

Ensign



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The Nativity, by Phyllis Luch

We learn in Matthew 2:9–11 that the Wise Men gave gifts to Jesus Christ when He was a young child, and they were led by the new star that appeared at His birth.

“The star, which [the Wise Men] saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

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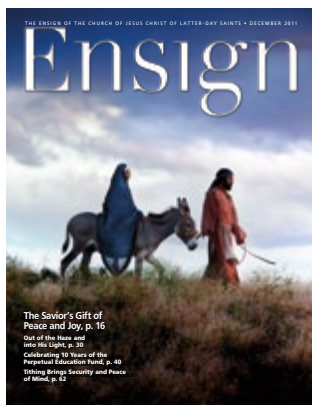
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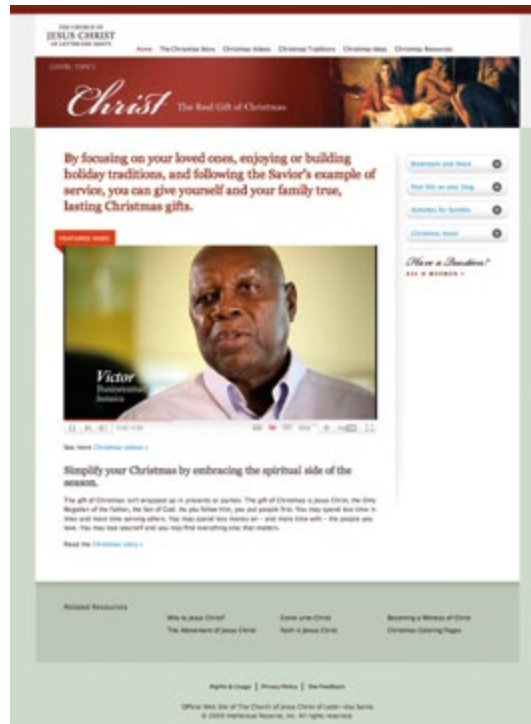
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THERE IS HOPE

If you or someone you love is struggling with pornography, there is hope. Visit CombatingPornography.org

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Find support for you or someone you love who is serving in the military. Visit military.lds.org.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

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**By President
Henry B. Eyring**
First Counselor in
the First Presidency



THE CHOICE TO BE Grateful

Our Father in Heaven commands us to be thankful in all things (see 1 Thessalonians 5:18), and He requires that we give thanks for the blessings we receive (see D&C 46:32). We know that all of His commandments are intended to make us happy, and we also know that to break commandments leads to misery.

So to be happy and to avoid misery, we must have a grateful heart. We have seen in our lives the connection between gratitude and happiness. All of us would like to feel gratitude, yet it is not easy to be consistently grateful in all things in the trials of life. Sickness, disappointment, and the loss of people we love come at times in our lives. Our sorrows can make it hard to see our blessings and to appreciate the blessings God has in store for us in the future.

It is a challenge to count our blessings because we have a tendency to take good things for granted. When we lose a roof over our heads, food to eat, or the warmth of friends and family, we realize how grateful we should have been when we had them.

Most of all, sometimes it is hard for us to be sufficiently grateful for the greatest gifts we receive: the birth of Jesus Christ, His Atonement, the promise of resurrection, the opportunity to enjoy eternal life with our families, the Restoration of the gospel with the priesthood and its keys. Only with the help of the Holy Ghost can we begin to feel what those blessings mean for us and for those we love. And only then can we hope to be thankful in

all things and avoid the offense to God of ingratitude.

We must ask in prayer that God, by the power of the Holy Ghost, will help us see our blessings clearly even in the midst of our trials. He can help us by the power of the Spirit to recognize and be grateful for blessings we take for granted. What has helped me the most is to ask God in prayer, “Wouldst Thou please direct me to someone I can help for Thee?” It is in helping God bless others that I have seen my own blessings more closely.

My prayer was once answered when a couple I had not known before invited me to go to a hospital. There I found a little baby so small that she could fit in my hand. In only a few weeks of life, she had undergone multiple surgeries. The doctors had told the parents that more difficult surgery would be needed for the heart and lungs to sustain life in that little child of God.

At the request of the parents, I gave the baby a priesthood blessing. The blessing included a promise of life being extended. More than giving a blessing, I received the blessing myself of a more grateful heart.

With our Father’s help, all of us can choose to feel more gratitude. We can ask Him to help us see our blessings more clearly, whatever our circumstances. For me that day, I appreciated as never before the miracle of my own heart and lungs working. I gave thanks on the way home for blessings to my children that I could see more clearly were miracles of kindness from God and from good people around them.



God the Father gave His Son, and Jesus Christ gave us the Atonement, the greatest of all gifts and all giving.

Most of all, I felt gratitude for the evidence of the Atonement working in the lives of those anxious parents and in mine. I had seen hope and the pure love of Christ shining in their faces, even in their terrible trial. And I felt the evidence you can feel if you ask God to reveal to you that the Atonement can allow you to feel hope and love.

We all can make the choice to give thanks in prayer and to ask God for direction to serve others for Him—especially during this time of year when we celebrate the Savior's birth. God the Father gave His Son, and Jesus Christ gave us the Atonement, the greatest of all gifts and all giving (see D&C 14:7).

Giving thanks in prayer can allow us to see the magnitude of these blessings and all of our other blessings and so receive the gift of a more grateful heart. ■

TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

Writing down our experiences and blessings can help us remember them and give us something to refer back to. Consider asking those you teach to write down what they are grateful for—to help them remember the blessings they have received, recognize the blessings of the present, and look forward to the blessings of the future.

You could also encourage those you teach to follow President Eyring's example in asking Heavenly Father to direct them to someone they can help or serve.

Take a Gratitude Challenge

By John Hilton III and Anthony Sweat

Let's not just talk about counting our blessings—let's do it! Write a list of 100 things you are thankful for. If that sounds like it is too many, try this:

1. Write 10 physical abilities you are grateful for.
2. Write 10 material possessions you are grateful for.
3. Write 10 living people you are grateful for.
4. Write 10 deceased people you are grateful for.
5. Write 10 things about nature you are grateful for.
6. Write 10 things about today you are grateful for.
7. Write 10 places on earth you are grateful for.
8. Write 10 modern inventions you are grateful for.
9. Write 10 foods you are grateful for.
10. Write 10 things about the gospel you are grateful for.

When we make a list like this, we discover that a list of 100 doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of all the things God has given us.

CHILDREN

Help Me See My Blessings

Felipe is asking Heavenly Father to help him see the blessings in his life. Help him find things he can be thankful for by circling them. Be sure you don't miss these things hidden in the picture: house,

banana, dog, church, school, clothes, bike, guitar, ball, and flower.

Consider making a list of things you are thankful for and sharing it with your family.





Faith • Family • Relief

An Extensive Sphere of Action

The Lord, His Church, families, and communities need the influence of righteous women. In fact, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “every sister in this Church who has made covenants with the Lord has a divine mandate to help save souls, to lead the women of the world, to strengthen the homes of Zion, and to build the kingdom of God.”¹

Some sisters may wonder if they can accomplish such lofty aims. But as Eliza R. Snow (1804–87), second Relief Society general president, explained, “There is no sister so isolated, and her sphere so narrow but what she can do a great deal towards establishing the Kingdom of God upon the earth.”² Sister Snow also taught that Relief Society was organized “for the accomplishment of every good and noble work.”³

Participation in Relief Society enlarges our spheres of influence by giving each sister opportunities to build faith, to strengthen families and homes, and to provide service both at home and throughout the world. And fortunately, our efforts as individuals and as Relief Societies need not be large and overwhelming, but they should be deliberate and consistent. Righteous practices such as daily personal and family prayer, daily scripture study, and consistently magnifying Church callings will help increase faith and build the Lord’s kingdom.

To sisters who wonder if these seemingly quiet contributions make a difference, Elder Ballard affirms: “Every sister who stands for truth and righteousness diminishes the influence of evil. Every sister who strengthens and protects her family is doing the work of God. Every sister who lives as a woman of God becomes a beacon for others to follow and plants seeds of righteous influence that will be harvested for decades to come.”⁴

Study this material and, as appropriate, discuss it with the sisters you visit. Use the questions to help you strengthen your sisters and to make Relief Society an active part of your own life.

What Can I Do?

1. How can I help the sisters I visit recognize and act on their ability to be a righteous influence?
2. How can I use my unique gifts and talents to bless others?

From the Scriptures

1 Corinthians 12:4–18; 1 Timothy 6:18–19; Mosiah 4:27; Articles of Faith 1:13

For more information, go to reliefsociety.lds.org.

From Our History

Eliza R. Snow, who had served as secretary when Relief Society was organized in Nauvoo, was called by President Brigham Young (1801–77) to travel throughout the Church, helping bishops organize Relief Society in their wards.

