The founding and maintenance of Bethlehem Church, located in
the community of the same name, in Monroe County, about six miles from
the little city of Forsyth, is beautifully typical of a spirit of co-
operation that transcends denomination or clan. For Bethlehem was the
inspired seed that sprang from the heart of a man who was not, himself,
a professor of any religion, but who later became a Baptist, and the con-
tributions that made the building possible and that have helped through-
out the years in growth of the church, have come from interested people
of several denominations, and from all parts of Monroe County. Truly,
Bethlehem was reared in prayerful, persevering love by the people of
that community, aided generously by the people of other communities.

Bethlehem is in her forty-first year. It was on the afternoon of
November 3, 1910, that Dr. J. O. Elrod, beloved physician of Forsyth and
Monroe County, was paying a routine professional call on one of his pa-
tients, Mrs. Jerry Cox. Two other neighbors were there, Mrs. Lula Worsham,
and Mrs. Nettie Alexander, and the talk naturally turned to the neighbor-
hood, its affairs and needs. Dr. Elrod, at that time not a professed
Christian, was yet a man whose bigness of heart, untiring service to his
fellowman, generosity on all occasions, placed him in a category of self-
less sacrifice, unequalled by many who bore the name of Christ. Summing up
the neighborhood, Dr. Elrod stated: "well, there is no doubt about it. You
people of Bethlehem have one of the finest communities in the county, but
one thing you lack". Pausing to gaze earnestly at each woman in turn, he
continued: "You have no church, and this neighborhood needs a church!" Dr.
Elrod was ever a man to follow words with action, and plunging his hand into
his pocket, he pulled out his wallet and extracted several bills: "And,
here, now", he said, "is $25.00 to start you off. You women build a
church!"

And, just as in the New Testament times, the women heard and hastened
forth. In no time at all, the nest egg had grown to $750.00, an acre of land had been generously donated by two land-owners, one-half acre by Mr. Jerry Cox, the other half by the late Rob Worsham. Lumber was given freely, the logs hauled, and the late J. S. Jossey, prosperous farmer, sawed the lumber "for free".

And so - as was built the Tabernacle in the days of Moses, this same spirit shone forth in the building of Bethlehem Church. Just as then: "And they came, EVERYONE whose heart STIRRED HIM UP, and EVERYONE whom his spirit MADE WILLING, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle ---- and they came, both MEN and WOMEN, as many as were WILLING HEARTED."

It was a joyous day for that community when the little white church was finished, and the people of the neighborhood flocked to it, seeking membership joyously. At one time there were around fifty members enrolled.

There were some minor troubles - for one, in about three years, a sudden saving made it necessary to move the building to its present location, and the entire acre was given by the late Rob Worsham. Then a storm came, and the building was blown off its pillars. But it was quickly replaced and repaired by the willing hands of the men of the community.

The church register of Bethlehem was not kept too accurately, and much of the history is made up of facts given by former members. The first mention of Bethlehem Church to be found on the Conference books is on March 17, 1911, when the building committee was named, Rob Worsham, Jerry Cox and J. L. Alexander. The first stewards were J. F. Cochran, L. P. Clements and Frank Meek. The trustees were J. R. Hunt, R. M. Worsham, C. H. Meek, L. P. Clements, C. N. Taylor, D. O. Trammell and P. Zellner. The register gives the names of some fifty early members, many of them gone on now to the "glory-land", and it lists the baptisms of six infants, but there is no record of a wedding nor a funeral ever held in the church.

The first pastor was the Rev. E. A. Ware in 1912, and the records
show that to him was paid quarterly the sum of $12.50. Serving the church throughout the years from 1911 to 1929 were Rev. E. A. Ware, 1912; Rev. M. Walraven, 1913, 1914; Rev. E. P. Eubanks, 1915, 1916; Rev. R. R. Tatum, 1917; Rev. H. L. Byrd, 1918-1920; Rev. R. F. Elrod, 1921-1924; Rev. A. M. Sprayberry, 1925; Rev. J. E. Ward, 1926, 1927; Rev. F. O. Green, 1928; Rev. A. C. Baggarly, 1929.

The year of 1929 was a dark year for little Bethlehem, for the church was taken off the Conference at the end of the 4th quarter, and all of the members except three, were transferred to other churches. The three faithful, determined to stick by the church their labors and love had helped to build, were Mrs. Mollie J. Dewberry, Mrs. Gussie Jackson and Frankie Zellner.

During the years that followed occasional services were held at Bethlehem with the Rev. A. W. Williams, Rev. W. A. Woodruff, Rev. W. J. Culpepper, Rev. J. D. Gibbons and Rev. Victor Treadwell, the last a Baptist, minister, preaching as often as possible. But the church was not on any circuit, and it deteriorated rapidly.

