



## CHRISTMAS IN UKRAINE

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*"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isaiah 9:2)*

It did not matter whether winter was snowy or not. Back in the 1970s, Christmas could be white or rainy, and yet it was still Christmas in the western parts of Ukraine.

It was also quite different from celebrations that we have now. The USSR was not just an atheistic country. The Soviet government declared a *militant* atheism to be a national policy. It meant children like me were forbidden to go to church. To make sure students did not enter churches, the buildings were surrounded by Communist activists, especially on big holidays like Christmas.

But older Christians found a way out. Christmas evenings in our part of the world could be snowy (most of the time) or rainy (sometimes), but they always were dark. On one night, Christian gentlemen like one of my grandfathers, and Christian ladies on another night would form singers groups. They would walk from one Christian home to another late at night or even very early in the morning, greeting each other with the words "Christ is born!" and singing Christmas carols.

It's easy to identify someone at night when light is on. These Christian singers never had any light. They did not want to be spied by the Communist agents. But they had a bell. When they would approach a Christian house they would ring their bell and a door would be opened. Happy households with children like me would welcome them in, since voicing glory to Christ out in the open could bring persecution to all involved.

And then a miracle, especially for us children, would happen: Christmas carols at Christmas tree with other Christians who wanted, despite the darkness outside and possible persecution, to share the Good News about the Savior Jesus Christ born with us!

Those dark nights were suddenly illuminated with the glory of heaven, opened through the Gospel in song. In this musical confession, the believers sparkled and kept a desire to learn more of Jesus Christ and share His Gospel.

However, it was extremely difficult without any hymnal or Bible, or any other Christian books. To learn Christian songs, we had to copy them into notebooks and study them by heart, never carrying those notebooks in public. It was always my dream to own the Bible and a Christian hymnal with wonderful Christmas and Easter music.

(over)

## THE PURE GOSPEL CAME TO US THROUGH THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS.



*Bishop Horpynchuk and his family*



*Ukrainian Lutherans eagerly claim their own copies of the Book of Concord, translated into their own language.*



Now, many years have passed since 1970s. The Soviet Union, by God's will, has disappeared from the world maps. Thanks be to God!

Even greater miracles have followed. The pure Gospel came to us through the Lutheran Confessions. And dreams became fulfilled. No longer do we have to copy Christmas carols into notebooks, because the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF) has published hymnals for us. We have the Bibles, because the LHF has taken care of that.

We have Sunday school materials and now children sing glory to Jesus, traveling from one home to another, singing in public, and sharing the precious Gospel message with other kids and their parents.

Our adults can read solid theological books and share *Luther's Small and Large Catechisms* with their friends and colleagues. Our Christmas is even more illuminated now, and it is being forwarded to thousands of others who do not yet know the Son of God born, crucified and risen again for them!

The brightest Christmas season in my life took place in 2006. It was on January 15 when on the first Sunday after Christmas (in Ukraine we celebrate Christian holidays according to old Julian Calendar), the very first edition of the *Book of Concord* in the Ukrainian language was triumphantly presented to the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

The *Book of Concord*, as well as hymnals that were used to praise Christ by singing Christmas carols and hymns, were all wonderful gifts from the Lutheran Heritage Foundation. Hundreds of people were gathered together to listen to Rev. William Ziebel preach and for Rev. Dr. Robert Rahn to present the *Book of Concord* to Ukrainians in the Ukrainian language.

Then we had long lines of people who desired to have the newly-published Lutheran Confessions so they could study them and remain in the true doctrine. A true festival of joy and pure Gospel!

It was snowy outside. It was cold as well. And yet we did not have to hide or hear the bell ringing to inform us that long-awaited guests/Christian singers have come and they need to be let secretly in.

Even though Christmas evenings have been still dark in Ukraine as they will be till the Lord Jesus returns in glory, the light of the Gospel is lit and kept alive by LHF publications. These Lutheran books and materials continue to make every Christmas even more illuminated and meaningful to thousands of people in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Bulgaria!

LUTHERAN HERITAGE FOUNDATION

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