be narrow and tight, the window of God's love never closes. It is never out of season to know his grace. It is never out of season to take to heart his incredible love. It is never an inappropriate time to respond to his goodness with lives of commitment and faith.

So enjoy the moment, and commit yourself boldly to great new things. But after the newness of the year has become well worn and settled, and life returns to its routine, remember that God's tender ear remains available to every voice. Even the wonderful, childlike thoughts of you and me.

New laws take effect

The New year brings some new laws in North Carolina.

Starting January 1, convicted sex offenders in this state are required to register with local authorities as part of Gov. Jim Hunt's effort to make communities safer.

The new law, proposed by the Governor in the 1995 legislative session, will give communities access to information about people in their neighborhoods or those who are working with children.

Convicted sex offenders will be required to register with the local sheriff's office of the county in

which they live and the information will be made available to the public. Schools, day care providers, parents and others would then be able to to the sheriff's office and review information on convicted sex offenders in that county, including the type of offense, personal information and a photograph of the offender.

Another component of Hunt's 1995 legislative agenda that took effect Monday is the repeal of the prison cap, which will keep more than 5,000 prisoners behind bars next year who would have other-

wise been paroled.

Hunt's other crime fighting initiatives passed by the General Assembly in 1995 include a new law requiring criminal background checks for day care providers and foster parents, and a victim's rights amendment to the state constitution to guarantee victims the right to be heard in court and the right to be informed of and involved in court proceedings related to their case.

Signs have already been posted by Chief of Police Bob Hayes prohibiting weapons in public buildings.

DSS seats David Neisler

David Neisler of Kings Mountain was seated recently on the Cleveland County Board of Social Services.

He replaces Robert A. Williams on the five-member panel and was appointed by the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners.

Neisler, 36, is an officer of Dicey Fabrics of Shelby, a family-owned and operated upholstery fabric manufacturer.

He recently completed terms on the Kings Mountain Hospital Board of Directors and continues to serve on the board of directors of Adventure House.

Sparks charged in rape attempt

A 21-year-old Kings Mountain man was charged New Year's Day with the attempted rape of a 16-year-old girl.

Roger Dean Sparks of Chesterfield Apartments is under \$10,000 secured bond in connection with the incident which reportedly happened in the girl's home, also at Chesterfield Apartments.

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