

Christmas
A Time to Say Thanks
By
Bill Dagle

According to the Reader's Digest *Christmas Songbook*, John Jacob Niles, the singer and collector of folk songs, said that he based his *I Wonder As I Wander* on "a line or two of haunting music that he heard sung by a young girl in a small North Carolina town. He asked her to sing the few notes over and over, paying her a few pennies each time, until he had jotted it all down in his notebook. So close was the finished song to its Appalachian inspiration that Niles is often cited as the arranger of the tune rather than its creator."

Well, since its creation, the Christmas song, *I Wonder As I Wander*, has been added to the list of those special songs we sing this time of the year. It is not only a beautiful song with a plaintive melody, but it causes the hearer to question the true meaning of Christmas. So many wander through the holiday season wondering what is this all about, anyway. Why do we have Christmas and who was this man named Jesus are questions that are on the hearts of many.

It's only logical to look to the church for answers, and many have because the pulpits should be ready to help the weary wanderers. One pulpit in our area, in particular, has helped many a wanderer. That is the Open Bible Church in Cambridge, New York. Through the doors, men and women and boys and girls have ventured to find a message of love, compassion and clarity of scripture. Many have departed with a change of heart and a renewed spirit to serve their fellow man. All this has happened over the last 18 years because of two men—the first being the Son of God, Jesus Christ, born in that lowly setting over 2000 years ago, in the little village of Bethlehem. This baby's substitutionary death 33 years later opened the doors of Heaven to those who would enter by believing in Him and Him alone.

The second man is the pastor of this church whose service to God has spanned four decades. With a heart as deep as an ocean and a smile as wide as the sea, Pastor Cal Witham has met the challenge, has fought the good fight and, now, after 18 years as Pastor, has finished the course. Retiring on December 26th, Pastor Cal will be missed by many, but not forgotten. With his wife, Bonnie, both have set an example of what a Christian should be. With tears and prayers, they have paved the way for others to follow. Only eternity will reveal the thousands that have been led into the kingdom by their efforts.

As a fellow traveler, I want to say thanks to my spiritual guide, the one who has touched the hem of His garment on my behalf in prayer and has taken the time to help me learn to serve Jesus. Finally, this pastor is the one who has taught me to get ready for Heaven where there is no more wondering or wandering, but where I will be safely home at last. Thank you to my pastor, Calvin G. Witham, for who you are and for what you have become to me.

Now 91, Pastor Witham is still living in the Cambridge area; but his ministry of counsel to those who still wander continues to this day. It is amazing what God can do with a man totally surrendered to Him.