Augustana Winter Traditions: The Joy of Christmas Celebration at the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover

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The Joy of Christmas tradition at Augustana officially began in the winter of 1970. The college and Augustana Lutheran Church were both started by Lars Paul Esbjörn, fostering a close connection between the two throughout the years. The Jenny Lind Chapel, was finished in 1854 and named in her honor. The chapel was decorated with simple candles, bows, wreaths, and an unadorned Christmas tree.

The next stop is at the Jenny Lind Chapel where carols are sung and communion is served. The small church is decorated with simple candles, bows, wreaths, and an unadorned Christmas tree.

After the service has ended, students and other attendees return to Augustana Lutheran Church. Here they are treated to cookies and hot chocolate from members of Augustana Lutheran Church.

Above is the Jenny Lind Chapel, pictured on a beautiful April day in Andover, Illinois.

Swedish Pastor Lars Paul Esbjörn (above left) was a founder of the Augustana Lutheran Synod and Augustana College. To build a chapel in his current-day Andover, Esbjörn asked and received a $1,500 donation from singer Jenny Lind (above right). The chapel was named in her honor.

According to Ron Peterson, current Dean of the Jenny Lind Chapel, people from all over come to the yearly program known as the Joy of Christmas. Attendees included people from Galesburg, Geneseo, Kewanee, Andover, and the Quad Cities. The largest group is of students from Augustana College who are brought over from the Quad Cities in buses. These students also participate in providing music for the gathering, both vocal and instrumental. Augustana also has provided the guest-preacher and various students or faculty who participate in telling the Christmas Story in various languages. Citizens of the Andover area who belong to the Augustana Lutheran Church of Andover play an integral part in this program. The church members prepare the church for the service and provide a place to gather for the service, with cookies and hot chocolate to enjoy as well.

There are countless special memories that students have associated with the Joy of Christmas tradition. Pastor Priggie and Ron Peterson both recounted the story of a young couple who met on the bus ride to Andover for the Joy of Christmas the winter of their freshman year. The couple continued to date throughout college, and after the service was over and the cookies and cocoa were being passed around, the young man asked his soon to be fiancée to marry him. Ron recounts another couple that had moved to California but came back to the chapel to get married because they were Augustana alum and the chapel held special meaning to them. Pastor Priggie added that some alum had their children baptized there and Ron stated that many of the weddings that were held at the chapel were also that of those who previously attended. Clearly this chapel has shaped the lives of many Augustana alum and still holds a special place in their heart, even years past their graduation date.