Sister Snow taught: “If any of the daughters and mothers in Israel are feeling in the least circumscribed [limited] in their present spheres, they will now find ample scope for every power and capability for doing good with which they are most liberally endowed. . . . President Young has turned the key to a wide and extensive sphere of action and usefulness.”⁵

NOTES

1. M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Righteousness,” *Liahona*, Dec. 2002, 39; *Ensign*, Mar. 2002, 70.
2. Eliza R. Snow, “An Address,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Sept. 15, 1873, 62.
3. Eliza R. Snow, “Female Relief Society,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 22, 1868, 81.
4. M. Russell Ballard, *Liahona*, Dec. 2002, 39; *Ensign*, Mar. 2002, 70.
5. Eliza R. Snow, *Deseret News*, Apr. 22, 1868, 81.



An Answer for Every “WHAT IF?”

“And [Jesus Christ] shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11).



THE HEALING POWER OF THE ATONEMENT

“[Jesus Christ] knows of our anguish, and He is there for us. Like the good Samaritan in His parable, when He finds us wounded at the wayside, He binds up our wounds and cares for us (see Luke 10:34). Brothers and sisters, the healing power of His Atonement is for you, for us, for all.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 7.

By Michael D. Woodbury

Several years ago my scooter slipped out from under me, and I fell in the middle of the road. Almost immediately I was hit by another vehicle—a large one—and dragged down the road. Those who reported the accident called it in as a fatality.

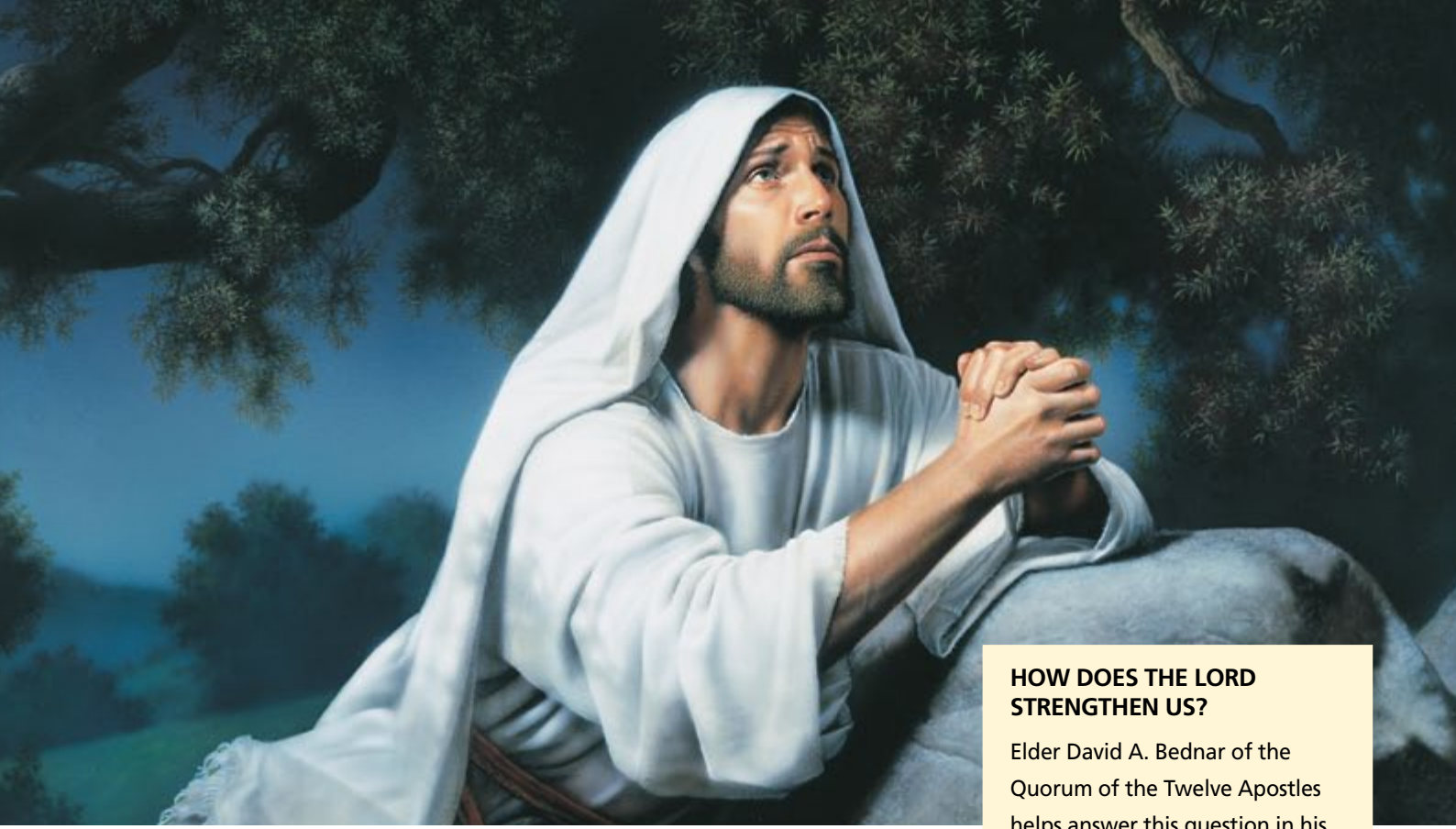
When paramedics discovered I was still alive, they rushed me to the hospital, where during the next several days I underwent a number of emergency surgeries. While I was on life support and unconscious, my father and others laid their hands upon me and, through the power of the priesthood, blessed me. From that moment on, the healing process was miraculous. But even more significant than what happened to me physically was what happened spiritually.

This experience opened my heart to the Savior’s influence. A week after the

accident, I regained consciousness and learned what had happened. I recognized that the Lord had protected me and allowed me to remain with my wife and children on earth. I found myself comforted, not abandoned, by God. Rather than feeling traumatized and overwhelmed by the recovery process that lay before me, I felt peace.

In the days that followed, my love for Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ reached new depths, and my desire to remain faithful all my life intensified. I saw the Lord’s love through the good people I encountered. And I saw that Heavenly Father heard and answered the prayers and fasting of people of many faiths on my behalf.

As I have shared this story with others, the “what if?” questions have been endless. “What if you had died?” “What if you



HOW DOES THE LORD STRENGTHEN US?

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles helps answer this question in his general conference talk “In the Strength of the Lord” (*Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 76–78):

- “In the strength of the Lord we can do and endure and overcome all things.”
- “The enabling and strengthening aspect of the Atonement helps us to see and to do and to become good in ways that we could never recognize or accomplish with our limited mortal capacity.”
- “In the strength of the Lord and through His grace, I know that you and I can be blessed to accomplish all things.”

Consider sharing with another your testimony of the blessings that come as a result of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

had been left unable to walk?” “What if you had to battle severe pain for the rest of your life?” The amazing part to me is that the Atonement provides an answer to every “what if?”

Because of the Atonement, I will be resurrected and any physical infirmity or pain will be wiped away. My wife, children, and I are sealed together as an eternal family. The Atonement made that possible too. If we move forward with faith in our Savior as we pass through the trials of life and endure to the end, the Atonement will provide the path we need to follow, with the glorious promise of eternal life waiting at the end. ■

“He will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

For more on this topic, see Matthew 11:28–30; 3 Nephi 17:7–9; and Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Liahona*, Apr. 1997, 39; *Ensign*, Apr. 1990, 7.

OFF KEY BUT ON TARGET

By JaNeal B. Freeman

My father sang a line of music all his own—not tenor, not bass, but somewhere around and all over both of them. Even though he couldn't tell a middle C from an A flat, Dad sang out loud and strong.

I never remember being embarrassed by my father's singing, but I do remember being both amused and puzzled by his joyful noise. Didn't he realize other people were listening?

My dad loved the hymns of the gospel, and he wasn't about to let a lack of talent get in the way of worshipping through music. He sang with joy, enthusiasm, and emotion. I loved how he could sing a hymn like "The Spirit of God" with energy and conviction and then a few minutes later sing the sacrament hymn with tenderness and reverence.

One afternoon my father taught me a powerful lesson through a hymn. I was playing the piano as I often did to unwind after a day of high school. My father, always watching for a little one-on-one time, came in and joined me. It was a routine I was familiar with: he would page ahead in a songbook, find a song, and then have me play it while he sang.

On this particular day, Dad pulled out the hymnbook and turned to a hymn.

"This is a great song. One of my

favorites," he said, placing the book on the piano. It was "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief." Dad told me it was a favorite hymn of the Prophet Joseph Smith and that Joseph had asked John Taylor to sing the song at Carthage a short time before Joseph and Hyrum were martyred.

Then Dad sang all seven verses while I accompanied him. In that moment, two amazing things happened. The first was that my father sang the whole song without missing a note. His A flats were actually A flats! Dad's voice was unpretentious and simple, and to me it sounded beautiful. The second amazing thing was less surprising but much more important. As my father sang, I knew that he loved Joseph Smith and had a testimony of his prophetic call. The Spirit bore witness to me that Joseph Smith was a prophet.

