INTRODUCTION.

Today in this inspiring communion, let me salute the magnificent missionary - Abraham Lincoln.

A missionary is one with a mission.

It is customary to think of a missionary as one who goes forth to propagate a religious faith. Very naturally we think of Jesus Christ, of Buddha, of the Apostle Paul, of Mohammed, of Moses, of Francis Xavier or Father Marquette.

But a missionary can be more than this. It could be a dedicated group like the Crusaders. It could be a nation under a spirited leader.

The mission might lie in any field of human activity.

The Roman emperors leading the legions of ancient Rome were missionaries bent on conquest. The French under Napoleon were missionaries bent on world domination. The Moors inspired by Mohammed were missionaries intent on destruction of every infidel and that includes all who did not embrace the doctrines of the Koran. The first English in India were missionaries seeking an expanding trade.

Every generation had had it's people and institutions with a sense of mission in some field of human activity.

II. IN THE CIVIL FIELD, there is one who stands out and above all others - the magnificent missionary Abraham Lincoln.

He sought not to propagate a religious faith.

He sought no conquest like Caesar or Napoleon.

He neither possessed nor sought autocratic power.

He sought no material advantage.

He was a humble common man whose only weapons were an incandescent conviction, an unflinching zeal, and invincible logic.
III. THE MISSIONARY EMERGES.

Not far from here, in the city of Bloomington on May 29 1956, the spirit of the missionary emerged.

Two years before, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the new and hateful doctrine of popular sovereignty was breeding revulsion. Heretofore the issue of slavery was a policy problem and in a sense an intellectual exercise in some quarters.

When the meeting in Bloomington drew to a close, Lincoln was summoned to speak. This was the occasion when he uttered the celebrated "Lost Speech." The form and text may have been lost but the spirit and effect was imperishable. This was the utterance which his partner Herndon referred to as the greatest of his life. Until then, according to Herndon the slavery issue was argued on grounds of policy and not from the standpoint of eternal right. But this day, Abraham was newly baptized.

"From that day," wrote Herndon, "to the day of his death, he stood firm in the right." The smothered flame broke forth. A new sense of justice fired his energy. The soul was now seasoned; Lincoln had found his cross. A new sense of mission was lighted. The magnificent missionary had emerged here on the rolling prairies of Illinois.

IV. THE INTERIM.

In the interim period before the formal debate began, not only the great moral issue but also the zeal of Lincoln was being fueled.

In the Presidential election, Buchanan was elected.

In the territory of Kansas, the clashes over slavery were being referred to as war.

The unrestrained spirit of John Brown burst into murderous action like some Apocalyptic horseman of Vengeance.

Then came the amazing decision of Chief Justice Taney of the Supreme Court.

There was the extraordinary document called
the Lecompton Constitution

There was the fact that this was an election campaign for the U.S. Senate between Lincoln and Douglas and the natural development of some sharp personalities between the two as they each sought victory.

And finally, the kindling of interest beyond the boundaries of Illinois to give the contest a national significance.

Thus in this period between the emergence of the sense of mission of Abraham Lincoln at Bloomington two years before and the first of the formal discussions at Ottawa on the hot Saturday afternoon of August 21, 1858, the spirit of the moral baptism was working steadily in the soul and mind of Abraham Lincoln.

V. THE MORAL LIGHT SHINES BRIGHTLY.

Few things were left undiscovered. It embraced the Missouri Compromise of 1850 which sought to limit the extension of slavery. -the effort to repeal it by the Kansas Nebraska Bill piloted thro a Senate Committee by Judge Douglas - the Dred Scott Decision in the supreme court - the personal life of the candidates - But the moral issue was overriding. It came in the very first discussion at Ottawa.

"I hold there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... In the right to eat the bread without the leave of anybody else which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas and the equal of every living man."

On they went from Ottawa to Freeport, from Freeport to Jonesboro, from Jonesboro to Charlestown from Charlestown to Galesburg, from Galesburg to Quincy, from Quincy to Alton.

It was then mid-October.
“Here came the final discussion. Slavery is wrong. It is wrong. It is wrong. The word kept tumbling from Lincoln’s lips over and over.

“That is the issue real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world.

VI. THE CONTAGION.

Then as now, editors and politicians, scholars and historians could interpret the debates as they saw them.

I evaluate them against the past of that day, the present of that day, and the future of that day.

Two years before the missioner emerged. Character and conviction emerged.

The ultimate course and the moral concepts emerged.

The missioner found himself on and on he went. The issue was principle was drawn. It was the age old struggle of right and wrong.

At first it had to be tempered to reality. He was dealing with an entrenched institution, with a court and a Congress, with a Constitution. He was dealing with a divided land. He was dealing with people, sharply divided. He was dealing with friends and party associates interested in a political victory. He was dealing with his own candidacy. These were realities. Little by little, the people must be conditioned for the whole dose of basic principle—right and wrong.

As the conditioning process went on, so the conditioning of his own spirit went on.
It was a slow but inevitable contagion which developed. The thousands upon thousands of people who attended, who read the accounts, who were caught up in the fervor of the occasion had a chance to think, to meditate on the moral issue, to separate the superficial from the genuine, to get a sharpened sense of the real issue, to reflect once more on the principle of equality.

VI. ULTIMATE IMPACT.

And the ultimate impact can best be read in the utterances which came later.

In a cool afternoon November afternoon at Gettysburg in 1863, there came those deathless words "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." The eternal truths rolled on.

On a misty morning in March of 1865, as he stood to receive the oath for the second time with all the agonies of carnage and death written on his face and in his heart, he could yet say, "It may seem strange that any man should ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces but let us judge not that we be not judged."

VII. THUS DID THE SENSE OF MISSION born on these prairies, incubated and fashioned and shaped in these debates carry on and on in the heart of a humble man who to the very end dedicated himself to what Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence many years before "We hold these truths to be self-evident ... that all men are created equal." He was the magnificent missionary