

# Christmas Peace IN THE MIDST OF WAR

*I spent the holiday as a prisoner among strangers, but the message of Christ's birth reminded me that we are all God's children.*

By J Stanford Staheli

**D**uring the Christmas season of 1944, I was far from home, isolated in a tower room of a castle as a prisoner of war in Germany. I was distanced from the world and the usual celebrations of Christmas.

In spite of my surroundings, void of anything to suggest the season, my thoughts turned to home. What at first seemed to be a daydream of home and children's excited voices turned out to be more than a dream. Real laughter and squeals of excitement floated through my little open window from the outside world. I quickly stepped onto my stool and pulled myself up by the bars on the window so that I could look out on the source of merriment beyond the fortress walls.

Children were making their way up the cobblestone street below. The ground was covered with snow, and the children were dressed in warm, brightly colored clothing that added to the festive tone of the day. They were pulling sleighs as they left the outskirts of Frankfurt and started up the slope past the castle toward the forest beyond. This merry group of children reminded me of my own younger brothers and sisters at home, most likely engaged in the same activities in the snow halfway around the world.

I watched these children until they were out of my sight, but they reminded me of our kinship to each other. Their families lived in the homes of the city below. Their lives,

their thoughts, and their feelings were much the same as those of my family. My parents and siblings were thinking and praying with anxious hearts about my safety. The mothers and fathers in these homes below were thinking of and praying for their sons, brothers, and fathers who were fighting in battles in this same war. Some were missing in action, some were wounded, and some were prisoners of the opposing forces, just as I was.

It wasn't long before I saw the young people returning, their sleighs loaded with freshly cut evergreens from the forest. Their excitement was running high as they hurried to their homes, looking forward to decorating their trees. Again I was reminded of my family and our tradition of searching the nearby hills for a piñon tree, cutting it, carrying it home, and adorning its branches with green and red paper chains, strings of popcorn, a few ornaments, and the icicle decorations saved year to year.

The next day was Christmas, in Germany and all over the world. I knew in my heart that in spite of war and devastation, Christianity was still alive. The belief and hope of peace on earth and goodwill to men burned brightly in every Christian heart on this night in remembrance of the Christ child born in Bethlehem long ago. This I learned as a prisoner of war that Christmas in the castle. ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