My father passed away a few years later, and I often think of that day and the impact it had on me. An important part of my testimony of the gospel is held firmly in place because a father who "couldn't sing" chose to sing with all of his heart. ■



TAKE TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

"Besides showing youth the way by example, we lead them by understanding their hearts and walking alongside them on the gospel path. To truly understand their hearts, we must do more than just be in the same room or attend the same family and Church activities. We must plan and take advantage of teaching moments that make a deep and lasting impression upon their minds and hearts. . . .

"I would hope that we would have the opportunity of bearing our testimonies that we know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I would hope that we would bear our testimonies so that our children will know where our hearts are and that we love them. The greatest love and the greatest teachings should be in our homes."

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Our Duty to God: The Mission of Parents and Leaders to the Rising Generation," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2010, 95, 98.

By Elder Marcos A.
Aidukaitis
Of the Seventy



The Joy OF SABBATH DAY OBSERVANCE

Growing up as a Latter-day Saint in a non-LDS environment was one of the enjoyable experiences of my early life. What I remember most is getting together with family and friends for birthdays, holidays, soccer games, and an occasional family *churrasco* (barbecue). Another favorite memory is going to church together as a family on Sunday.

Keeping the Sabbath day holy and worshipping our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, were basic and natural for our family. As a youth in the Church, I always anticipated playing soccer on Tuesday nights, but I also anticipated going to sacrament meeting, Sunday School, and priesthood on Sundays. It felt so good to be with our brothers and sisters in the gospel that we were not quick to return home afterward.

Not until I was married and had a family of my own did I really appreciate the good example my parents had set during my formative years. As the father of a family, I came to better understand how important it is to “go to the house of prayer and offer up [our] sacraments upon [the Lord’s] holy day” (D&C 59:9). I came to better understand the blessings He has promised to those who keep this commandment.

I vividly remember how happy my friends and I were as youth when we could tell each other that we had not missed a single Church meeting for an entire year. We might not have been fully aware of what was happening to us as a result of our faithful attendance, but we were keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. In addition, our hearts were glad, our countenances were cheerful, and our joy was truly full (see D&C 59:9, 13–15).

A Sabbath Day Tradition

For many years my wife and children and I have had the tradition of spending summer vacation on a small beach near our home in southern Brazil. Sometimes we moved because of work, but no matter how far we lived from that small beach, we always made the annual trip with much anticipation and joy. Likewise, extended family members and friends would travel long distances so we could all be together once a year. Everyone came as early as they could and stayed as long as possible.

At that small beach our family had many wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth and gospel teaching. Most of our extended family members were not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and did not share our religious beliefs. To



I testify that joy and blessings come from worshipping God on His holy day—including blessings we cannot now see.



Breaking the Sabbath would have been easy to rationalize during our annual vacation at the beach, but we never missed going to church on Sundays.

them the Lord's day was just another day to play and have fun. Because more of the family would be at the beach on weekends than during the other days of the week, our presence and participation in Sunday activities was not only expected but also insistently requested—including by our children.

Our children were small and only just learning to apply the truths of the gospel. To them the temptation of participating in activities with their cousins and friends on Sundays was great. Spending time with family is an important part of the gospel, and breaking the Sabbath would have been easy to rationalize. After all, the closest unit of the Church at that time was more than 60 miles (96 km) away from the beach. Our friends and neighbors in our home congregation were far away, and none of them would ever know if we stayed at the beach instead of driving to the chapel and attending our meetings on Sunday. We

went to church the entire year, and our extended family could be together only a few weeks a year.

Nevertheless, we never missed going to church on Sundays—not even once! We remembered the Lord's teachings:

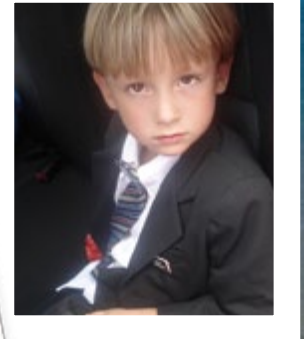
“And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;

“For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High; . . .

“But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High. . . .

“And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full” (D&C 59:9–13).





We chose to keep this commandment, and we taught our children that they should keep it as well. Soon they understood that it was more important to worship God on His holy day than to please family and friends or to satisfy their own desires.

Blessed by Obedience

On Sundays at the beach, we would wake up early, dress up for Sunday worship, and travel by car to the nearest chapel. During our trip and throughout the entire day, we would enjoy the peace and joy the Lord has promised to those who keep His commandments. We came to learn that this feeling of peace and joy does not come from the world.

After several years of this routine, something wonderful happened. Our children stopped questioning the importance of worshipping God on His holy day, and several of our children's cousins began to ask if they could go to Church with us! Little did we know that the feeling of peace and joy we felt was also being felt by our nieces and nephews upon our return from our meetings. Eventually a great blessing resulted. After some of those children became adolescents, two of them from one family told their parents, "We want to become Latter-day Saints." Soon the entire family was baptized. Recently, one of the children, now a returned missionary, was married in the temple.

We still go to that beach every year, but

everyone knows that on Sunday our family will not be there to play. Instead, we will go to church and worship God with family members who join us—a group that is becoming larger and larger every year!

When we look back on those years and think about the choice we made, we thank God for helping us have the courage to do what was right and to teach our children to do the same. We don't have the slightest doubt that that decision strengthened our children as well as our extended family. It gave us the Lord's promised peace, played an important role in the conversion of family members, and blessed us with a satisfaction not found in alternative Sunday activities that do not fill the soul.

I testify that joy and blessings come from worshipping God on His holy day—including blessings we cannot now see. And I testify that "happy is that people, whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15). ■

We still go to the beach every year, but everyone knows that on Sunday our family will not be there to play. Instead, we will go to church and worship God with family members who join us.



By David R. Baumgarten

Growing up, I always had great faith that prayer is direct communication with Heavenly Father. This faith came from listening to my parents tell of an experience my family had when I was a toddler.

In 1938, when I was almost two years old, my father drove trucks for a food products company in the San Bernardino, California, area (USA). One of the stores on his delivery route was in Big Bear Village, high in the San Bernardino Mountains. One morning in May, Dad decided to take Mom and me with him on his route. There was still snow on the northern slopes of the mountains, but it was a beautiful day and the sky was bright blue.

At one stop my mom let me get out of the truck to play in the sunshine. When my dad was done with his delivery 15 minutes later, my parents realized I was gone. They called for me and searched the area but could not find me. Panicked, they sought help, and the people in the store joined them. Later, 200 men from an emergency response group came to help. Soon the sheriff's department, the forest

service, and a number of volunteers from town came, and by late afternoon more than 400 searchers were combing the area. But they couldn't find me.

On the second day, more searchers came. The Red Cross set up stations so searchers could eat and rest. A plane from a nearby air force base searched from the sky, and a Native American tracker who was well known for finding lost hikers helped. He found one of my sandals and a few footprints, but nothing more.

As the second day was ending, many of the workers gave up. The Red Cross stations closed down. Mom heard a group of men saying that a young child could never survive the cold and danger of the mountains alone. They were sure I would not be found alive.

Meanwhile, Dad and a few others left to make one final effort. The darkness was closing in, but they were determined. They formed a line across the edge of the village, each person about 20 feet (6 m) from the next person, and walked straight ahead into the forest.

My Father's Prayer

In desperation, my father knelt in the woods and offered a prayer.

After a while, my dad found himself separated from the others. He had gone farther than any of the searchers had gone before. It was here, alone, that he fell to his knees and began to pray. My dad had prayed many times before, but now his prayers were filled with desperation over me, his lost son. He poured out his soul to his Heavenly Father, praying that I would be found.

As he finished his prayer, he felt as if someone grabbed his shoulders, stood him up, and turned him in a specific direction. He started running in that direction even though he was tired and hungry. He tried to slow down, but something urged him onward. When at last he stopped, he heard a cry. He listened and heard it again. He walked over a small hill, and there I was—half under a bush, face in the mud, one shoe missing. I

was more than four miles (6.4 km) from the store and 1,800 feet (550 m) up the mountain.

Overcome with gratitude for the answer to his prayer, Dad picked me up and began to carry me down the hill. He found a road, and soon a car picked us up and took us to the village. When the car stopped, my inconsolable mother saw my dad in the backseat holding me. I was bruised, scratched, and hungry, but very much alive.

Hearing this story throughout my childhood and youth was the start of my faith in a loving Heavenly Father who answers prayers. As I grew, I experienced answers to my own prayers that strengthened my faith and testimony. I know that the Heavenly Father who answered my dad's prayers all those years ago in the woods hears and answers our prayers today. ■



LISTEN FOR THE ANSWER

"To those within the sound of my voice who are struggling with challenges and difficulties large and small, prayer is the provider of spiritual strength; it is the passport to peace. Prayer is the means by which we approach our Father in Heaven, who loves us. Speak to Him in prayer and then listen for the answer. Miracles are wrought through prayer."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Be Your Best Self," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2009, 68.