The only names of bishops and presiding elders found in the old church records are those of Bishop Darlington, 1926, and Bishop Beauchamp, 1927, and Presiding Elder, J. H. Eakes, 1926, and Presiding Elder W. A. Shelton, 1927. Superintendents named are Fletcher Walton, 1912-15; W. L. Pierce, 1916-19 Luke Johnson, 1920-26; J. H. Eakes, 1924-26; L. M. Twiggs, 1927-29 — then came the long dark gapse of years, until in 1945, the church was taken back into the fold under Superintendent, P. A. Turner, who served from 1945 until 1949, when H. J. Jones succeeded him.

The same wise-hearted, spiritually-minded women who labored to help build their church, early realized that Christian training and teaching was necessary for their children, and in 1912, a Sunday School was begun at Bethlehem. Mrs. Lula Worsham, yes, she who was among the first to catch the vision of a church in their midst, was the first superintendent,
and today there hangs upon the wall in the rear of the pulpit, a beautiful painting of Christ in Gethsemen, the work of Mrs. Worsham's niece, Miss Lucy Banks, and dedicated to this consecrated woman.

In 1944, Bethlehem community began to feel the glow of returning life and interest in its church. The Rev. T. J. Hughey, at that time not yet ordained as a minister, but filled with love for God and His work, offered his services to pastor the little congregation. Under the inspiration of his leadership, Bethlehem church awakened. The small community, catching the spirit, gave a free-will barbecue, and gifts received at that time went towards sadly needed repairs on the building. It was covered with a new metal roof, painted afresh, electric lights installed and venetian blinds added.

Rev. Hughey preached the first sermon in the church after it was re-organized. Former members came back, new members were added, and in 1946, when the Rev. P. A. Turner was superintendent, Bethlehem was restored to the Conference. The Rev. Adrain Warwick served Bethlehem as pastor in 1945 and 1946; the Rev. Clyde Blackstock, 1947-1949, the Rev. Taska Johnson in 1949, and then in 1950, Bethlehem was given her own pastor, the man of God, who had helped to restore her, the Rev. T. J. Hughey.

The present trustees are W. H. Fletcher, J. P. Roquemore, and Moran Fletcher. The stewards are Mrs. Ernest Driskell, J. R. Ham, Walter Bates and Mrs. J. P. Roquemore. In addition to serving as a steward, Mrs. Roquemore is superintendent of the Sunday School and president of the W. S. C. S.

The Womans Society of Christian Service was organized in 1950 with six charter members, Mrs. Roquemore, Mrs. Ernest Driskell, Mrs. Ralph Moore, Mrs. W. H. Fletcher, Mrs. W. W. Wright and Mrs. Emily Smarr. Entering whole-heartedly into the work, the members have paid all dues, met all pledges and donated towards the Associational activities.

Faced with the importance of recording the church history and the
necessity for keeping proper dates, the church elected Mrs. W. H. Fletcher as historian. The membership of Bethlehem today numbers 26, and though small in numbers, there is a richness of spiritual life beyond compare. Morning worship is held on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month, Sunday School every Sunday morning and prayermeeting every Thursday night. The pastor is devoted to his church, the church to their pastor, and as evidence of their love, they presented to him a lovely wall plaque, bearing his name, the dates 1945-1946, and the inscription from the Bethlehem Sunday School.

Each year there is held a fellowship barbecue at Bethlehem, to which each and every one interested is freely invited, and on that day of good will, there is no slightest evidence of of denominational spirit, but just a glad get-together, in which the voices of Methodists, Baptist, Presbyterians and others, all ring out in perfect accord in one glad song of praise.

With new life flowing, the church is planning to add to the building two Sunday School rooms. Also the members are taking part in the cooperative work of the Methodist Conference, and during the past year contributed $51.00 to missions and to the Orphans' Home. During this Conference year four additions by faith have been added to the church, and two infants baptized.

Although founded over forty years ago, and located upon land generously donated, Bethlehem Church (nor the Board of Trustees) has never possessed a deed to that consecrated acre. And through the years, the property has changed hands, but always going to one who felt the sacredness of the spot set apart for the House of God. Some several years ago, following the death of Rob Worsham, the land was purchased by the late Charlie Frank Heard, and on a number of occasions he was heard to express his intention of having a deed properly made out and recorded, giving the land for all time to Bethlehem Church. Death intervened, but just recently, approached by our pastor, the Rev. T. J. Hughey, Mrs. Heard instantly acceded to the plans of her husband,
and today W. H. Fletcher, chairman of the Board of Trustees of Bethlehem Church, holds that deed, given in devoted memory of Charlie Frank Heard, who at the time of his death was a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Forsyth.

And thus Bethlehem stands today, the greatest blessing in the life of this community, guarding, guiding, inspiring, banding together the people, as no other institution can - the product of not just the denomination, which name it bears, but of the combined good will of several denominations - the true spirit which makes us all akin - the children of ONE Heavenly Father.

No missionaries, no preachers have gone out from Bethlehem, but it has produced a band of lay men and lay women, the influence of whose consecrated lives will be felt the world over. It has sent out into the world's busy marts fine young men and women, grown up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", to take their places as Christian followers - perhaps, as Christian leaders. And true to the name of that Bethlehem, where the infant Jesus was born, may this later Bethlehem prove a blessing and a light to this sin-tortured world, for which the young Jesus died.