

Features



The Story Has Been Read by Mr. Bob Coffey

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*Article Written by
SMT Writer*

Dexter, Missouri - Marking the beginning of the holiday season for many area residents, a large crowd of an estimated 300 attendees gathered on Stoddard Street for The Christmas Reading - The Second Chapter of Luke. The weather was perfect as the group enjoyed a beautiful evening on Saturday.

"The neat part is that people come because they want to, not because they feel they have to," commented Greg Mathis, event organizer. "The weather, The Crowley Ridge Mennonite Choir and curiosity attributed to the large turnout."

"Many folks have wondered what we do at "The Reading", and finally worked it into their schedule to be a part of it," added Mathis.

The sounds of Christmas carols and the aroma of warming campfires filled the air as attendees entered the event. What is normally a vacant lot along the busy downtown street transforms itself into an incredible sanctuary that fans of the Christmas season gather to mark the true "*meaning for the season*".

This year's holiday event was the fourth annual gathering coordinated by Greg and Lisa Mathis. Originating as a way to continue meaningful family tradition, the Mathis family saw this as an opportunity to share the gift of The Christmas Story with neighbors, friends, as well as family in a meaningful way. The Christmas Reading is open to everyone, and the crowd has continued to grow each year.


 "We initially started this with decorations and a lighted tree on the lot next door, then the next year we added the large Christmas cards displayed around the tree" noted Mathis.

A very simple idea of holiday decorations was influenced by a wonderful lady of faith, June Coffey. Unknown by others, Mrs. Coffey was a devoted Christian lady that quietly offered her gifts to the Dexter community and her church through sacrificial service. Mrs. June's example of love, kindness and service influenced many throughout the area.

The event remains very simple with cookies, cider, decorations, Christmas carols and the reading of Luke Chapter 2. However, the simplicity of the agenda carries forward the very essence of the meaning of Christmas and family traditions.

"I always remember my mother-in-law, June Coffey, would read the Christmas story every year," recounted Greg Mathis. "She has dealt with Alzheimer's for the past ten years but, we felt that we could continue her tradition through this event."

Attendees received a special treat this year with the acapella musical sounds of the Crowley Ridge Mennonite Choir. A large group of men and women of all ages, the sounds of Christmas that filled the air along Stoddard Street were emotionally moving.

 This year's agenda was notably a family affair for the Mathis family as the "*reader*" for the evening was announced by Greg Mathis. Greg shared that the event was a very special time, and the selection of the annual reader was not taken lightly.

"They (the reader) can't be a preacher or a politician," noted Mathis.

Mathis then began to share of a man of honor and an example of Godliness, his father-in-law, Bob Coffey. Bob's life of leadership through his Savior Jesus Christ has been a trail of spiritual growth. From his many years as a Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church to the mission fields of Haiti, Bob has been the type of person to allow his life to become a testimony to others and to his family. Like his wife June, Bob has been a quiet servant that humbly works for the betterment of others.

Jokingly, Mathis commented, "I don't know how a man can be that good and get the three son-in-laws he got, but that is proof that God has a sense of humor."

In his deep distinctive voice, Bob Coffey began to read the 2nd Chapter of Luke to the crowd, versus 1 through 14:

Luke 2 - The Birth of Jesus



² In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^{a]}>[^{a]} Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Following the reading of the 2nd Chapter of Luke, Greg's son Aaron Mathis was called to the podium to offer the Christmas prayer for the group. With family being the crystal point of the evening, Aaron represented one of four generations that surrounded him for the prayer with his grandfather Bob Coffey, his mother Lisa

Mathis and this new addition to the family, Harper Anne Mathis. Harper is the newborn daughter of Aaron and Brittney.

The evening ended with the incredible sounds of the Crowley Ridge Mennonite Choir and a sweet spirit of joy among the crowd. As the event closed, you could hear the exchange of glad tidings and well wishes for a great Holiday Season.

"Having Bob and Aaron involved this year was certainly special for my family," acknowledged Mathis. "My wife had know idea that her father was the reader and that I asked Aaron to have the closing prayer. I promise not to push my family on those who attend again."

"I already have everything in place for next year, which will be our 5th annual," Mathis shared. "We have gone from 50 in attendance to over 300, in a very short time and appreciate all those who help and attended."

"My family wishes all of Stoddard County and all of the ShowMe Times readers a very Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year!"

~ The Greg & Lisa Mthis Family

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Written by Staff Writer

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