THE PEACE AND JOY OF KNOWING THE SAVIOR LIVES



As a special witness of His holy name, I testify that Jesus the Christ is the divine Son of the living God.

As one of the Twelve Apostles, I can say that the members of the Twelve cherish the privilege of teaching and testifying of our beloved Savior. We gladly share our testimonies of His life, His ministry, and His mission in mortality.

We commemorate the humble birth of the Savior at this time of year even though we know it did not occur in December. More likely, the Lord was born in April. Both scriptural and historical evidence suggest a time in the spring of the year, near the Jewish Passover (see D&C 20:1).

Scriptures declare that His mother, Mary, was espoused to Joseph (see Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27). Their espousal might be likened to a modern engagement, which is followed later by the actual marriage ceremony.

Luke's account records the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary when she learned of her mortal mission:

“And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. . . .

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:28, 30–32).

Note the capital *S* and *H*. Our Heavenly Father is the *Highest*. Jesus is the *Son* of the *Highest*.

“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:34–35).



By Elder Russell M. Nelson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Before Joseph and Mary came together, she was expecting that Holy Child. Joseph desired to protect Mary (see Matthew 1:18–19), hoping to spare her the punishment meted out to a woman pregnant without a completed marriage. While Joseph pondered these things, the angel Gabriel appeared to him, saying:

“Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21).

Mary and Joseph did not need to be taught the deep significance of the name *Jesus*. The Hebrew root from which it was derived, *Yehoshua* or *Jehosua*, means “Jehovah is salvation.”¹ So the work of the Lord God Jehovah, soon to be named Jesus, was salvation. He was to become the Savior of the world.

In the Book of Mormon we read a dialogue Nephi had with an angel who asked, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?”

Nephi replied, “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.

“And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

“. . . I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

“And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.

“And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:16–21).

Insights from Luke

Precious insight is added by the fond and familiar story we recount at Christmastime as recorded in Luke, chapter 2: “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed” (Luke 2:1).

This was really a capitation tax, a census, and an enrollment—a registration of the citizenry of the empire of Rome. King Herod had directed that people be counted in the land of their ancestors. Mary and Joseph, then living



in Nazareth, had to travel southward to the city of David, a distance of approximately 90 miles (145 km). Perhaps they traveled even farther if they had to go around the hostile intermediate province of Samaria.

Almost certainly they traveled with relatives also summoned to the land of their ancestry. This difficult travel was no doubt made with their animals, such as dogs and donkeys. They likely camped out several nights because their journey would have required three to four days.



A caravansary, where Mary and Joseph would have stayed, was typically rectangular in shape, composed of a central courtyard for the animals, surrounded by walled cubicles where people rested.

When they reached Bethlehem, the time came for the birth of the Holy Child.

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

This verse is filled with meaning, enriched by knowing a word from the original text of the Greek New Testament and understanding the culture of that time and place. The term from which “inn” was translated is *kataluma*.² The Greek prefix *kata* (or *cata*) means “down” in time or place. When *kata* is joined with *luma*, the word signifies a place where people break up, or take a break from, their journey. In the Greek New Testament, the word *kataluma* appears in only two other passages, translated in each instance not as “inn” but as “guestchamber” (Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11).

At that time and place, an Asian inn was not like a modern Holiday Inn or Bethlehem Marriott. A lodging place back then provided accommodations for traveling caravans, including people and their animals. Caravans stayed at what was then known (and is still known) as a *caravansary*, or a *khan*. The dictionary defines these terms as an inn surrounding a court in eastern (or Asian) countries where caravans rest at night.³

Such a facility was typically rectangular in shape, composed of a central courtyard for the animals, surrounded by walled cubicles where people rested. These

cubicles allowed guests to be elevated slightly above their animals, with open doorways so that owners could watch over their animals. The Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 2:7 indicates that there was no room for them in the “inns,” suggesting that all of the cubicles of the caravansary were occupied.

The thought that the innkeepers were inhospitable or even hostile is probably incorrect. People there were no doubt then as they are now—hospitable. Particularly would this have been true at a season when the normal population of Jerusalem and neighboring Bethlehem would have been swollen with many relatives of the local citizenry.

At an Asian caravansary, animals were secured for the night in the corner courtyard. In that courtyard would have been donkeys, dogs, sheep, possibly camels and oxen, along with all the animals’ wastes and odors.

Because the guest chambers surrounding the courtyard were filled, Joseph may have made the decision to care for Mary’s delivery in the center courtyard of a caravansary, along with the animals. It is entirely possible that in such a lowly circumstance the Lamb of God was born.

Twice in Luke 2 reference is made to swaddling clothes. What is the meaning of the phrase “wrapped him in swaddling clothes” (Luke 2:7)? I sense significance beyond the

use of an ordinary diaper or receiving blanket. Instead of those five words in the English text, only one word is used in the Greek text of the New Testament. That word is *sparganoō*, a verb meaning to envelop a newborn child with special cloth, strips of which were passed from side to side.⁴ The cloth would probably bear a unique family identification. That procedure was especially applicable to the birth of a firstborn son.

The angel announced, “This shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). The fabric of His wrappings surely would have been recognizable and distinctive.

What about the manger? French speakers will recognize that *manger* means “to eat.” A manger is a trough or an open box in a stable designed to hold feed for animals. Elevated from the floor of the contaminated courtyard, a manger was probably the cleanest site available. Such a feeding trough became a cradle for our Lord!

The Savior’s Unique Parentage

More important than the humble place of the Savior’s birth is His unique parentage. Several scriptures ask the question “Who shall declare His generation?” (Isaiah 53:8; Acts 8:33; Mosiah 14:8; 15:10). This means “Who shall declare His genealogy?” Now, two millennia later, we proclaim that Jesus the Christ was born of an immortal Father and a mortal mother. From His immortal Father, Jesus inherited the power to live forever. From His mortal mother, He inherited the fate of physical death.

Jesus acknowledged these realities as they affected His own life: “No man taketh it from me,” He said, “but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:18).

Those unique attributes of His parentage were essential for His mission to atone for the sins of all mankind. Thus, Jesus the Christ was born to die and then rise again to eternal life (see 3 Nephi 27:13–15). He died that

we might live again. He was born that all people could be soothed from the sting of death and live beyond the grave (see 1 Corinthians 15:55; Mosiah 16:7–8; Alma 22:14; Mormon 7:5).

His Atonement was wrought in Gethsemane, where He sweat great drops of blood (see Luke 22:44), and on Golgotha (or Calvary), where His body was lifted up upon a cross over the “place of a skull,” which signified death (Mark 15:22; Matthew 27:33; see also 3 Nephi 27:14). This infinite Atonement would release man from the infinitude of death (see 2 Nephi 9:7). The Savior’s Atonement made the resurrection a reality and eternal life a possibility for all. His Atonement became the central act of all human history.

Its importance was stressed by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who said, “The fundamental principles of our religion are *the testimony* of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”⁵

This declaration was the undergirding inspiration that guided the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles some years ago when we were approaching the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of the Savior. We 15 men entrusted with the keys of the kingdom prepared our written testimony. We titled it “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles.”⁶ Each of the 15 Apostles then living affixed his signature to that testimony.

Each individual with a testimony of the Lord has the privilege, in faith, to know of His divine parentage and to testify that Jesus is the Son of the living God. True testimony includes the fact that the Father and the Son appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith, whose birth we commemorate on December 23. That testimony includes the fact that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true and is led by a living Lord via prophecy and revelation through authorized administrators who receive and respond to direction from Him.



The Savior's Atonement made the resurrection a reality and eternal life a possibility for all. His Atonement became the central act of all human history.

Even in the most troubled times of modern life, this knowledge brings us peace and joy. “Be of good cheer,” the Master said, “and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come” (D&C 68:6). Lovingly, we hold fast to His blessed promise.

Our Gift to Him

Difficult days are ahead. Sin is on the increase. Paul foresaw that members of the Church would endure persecution (see 2 Timothy 3:1–13; D&C 112:24–26). Peter counseled, “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16). As Jesus descended below all things in order to rise above all things, He expects us to follow His example. Yoked with Him, each of us can rise above all of our challenges, no matter how difficult they may be (see Matthew 11:29–30).

Considering all that the Savior has done—and still does—for us, what can we do for Him? The greatest gift we could give to the Lord at Christmas, or at any other time, is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, worthy to attend His holy temple. And His gift to us will be the peace of knowing that we are prepared to meet Him, whenever that time comes.

The fulness of the Master’s ministry lies in the future. The prophecies of His Second Coming have yet to be fulfilled. At Christmas, of course, we focus on His birth. And to this world He will come again. At His First Coming, Jesus came almost in secret. Only a few mortals knew of His birth. At His Second Coming, the whole of humankind will know of His return. And then He will come, not as “a man traveling on the earth” (D&C 49:22), but “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:5; see also D&C 101:23).

