Taking A Break

During the first few decades at JBU, many students had no way of going home for the holidays. This was due, in part, to the shortness of the breaks, but also to the lack of easy transportation.

Thanksgiving break only lasted a day, leading to students celebrating on campus. The freshman class would plan the festivities for the day, arranging decorations for the chapel, dorms, and dining hall as well as putting together a program of entertainment for the day. In 1939, the day started with a morning devotional program that was led by John Brown Sr. and broadcast over KUOA radio. The evening amusement program featured a guessing game with prizes, held in the gymnasium. This was followed by a traditional turkey dinner.

Christmas vacation was also shorter in the early years. In 1926, Christmas vacation began on December 23 and ended on the 28th.

By 1935, Christmas vacation increased to a full week of classes being cancelled. However, this did not mean students could go home for the holiday. The main means of travel in those days was the train. Typically, students (many from California) didn’t have the money to travel, so they stayed on campus during the Christmas holiday.

According to Tarver Smith, an alumna from 1928, the students left on campus would draw names and buy gifts that could not exceed 25 cents. Companies in Joplin, Ft. Smith, and Siloam Springs furnished party food, and families would send gifts to the campus.

Students would eat with the faculty and staff members remaining on campus, hold small parties, and visit faculty homes.

As for the end of semester break that students now celebrate along with Christmas, it did not exist in the early days of JBU. In 1926 the first semester ended on Friday, January 14, and the second semester began on the following Monday. This tradition continued until, in the mid-fifties when students were given one extra day off from classes to complete their registration process for the spring semester. During the 1950s, JBU also added a spring break during the second semester that spanned the week of Easter.

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“..."I can remember so well the first year I spent Christmas at JBU.” Thus reminisced Miss May F. Boudinot, college librarian, this week when questioned about her vacations on College Hill.

The year she spoke of was 1921. The annual Christmas tree party was held that year in Dr. Brown’s home. After the party an “old bus” carried the guest to different homes for caroling.

JBU has always tried to make itself a home for those who find it necessary to remain here during vacation. Years ago California friends sent candy and nuts at Christmas. On one occasion was sent for a candy pull party. Faculty members are accustomed to inviting groups of students into their homes for a Christmas Day meal.

During the years that Mrs. Williams, former Dean of Workmen, was employed she took the girls who remained here over the vacation period to her country home for a party. Miss Boudinot explained that she helped prepare the last one. "I spent the evening in the kitchen frying hamburgers," she said with a smile.

The outstanding event in the Christmas season in the early days was the pageant produced by Miss Patterson, former faculty member.

On Miss Patterson’s first year here, she directed a very simple story supplemented by a few songs. Each year a little more was added until in its final production the pagent, as a very colorful and elaborate affair, was presented at the Community Building in Siloam Springs. It became known as “The Gift of Love,” representing the story of the coming Christ and what it has meant to the peoples of the earth.

The music department has always played a very important part in the Christmas program. This years service is proved to be one of the best in the history of the university.

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Insights

From the works of John Brown, Sr.

Now in beginning this talk, and it’s a talk, heart-to-heart. The birth of Christ involved a miracle, which means I believe in the virgin birth of course. Regeneration involves a miracle. You can no more strip Christianity of the supernatural than you can strip Christ of his deity. When you undertake to strip Christ of the facts of his deity, then you have a problem that is ten times more difficult. If he isn’t God how can you explain Christ’s influence in the world? And yet, while Christianity has to do with the supernatural and with manifestations beyond the reach of the mind of men, Christianity in its revelation to men and contact with human life becomes not alone a religion of—what shall we call it?—

common place but its manifestations are in a sense as natural as life itself.
At the birth of Christ, the angels’ chorus sang first over the Judean hills and sang the first Christmas carol for lonely shepherds. There was nothing unusual in the fact that the angel’s song was sung first to these lonely men. Nor was there anything strange or unusual in the announcement in the angels recorded in the lesson of this hour, “Ye shall find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” God’s method of approach to men has been just the reverse of the attempts which men make to garb and cloak Christianity in mystery and spectacular displays.

Jesus Christ was the only person who ever walked the earth who could choose the town where he was born. And he chose the obscure and all but unknown town of Bethlehem. Jesus was the only person the world has ever known who was privileged to choose his own mother. And he chose an unknown maiden yonder in the Judean hills, Mary. Jesus was the only person who was privileged to choose the building for his birthplace, and he chose a stable. He chose to leave heaven’s courts and the wonders and glories of young heavenly world to come into this world to be born of woman, to be tempted as humanity is tempted, that he might enter into the reality and tragedy of human life. And at last, that spotless, stainless one, actually entered into the tragedy, and the curse, and became sin for us that he might pay the price of man’s transgressions and provide a way for a fallen race back to the fellowship of the sons of God. He passed great cities to choose as the city of his birth, Little Bethlehem. The sign of the angel was a babe wrapped in clothes and lying in the manger. And friends in radio land, is not the coming of Christ and his birth perfectly in harmony with God’s manifestations to men of all ages?

-Babe in Swaddling Clothes Sermon

Milestones

December 16, 1948: The JBU choir sings over the radio to a nationwide audience. The performance was broadcasted by the Mutual Broadcasting System at 9:30 pm CST.

December 1972: During the Siloam Springs Annual Christmas Parade the Engineering Club’s float took second place. They spent about 150 hours making the float, which included Santa in a chimney and his sleigh; and were rewarded with the second place prize of $50.