

Joyous St. Mary's Christmas

December 18 was truly a red letter day for over 250 children of the St. Mary's mission and school, located on the Andrefsky River, near the mouth of the mighty Yukon.

The many happy children were greeted by Santa Claus bringing two C123J Fairchild plane loads of gifts, with the aid of the Alaska Air National Guard.

The weather was cool and clear as the large planes landed on the snow covered field and taxied up to a group of excited boys from the school, who started unloading the many gifts as soon as the planes opened their ramps and Santa Claus stepped off.

Many things came off the planes, which included individual gifts from far away places in the South 48, to special friends at St. Mary's.

Other gifts included assorted fresh fruits, toys of all kinds, record players and other musical instruments, and several dozen bicycles.

When Santa Claus reached the village in the pickup truck, rather than a sleigh, he distributed hundreds of pounds of candy to the younger children.

At that point the National Guard and press visitors were invited into the community hall to share a wonderful Christmas program conducted by the young people of the community.

This included a rhythm band by the real young children, Christmas songs sung in English, Latin and Eskimo, and Eskimo dancing.

Darkness overtook the program. All haste was made to return to the plane. The village people were so reluctant to see us leave that some of them climbed on the back of the open truck with us to share the six mile ride back to the airport.

The recently installed runway lights were turned on as our plane's engines were warmed up for the return trip to Anchorage.

Bennie Leonard, a director of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, went along to take the pictures included.



CHRISTMAS PROGRAM—St. Mary's High School students are rendering a Christmas song under the direction of their song leader. A varied and interesting Yule program was performed at the huge and cavernous gymnasium-auditorium of the high school. Everyone in the village turned out for the visitors, the Santa Claus and his helpers, the Air National Guard from the Kulis Air Guard Base.