As a special witness of His holy name, I testify that Jesus the Christ is the divine Son of the living God. He will love you, lift you, and manifest Himself unto you if you will love Him and keep His commandments (see John 14:21). Indeed, wise men and women still adore Him. ■

From a devotional address delivered at Brigham Young University on December 10, 2002. For the full text in English, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. See Eric D. Huntsman, “Glad Tidings of Great Joy,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2010, 54.
2. See word numbers 2,596 and 2,646 in James Strong, “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1890), 39, 40.
3. See *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2003), “caravansary” and “khan.”
4. See word number 4,683 in “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” 66.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 49; emphasis added.
6. See “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2–3.

Windows of Heaven

By Merrijane Rice

*When the sky was blue,
My heart was brittle,
Dry to blistered souls
Seeking drink.*

*So God hung black clouds low,
Let loose His floods,
And poured forth more
Than I could hold.*

*I sputtered and choked.
He wrapped a hand around my heart
And wrung out sustenance
For others.*

*The sky is gray,
But my heart is soft.
In drier days,
It would have
Crumbled.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY LARENE GAUNT

By Sally Johnson Odekirk

Church Magazines

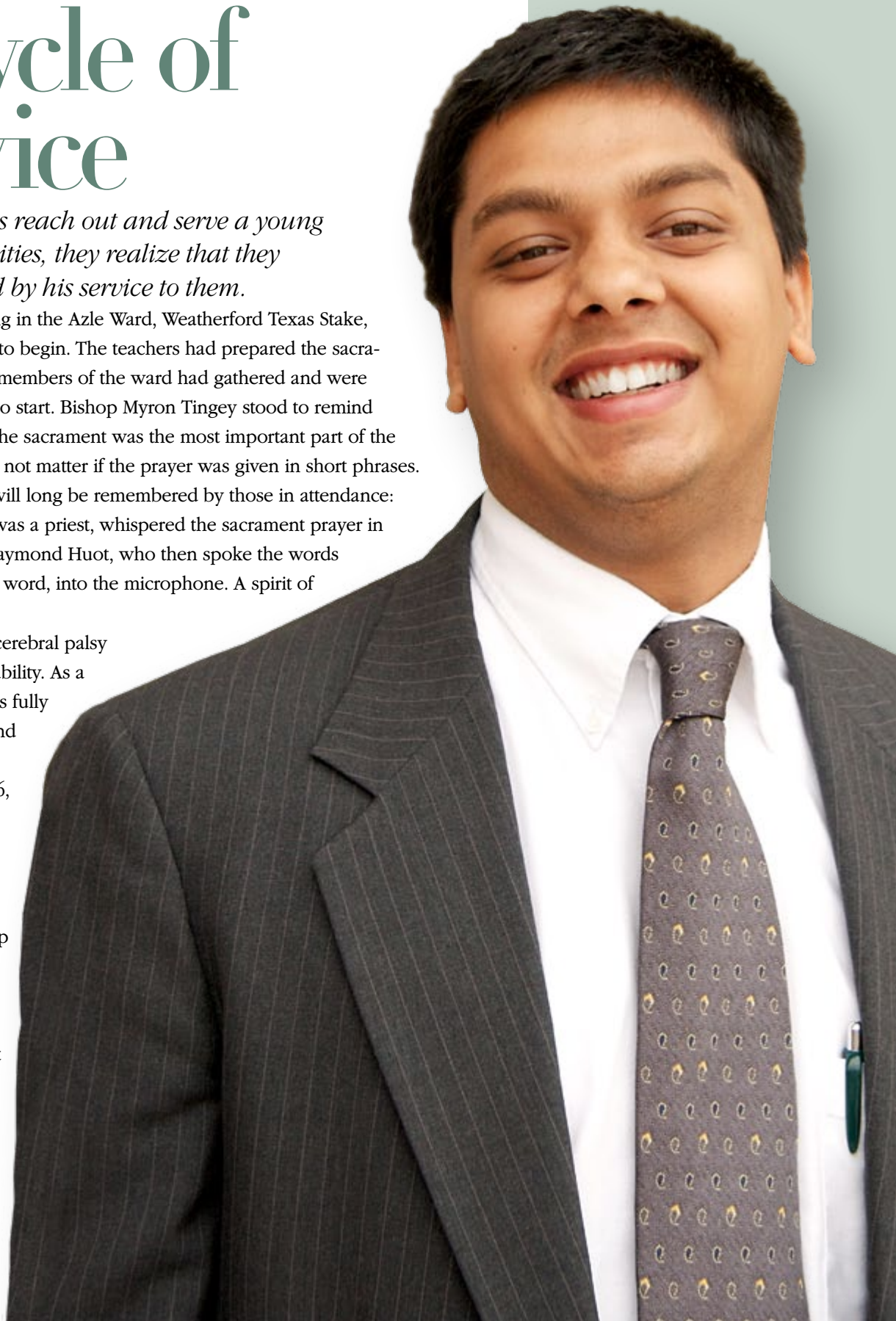
A Cycle of Service

As ward members reach out and serve a young man with disabilities, they realize that they have been blessed by his service to them.

Sacrament meeting in the Azle Ward, Weatherford Texas Stake, USA, was about to begin. The teachers had prepared the sacrament table, and members of the ward had gathered and were ready for the meeting to start. Bishop Myron Tingey stood to remind the congregation that the sacrament was the most important part of the meeting and that it did not matter if the prayer was given in short phrases. What happened next will long be remembered by those in attendance: Danny Oldroyd, who was a priest, whispered the sacrament prayer in phrases to his friend Raymond Huot, who then spoke the words of the prayer, word for word, into the microphone. A spirit of love filled the chapel.

Raymond has mild cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. As a young teenager, he was fully involved in Scouting and Young Men activities, and when he turned 16, he wanted to be able to offer the sacrament prayer. Bishop Tingey suggested having one of the other priests help him.

“It was inspiring to see his determination to fulfill that simple yet sacred calling,” Danny remembers. “His sincerity could easily be seen, and the support of the ward and its





Raymond, shown here with his fellow ward members, says, “I can’t read or write, but I can be an example.” He set an example in Scouting by earning his Eagle Scout Award (see photo on facing page).

leaders was a key to his growth and success.”

“We learned that cooperation can help everyone participate,” says Bishop Tingey. “And there is joy in serving others.”

It’s been that way ever since Raymond and his family moved into the ward: members reach out to help Raymond achieve his goals, and in return he teaches them how to love and to persevere in the face of difficulty.

“Raymond knows how to make the most of his challenges,” says his father, Don Huot. “He helps the ward think more positively about life because they see what he can do. He made lots of friends in the Young Men program. If he ever had any questions, he just asked his friends, and they helped him.”

A Friend to All

Don and Robin Huot adopted Raymond when he was 10 months old, knowing that he would have some challenges. But as Raymond grew, he determined not to let his disability hold him back. He has learned how to be outgoing and kind to those he meets.

Raymond was 12 years old when his family moved into the Azle Ward. “When we first moved here I sat in the back of the classroom like a hermit,” he says, “but the whole ward helped me grow.”

It started with the young men. Jared Abraham, who was a deacon at the time, recalls befriending Raymond. “I took him under my wing because he has a gift of childlike innocence that we’re all attracted to,” says Jared. “He’s also fun to talk to and be around.”

A few years later Danny Oldroyd moved into the ward with his family, and it was Raymond’s turn to welcome a newcomer.

“It was great to have someone to break the ice in the new ward,” Danny remembers. “For a 14-year-old boy, moving to a new place isn’t easy, but Ray helped make it easier.”

As Raymond progressed through the Young Men program, ward leaders and friends helped him fulfill his priesthood responsibilities, including his calling as teachers quorum president.

“The other boys realized that he needed help in some areas,” says Robin. “But at the same time, they were willing to follow him when he was in a leadership position.”

During high school he was a water boy and trainer for the local football team and had a lot of friends who responded to his warmth and enthusiasm. “People comment all the time on how much they love him,” adds Robin. “I think it’s because they reciprocate what they get from him.”

An Eagle Scout

In addition to Young Men and school activities, Raymond was also actively involved in the Boy Scout program. “When he was exposed to opportunities through Scouting, learning new things opened the world to him,” says Debra Oldroyd, who was the ward Scouting advancement chair when Raymond became a Boy Scout. “He also helped the other boys realize that they could work and have fun as a group.”

Ward Scout leaders worked with the Longhorn Council of the Boy Scouts of America to make sure that Raymond could meet the requirements to earn his Eagle Scout Award.

“We only needed two considerations for Raymond,” Bennett Hortman, Raymond’s Scoutmaster, explains. “We provided a scribe for him, and he required a flotation device for water activities. He earned 21 badges, and he did every one according to regular requirements. He also held leadership positions in the troop; I knew that if he was in charge, he was there 100 percent.”

