

PENTECOST - IN MEMORY

written by

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May 22, 1987

Dear Prof. Westerhaus:

Enclosed is a copy of "Pentecost - In Memory", the article I have written about my Mother's memories of Pentecost celebrations in Niederplanitz, Saxony, E. Germany. Tim Mutterer informed me of your interest in a copy of this material for WELS records.

I have sent this article to Pastor James Schaefer. It will be published in The Northwestern Lutheran in Spring, 1988, if I can shorten it somewhat to fit on one page. I'm working on that at present. However, I have sent you the full length article.

I believe we met a few years ago at Villa Terrace when we were there with Bernice and Gerhardt Mueller, my brother. It is our mother that I am writing about in this article.

Thank you for your interest in this material.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Wilson

Mrs. Evelyn (Mueller) Wilson
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PENTECOST - IN MEMORY

"Did we celebrate Pentecost, both Sunday and Monday!"

I heard Mother say it again this year. She was reminiscing about a time long ago, when as a girl, she participated in the Pentecost festivities in Niederplanitz, Saxony, East Germany. She told me that Pentecost was celebrated as enthusiastically as Christmas and Easter, each a two day festival, with church services on both days.

Preparation began on Saturday, with the purchase of birch trees. They were purchased from a man who rode slowly through the neighborhood, his horse-drawn wagon loaded with freshly cut trees. Children jumped about in excitement as they followed his wagon. The excitement mounted as the wagon pulled up to Mother's church, the Johannes Gemeinde, where four especially nice trees were unloaded. The white-barked trees had a trunk diameter of about six inches and fresh green leaves clung to the branches. After the trees were placed in large, dirt-filled buckets, one tree was placed on each side of the sanctuary. Two trees were also placed outside of the church entrance, one on either side.

Pastor Willkomm referred to Psalm 118-27 as his basis for use of birch trees to decorate the church on Pentecost. In Martin Luther's German biblical translation we read:

"Der Herr ist Gott, Der uns erleuchtet
Schmücket das Fest mit Maien bis an die Hörner des Alters".

Birch trees were also purchased to have in the home. Again, the tree was placed in a bucket, this time water-filled, and it remained in the house approximately one week. It always delighted Mother to have the fresh tree in their living room. She reached to touch its green leaves and looked high to top branches that brushed the ceiling.

Mother told me that a neighbor who sold lilacs for the occasion, made a good deal of money that Saturday before Pentecost as she clipped her bushes down to a few remaining bare branches. The fragrance of the lilacs, together with the scent of the fresh birch trees permeated the house in festal array.

Pentecost morning began early. Mother arose about 4 a.m., donned her church clothes and quickly left the house to join her friend, Emma. Together, the girls, as well as other people from Niederplantz, walked with hurried steps to reach the woods in time for the 6 a.m. Pentecost concert. They walked for one hour to reach the woods.

The city band of about 25 members stood with music stands before them, playing Pentecost hymns, including "Come Holy Ghost, God and Lord". Everyone who had come to hear the music stood quietly among the trees. In the crisp morning air, the melodies rose and mingles with the songs of the birds in joint chorus of praise.

After the concert, Mother and Emma hurried back, another hour's walk, to reach Johannes Gemeinde in time for the 9 a.m. festival service at their church.

As a member of the church choir, Mother often tells me, "We always sang our beautiful choir hymn, "Freut Euch, ihr Christen alle, Gott schenkt uns seinen Sohn". It was arranged by Fritz Reuter and we sang it antiphonally with the pastor. Oh, how we all sang!"

As Pastor Willkomm began preaching his one hour sermon on the Acts 2 account of the Pentecost story, the congregation settled into quiet attention. Pastor Willkomm preached a one hour sermon every Sunday.

After a nice meal which included meat, potatoes and vegetables, Mother joined her parents, brothers and sister for their afternoon walk back to the woods. People of Niederplantz streamed from all directions, young and old alike, to walk among the trees in the forest. Girls all wore new white dresses for the occasion, as did my Mother. Her dress had been made by her friend, Emma.

Food, which had been packed in a basket was brought along, as well as Ash Kuchen. It had been baked on Saturday for the occasion. After the long walk to the woods, all were soon hungry again, especially the boys and the family sat on the ground to eat. Some people bought food from a restaurant in the woods, usually cheese sandwiches and coffee.

After the last long walk home, a good night's sleep was welcomed. Monday all were up early for the second church service in observance of Pentecost.

In a letter some years ago Mother told me of all these happenings. She wrote, "It was all so wonderful, so festive that I had to write about it, because it comes to my mind so strongly, so long ago....".

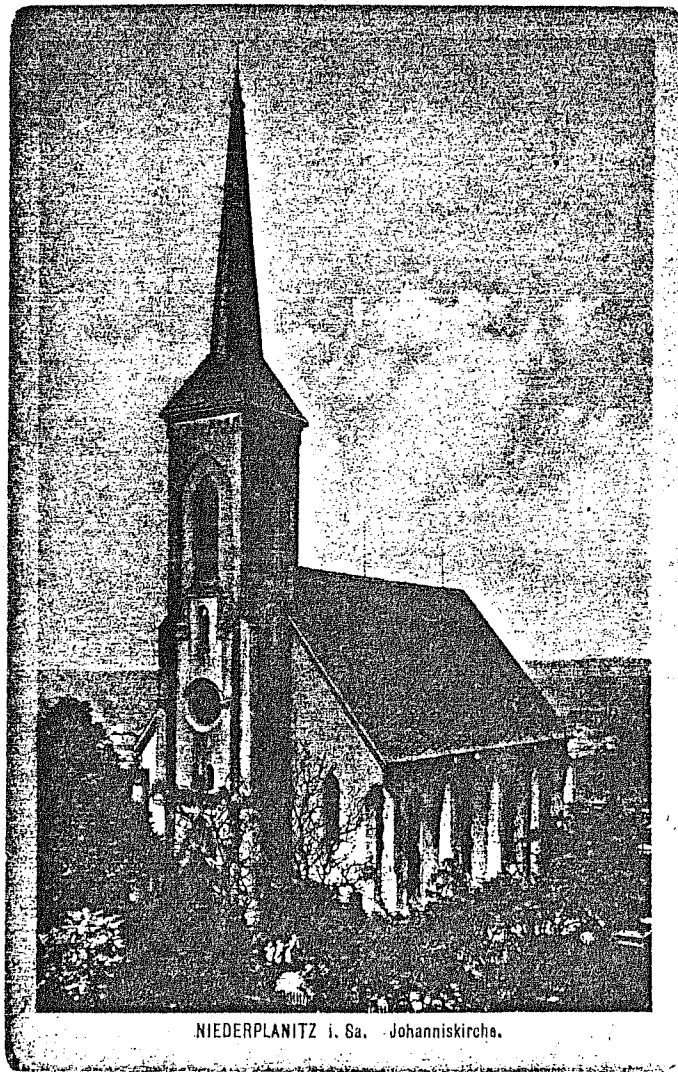
At present, my parents are residing in a nursing home in Neenah, WI. On a recent visit Mother commented that at 92 she couldn't sing as well now as she did so long ago at the Johannes Gemeinde. Her feelings now, are the same as they were when she concluded her letter:

"Some day we will celebrate and sing beautifully in HEAVEN!"

She awaits that day patiently yet longingly.....

Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness,
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the Sun of Grace is shining!

* * *



NIEDERPLANITZ i. Sa. - Johanniskirche.