For his Eagle project, Raymond worked with an organization to photograph, fingerprint, and document children so that this information will be available to police if a child comes up missing. Because Raymond is so well known and liked in the community, many of his friends participated to support him.

Missionary Work

When Raymond turned 19 he had a strong desire to serve a mission. Bishop Kent Talbot, stake president Tom Carver, and President Wright Thurston of the Texas Fort Worth Mission worked together to make a local service mission possible. Raymond proselytized with the full-time missionaries three days a week and served in the Dallas Texas Temple once a week.

“Raymond served with great enthusiasm for 12 months,” says President Talbot, now a member of the stake presidency. “His parents, the ward members, the missionaries, and the mission president were very supportive.”

“We went into homes, taught people, and gave priesthood blessings,” Raymond says. “I also helped the missionaries get member referrals by visiting with my high school



friends, coaches, and teachers; that was the best way for me to help them. I still go out with the missionaries and bear my testimony.”

All About Service

One of Raymond’s friends, Paul Sexton, says that Raymond is all about service. Raymond shows love and energy as he works with the 11-year-old Scouts as an assistant Scout leader and serves as a home teacher. “He is actively involved in home teaching—he encourages others to go home teaching, makes the appointments to visit his families, checks up on them during the month, and truly loves them,” Robin says.

“When you have a problem, he will spend however long it takes for you to feel better,” says his sister Ramona. “He really brings the whole ward together because he notices others who aren’t as social, so he talks to them and helps them feel like they belong.”

His friend Danny sums up Raymond’s impact on those around him: “He has helped me to understand that we can find joy from the simplest things in our lives. He has also shown me that we should not doubt the ability of those around us. The Lord does not doubt our abilities, and neither should we.” ■

For more information on members with disabilities, read “Six Myths about Members with Disabilities” at disabilities.lds.org.





The Christmas I REMEMBER BEST

By Sherilyn Clarke Stinson

Christmas in 1960 brought my first fashion doll, complete with a wonderful wardrobe crafted in secret by my mother. But the best surprise was yet to come. In our Christmas morning oblivion, we kids didn't realize Mom was in labor. She managed to endure until every gift was opened before going to the hospital to deliver our new baby brother. My new doll couldn't compete with Matthew, a real-life 10-pound doll with big brown eyes. He quickly became my special charge, and I assumed the role of "assistant mother." At the age of six, I believed I had found my mission in life. Matt was followed by a sister and then another brother, and I mothered them all.

In my early twenties I married with full expectation of becoming the mother of a large family. But life takes unexpected turns, and after two years of trying, we were diagnosed with infertility. It was a severe blow. Feeling bewildered and betrayed, I struggled to make sense of the hand I had been dealt. Finally, after many doctor visits, medical procedures, and prayers to heaven for a child, we began to consider adoption. Not wanting to give up my dream of having my "own" children, I was somewhat indifferent in the beginning. But as we completed our adoption study, my enthusiasm grew, and I began to believe that my dream of motherhood would actually come true.

December 22, 1981, started out like any other work day. My brother Matthew was due home from his mission the next day, and I was full of Christmas anticipation. But at about 11 a.m. my world changed forever with a simple phone call.

"Sherilyn? This is Ione Simpson, your adoption worker. How would you like an early Christmas present? We have a baby boy for you!"

Two hours later, my husband and I were sitting in an office at LDS Family Services in complete shock and disbelief. Our worker processed the necessary paperwork and then asked, "Are you ready to meet your son?" I don't know what I expected, but an 11-pound baby fullback wasn't it. Weighing 10 pounds at birth, he was now three weeks old, and all of the clothes we'd purchased on our way to the agency were too small for him. His little face was all broken out in baby acne, and he wore a forlorn expression of resignation. For a fleeting moment I was tempted to ask, "What else have you got?" But as soon as I held him in my arms, I fell in love and I knew he was our own.

Two years later, on December 15, I was wrapping the last of my Christmas gifts when Sister Simpson called again. "How would you like a baby girl?" Three frantic hours later the adventure began again with a beautiful, dark-haired daughter.

Each Christmas as I reflect on the birth of the Christ child, I also pause in gratitude for the precious gift of motherhood that came to me through the miracle of adoption. Amid the holiday flurry, my thoughts always turn to each of my children's amazing, courageous birth mothers, whose selfless love made my dreams come true.

Although I have never met my children's birth mothers, each Christmas and at each milestone of my children's lives I say a prayer for those women, that they may have continued peace in their decisions and joy in their lives. How I wish they could know that the children they placed so trustingly with my husband and me became wonderful adults. How I wish they could know the exquisite joy their Christmas gifts have brought into our lives. ■



*Lydia was thrilled
at our invitation.
Here was a chance
to do something she
could never have
done on her own.*

THE GIFT OF Giving

By Boyd C. Rich

It was the Christmas season of 1950 in Linz, Austria. During the years immediately following World War II, this city on the Danube housed large numbers of refugees from various countries, many of them huddled in ramshackle abandoned army barracks. There they lived in stark poverty as Europe began to slowly rebuild after the war's devastation.

My missionary companion and I had come to love and feel compassion for these refugees, many of whom lived in a large camp about a mile from our apartment. We visited them often and were received with friendship and respect.

One especially dear lady was a member of the Church. Lydia Haslinger was a native German who lived in a small room in one of the oldest barracks. Lydia survived on meager earnings from sweeping up the fine sawdust in a camp woodworking shop. She had a severe bronchial cough that was aggravated by the dusty work environment. It didn't help that she had only an old, brown, threadbare sweater to keep out the damp cold of the Austrian winter.

But Lydia didn't complain or show discouragement. On the contrary, she did her best to bring a bit of happiness to her many destitute refugee friends with her ready smile and hearty laugh. Having had some nursing experience, she would try to help those who were suffering from illness. Since she had no money, it was all she could offer.

In my letters to my family back in Star Valley, Wyoming, USA, I had written often of these struggling refugees. Nowadays, Church policy is to help those in need by contributing through the Church's organized welfare and humanitarian efforts, not through missionaries and their families. But those were different times. My parents spread the word among the members of their ward, who responded generously. It was an astonished postal delivery man in

Linz who, over several days, delivered 22 large boxes to our apartment. They were filled with warm socks, coats, shoes, and other clothing for all ages.

Three days before Christmas we found Lydia at home, coughing and shivering, but happy to see us as always. "Sister Haslinger," we said, "we have a problem. Could you help us out?" Puzzled, she assured us that she was willing. "We have many boxes of clothing for the people here in the camp, but we don't know the people well enough to determine the needs of the families. Would you take charge of distributing these things to your neighbors and friends for Christmas?"

Lydia was thrilled. She set about organizing the gifts for the various families and delivered them on Christmas Eve. When we visited her the next day she was bubbling with happiness. "Never in my life have I been so happy!" she exclaimed. The recipients had wept with joy and thanked Lydia profusely. She in turn had quickly denied personal responsibility, saying the gifts had come from America. We were impressed, but not surprised, to note that Lydia had kept not one thread of that clothing for herself.

The next morning, my companion and I went to a downtown department store. Then we were off to see Lydia again. When she opened our package and held up the heavy, warm winter coat we had bought for her, she wept with gratitude.

As for us, we were happy that we could do something for Lydia that she couldn't do for herself. But we also knew that she had already received a far greater gift. She lived by the Savior's teaching that "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Lydia had been able to feel the real joy of Christmas by giving unselfishly to others. For her, giving had been the greatest gift of all. ■

By Elder
Patrick Kearon
Of the Seventy



Come, LET US ADORE HIM

Last Christmas while serving at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, I encountered a local weather condition called an inversion. An inversion is a condition in which the air close to the ground is cooler than the air higher up, the opposite—the inversion—of the usual condition. Inversions are not unique to Salt Lake City, but they are more pronounced in effect because the city is located in a valley bounded by high mountains. This traps the city smog and holds it against the valley floor, covering the city and surrounding area in a thick, dark, freezing cloud. The smog is hazardous to the health of those with breathing difficulties and affects the morale of many others, as the air feels dirty and the sun is obliterated for days, even weeks, at a time.

A short drive up the mountains, however, reveals that the smog is only a few hundred feet thick. In a few minutes, you can be in bright sunshine, breathing crystal clear air, staring at pristine, snowcapped mountains. The contrast with the valley below could not be starker. As you climb farther up the mountains, you look down on the smog you have left behind in the valley, and it appears like a dirty blanket beneath an azure sky.

We must recognize that we have the power and capacity to take ourselves out of the filthy air of the valley and into the bright sunlight of the peace and hope that is found only by coming to the Savior.



There are times in our lives when we figuratively find ourselves stuck down in the valley, under the gloom of the dark, smoggy haze. Because of poor choices we have made, behaviors that offend the Spirit, or simply the painful and stretching decisions and challenges common to mortal life, we feel mired in thick, smothering fog. We can't see clearly, we feel confused, and we sense that we have moved ourselves away from the light and warmth of our Heavenly Father's love. We forget that the pure light of the Lord awaits us, beckons us, and is only a few steps of faith away. We must recognize that we have the power and capacity to take ourselves out of the filthy air of the valley and into the bright sunlight of the peace and hope that is found only by coming to the Savior.

At this Christmas time of year, we rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, who has invited us all to come unto Him and into the light. We can read in the scriptures of the men and women who were blessed to literally come to Him at the time of the Nativity. Some came from afar, while others were closer by. Some received angelic visitations, and others acted on personal revelation. But each accepted the invitation to come to Him.



What can we learn from the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and the Wise Men, all of whom were favored to come and see the Christ child with their own eyes? As we ponder their faithful responses to the invitation to come to Christ, we can learn to more effectively lift ourselves out of our own inversions, out of any gloom and confusion we may be experiencing, and bring ourselves into the clear, pure hope offered by the Light of the World. It is there, with Him, that we come to feel who we really are and where we fit into the eter-

nal picture. Our own inversions are reversed, and proper perspective is restored.

Our discipleship doesn't require us to leave our sheep in the fields or to cross deserts. Our journey to the Savior isn't physical; it is spiritual and behavioral. It involves accepting and embracing His Atonement.

The Shepherds

In the well-known verses from Luke 2, we learn significant facts about those first witnesses of Christ's birth, the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem. When "the angel of the Lord came upon them, . . . they were sore afraid" (verse 9). But they heard "good tidings of great joy" that the long-foretold Savior, the Messiah, the Christ, had been born (verse 10). They listened to know the sign by which they could recognize the Savior, that He would be "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (verse 12). When the heavenly host had concluded their joyful proclamation, the shepherds responded immediately, saying, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass" (verse 15). They came "with haste" (verse 16) and found the Christ

child just as the angel had said, and then they “returned, glorifying and praising God” (verse 20). Wanting to share the glorious news of the Savior’s birth, “they made [it] known abroad” (verse 17).

Like the shepherds, we must respond immediately, with haste, whenever the Spirit speaks to us. In the words of President Thomas S. Monson, we must “never, never, never postpone following a prompting.”¹ Sometimes after heeding a prompting, we cannot clearly see why we have been guided by the Spirit to act in a certain way. But often, like the shepherds, we see miracles occur, and our faithful response to a prompting is confirmed. We can then take opportunities to share our joy and our witness with others. Doing so can strengthen others’ faith and hope, further confirming our own testimonies and bringing us closer to the Savior and His ways.

Simeon

Another favored witness of the Christ child was Simeon. He was a “just and devout” man who received regular communication from the Holy Ghost (Luke 2:25). It had been revealed to him “that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (verse 26), and he was living in hope and anticipation of that blessed event. The Spirit prompted him to come to the temple on the day Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to Jerusalem “to present him to the Lord” (verse 22). Simeon recognized the baby as the promised Messiah and “took he him up in his arms, and blessed God” (verse 28), prophesying of the destiny of the holy baby as the “light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (verse 32).

Simeon’s righteous and faithful life enabled him to be present in the temple so he could testify of the Light when at last he found it. We, like Simeon, can strive for greater sensitivity and obedience to the whisperings of the Holy Ghost so that our lives can take the path our Heavenly Father has in mind for us. Because Simeon had cultivated his ability to hear and respond to the Spirit, he was in the right place at the right time, and the Lord’s promises to him were fulfilled in the most glorious way.

The same opportunities can be afforded to each of us and can likewise allow the Lord’s plan to unfold in our lives. When we are faced with making decisions of eternal significance, when we are at a crossroads in our lives, we need clarity of thinking and correct perspective. Sometimes the very nature of making these important decisions causes us to feel unsure, unsteady, and even unable to act, down in the dark valley under the inversion. But as we take steps of faith and act according to righteous principles, we gradually see God’s plan taking shape in our lives, and we are brought back into the bright sunlight of God’s love.

Anna

Anna was a woman of “great age,” a widow described as a “prophetess” (Luke 2:36), whose long and faithful life was characterized by her constancy in fasting and prayer and that she “departed not from the temple” (verse 37). Upon beholding the baby Jesus in the temple, she “gave thanks” for the Christ child “and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (verse 38).

We learn from Anna’s experience that we can live faithfully through all weathers if we



ANNUNCIATION TO THE SHEPHERDS, BY DEL PARSON; SIMEON'S PRAYER OF THANKS, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT; THE SUBSTANCE OF HOPE, BY ELSPETH YOUNG, MAY NOT BE COPIED; THE ARRIVAL, BY MICHAEL ALBRECHTSEN, MAY NOT BE COPIED



are consistent in our fasting and prayer and if we do not depart from the temple in our hearts. If we haven't yet had the opportunity to travel to a temple and receive its blessings, we can still enjoy the blessings that flow into our lives when we worthily hold a temple recommend. Prophets have repeatedly invited us to hold a temple recommend even if our circumstances do not allow us to attend the temple.² We can lift ourselves from dark moments and into the light of gratitude



As we ponder the faithful responses of the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and the Wise Men, we can learn to more effectively lift ourselves out of our own inversions, out of gloom and confusion, and bring ourselves to the Light of the World.

through our temple worship and through testifying of Jesus to all who look for peace and hope.

The Wise Men

Finally, in Matthew 2 we read of the Wise Men, who journeyed far, having “seen his star in the east” and having understood the sign (verse 2). Prepared with gifts of tribute and worship, they came looking for Him, asking, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (verse 2). When their search was finally over and they had found the Christ child, they “fell down, and worshipped him” and presented their treasures (verse 11). Though they met with Herod's deceit, they were “warned of God in a dream that they should not return

to Herod” but should go home “another way” (verse 12). The Wise Men acted on this revelation from God and protected the holy family from Herod's evil intentions.

There is much we can learn from the Wise Men. Like them, we should study the scriptures and know the signs to watch for as we all prepare the earth for the Savior's Second Coming. Then, as we search and ponder the scriptures, we will more fully desire to seek the Lord every day of our lives and, as a gift to Him, give up our selfishness, pride, and rebelliousness. When personal revelation comes to alter the plans we have made, we can obey, having faith and trust that God knows what is best for us. And ultimately, through lives of true discipleship, we must fall down and worship the Savior in humility and love.

This discipleship doesn't necessarily require us to leave our sheep in the fields or to cross deserts. Our journey to Him isn't physical; it is spiritual and behavioral. It involves accepting and embracing the fact that His Atonement is infinite and covers every aspect of our lives—our sin, weakness, pain, sickness, and infirmity (see Alma 7:11–13). It means that we can let go of those things that hold us down in the gloomy fog of our own inversion and live instead in the warmth and love of the Light of the World. As President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has taught: “The words ‘come unto Christ’ are an invitation. It is the most important invitation you could ever offer to another person. It is the most important invitation anyone could accept.”³ ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “The Spirit Giveth Life,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 70.
2. See, for example, Howard W. Hunter, “The Great Symbol of Our Membership,” *Tambuli*, Nov. 1994, 6; *Ensign*, Oct. 1994, 6.
3. Henry B. Eyring, “Come unto Christ,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Mar. 2008, 49.



MY SERVICE AS A SINGLE MEMBER

By Julie Burdett

Church Magazines

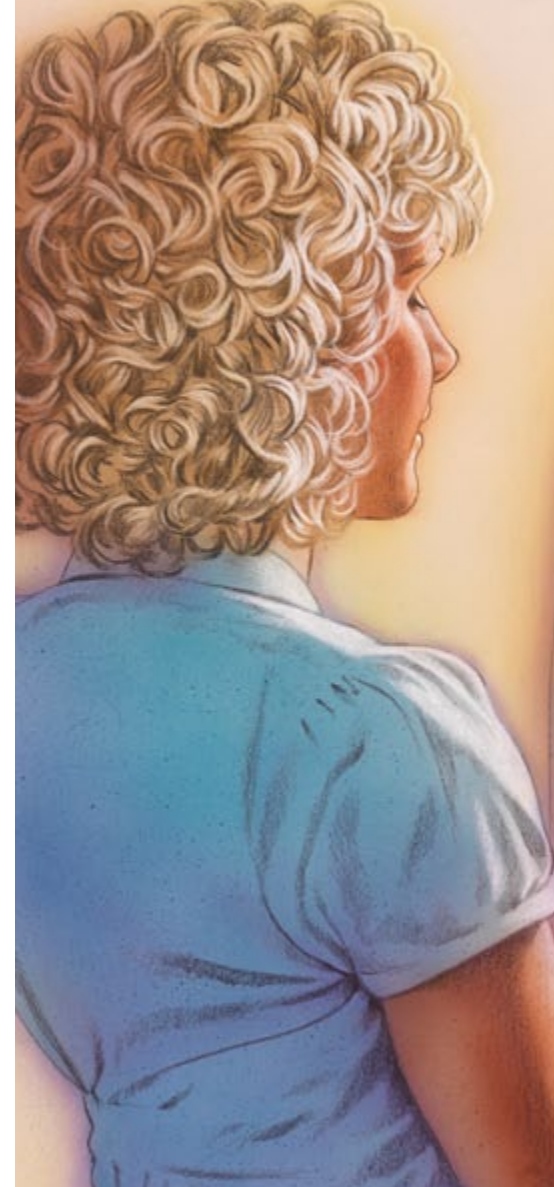
*When I received a new calling, I was stunned.
“Can I do that?” I asked myself.*

About seven years ago, when I was 29, I moved to Utah from Oregon, USA. After weighing my options, I decided to attend my local family ward, thinking I needed a change from the singles wards I had attended.

My parents raised me to always accept Church callings, so I made an appointment with the bishop to present myself as someone who wanted to be put to work. It wasn't long before I found myself teaching the five-year-olds in Primary, which I enjoyed. Five months later the bishop called me to be Primary president. I was stunned. “Can I do that?” I asked myself.

Being single and childless made me wonder if I was qualified to serve in that capacity. In my past experience with family wards, Primary presidents were happily married, accomplished, and devoted mothers. Remembering what my parents had taught me, however, I accepted the new assignment. The bishop truly took to heart the mandate that bishops are to “find meaningful callings for all young single adults.”¹ The calling may have been a little more meaningful than I was expecting, but I was grateful for it.

As I served in my new calling, I experienced many sweet, funny, and



inspiring moments with the children. One year, during Christmastime, we reenacted the Nativity for a special sharing time. We sang songs. We furnished robes and towel headdresses for the shepherds and for Joseph. We had tinsel garlands for the angels' heads. We made cardboard and foil-covered crowns for the Wise Men.

As we reenacted the Christmas story and sang the sacred songs of the season, I noticed the beautiful young girl who was portraying Mary. Her example of reverence and gentleness as she knelt, quietly holding the doll that represented the baby Jesus, touched my heart. The spirit of



that moment made me thankful to a loving Heavenly Father for our Savior and helped strengthen my testimony of His profound and loving mission. It also made me thankful for the tremendous blessing I had received in being called to serve and for an inspired bishop who helped to make that service possible.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, we read, “Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work” (D&C 4:3). Though this verse is usually associated with missionary work, I like to think that it can refer to any form of gospel-based service.

Regardless of marital or social

status, each of us is first and foremost a child of a loving Heavenly Father, who wants us to grow, belong, develop our talents, serve one another, and help one another return to Him.

The acceptance and love I felt in that ward was instantaneous and remains in my heart to this day. My desire to serve was recognized and utilized, many people reached out and welcomed me, and Heavenly Father truly blessed me. Because of kind and attentive leaders, I was blessed to teach and learn from some of His most wonderful children. ■

NOTE

1. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 16.3.3.



LOVING ATTENTION

“Although many single adult members are well-adjusted to life and its problems, they still need loving attention from the Church and its members to reaffirm their usefulness and the love that God has for each of them.”

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “Welcoming Every Single One,” *Liahona*, Aug. 2007, 4; *Ensign*, Aug. 2007, 6.



THE ROAD TO the Temple

*Although members have taken different paths,
Latter-day Saints in Ukraine are finding that all roads
of righteousness lead to the temple.*

By Chad E. Phares

Church Magazines

The predawn drive along Kiltseva Road in Kyiv, Ukraine, presents travelers with a relatively quiet path to the Kyiv Ukraine Temple. Only a few sets of headlights shine through the morning fog as vehicles weave around a smattering of small potholes.

The glow of the temple ahead serves as a beacon, providing a guiding light that shows those traveling to the temple exactly where they need to go.

While some have been blessed to follow this serene path to the temple since it was dedicated in August 2010, others can attest that their paths to the temple were not quite as tranquil.

As morning breaks and the sun peaks over the horizon, cars and buses pour onto Kiltseva Road. Now flooded with vehicles, the once-serene path becomes a noisy parking lot.

Knowing that the traffic is an expected part of the drive, many temple goers stay on the

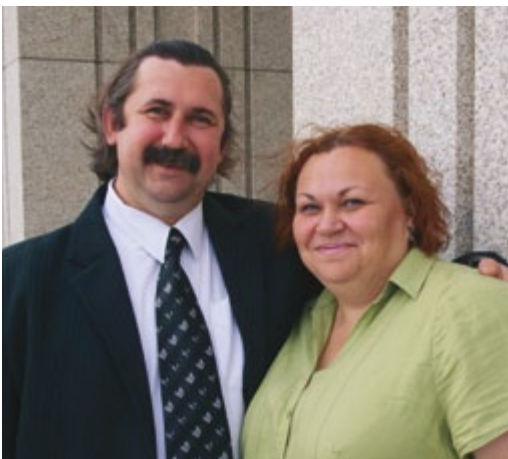
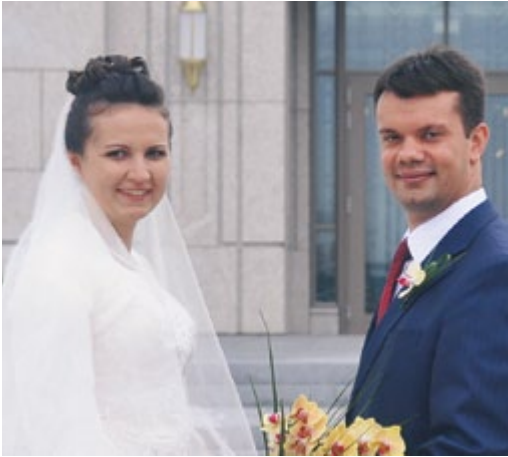
road, patiently moving a few feet at a time before rolling to another stop. The temple remains the destination, but the drive is slow.

Others choose different routes. Behind the temple is a collection of dirt roads and back streets. The way is not clearly marked, and drivers can easily get turned around. However, if the driver looks up, he or she can see the temple spire, once again serving as a guide, inviting all to come to the temple.

The spiritual paths members in Ukraine have taken to get to the Lord's house are not unlike the roads that surround the temple.

While some young members have been blessed to grow up in the Church and now are able to attend the Kyiv Ukraine Temple to do their own ordinance work, many others have driven their way through heavy spiritual traffic to get there.

The temple, announced in 1998 by President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008),



From top: *Asiya and Nikolai Chemezov were sealed in the Kyiv Ukraine Temple three days after it was dedicated. Petr and Adalina Mikhailenko are grateful their granddaughter, Masha, can look forward to attending the temple in her homeland. Andrei and Valentina Dudka visited the temple site often as the temple was being built.*

was completed in 2010. During those 12 years, many Kyiv Ukraine Stake members stayed on the narrow—albeit seemingly slow—path, patiently waiting for the temple to be completed. Others took different paths, temporarily losing sight of their temple goals.

Although the spiritual paths members are taking to get to the temple differ, faithful members in Ukraine are finding that all roads of righteousness lead them back to the temple.

The Straight Path

Many young adult members in Eastern Europe were led to the gospel at a young age. This early gospel knowledge has allowed them not only to cultivate testimonies from their youth but also to build a strong resolve to be married in the temple.

Both Nikolai Chemezov and his wife, Asiya, of the Kharkivs'kyi Ward, were introduced to the gospel in their youth—Nikolai as an eight-year-old and Asiya as a teenager.

“Ever since I was baptized, I knew that Heavenly Father’s plan was the path of exaltation,” Brother Chemezov says. “The Church’s teachings on the divine mission of the family have always been important to me.”

Sister Chemezova also realized the importance of eternal families at a young age. “When I attended church as a young woman, I was taught how important it is to enter into sacred temple covenants,” she says. “I always dreamed of a temple marriage, and I always tried to be worthy of being able to be married in the temple.”

The couple began dating in 2009. As love blossomed and conversations began to turn toward marriage, the two already knew what would be their next step. “When they announced that the Kyiv Temple would be dedicated in August 2010, we decided we would be sealed there,” Sister Chemezova says.

“It’s good we didn’t have to wait too long,” Brother Chemezov adds.

The couple was sealed in marriage on September 1, 2010.

“It was the most wonderful day of my life,” Brother Chemezov says. “I felt blessed to take the hand of my dear Asiya and take her to the house of the Lord. It is safe to say that on that day my dream came true—the dream of creating an eternal family.”

The Long Way

Although the path to eternal marriage has been just as straight for Vynohradars'kyi Ward members Petr and Adalina Mikhailenko, the road has been much longer. The Mikhailenkos were among the first families

to join the Church in Ukraine, having been baptized in 1993—just two years after the first branch was established in Kyiv.

Despite this, distance from a temple and other factors kept the couple from being sealed for many years. Undeterred, they remained committed to each other and to their dream of an eternal marriage.

“I waited patiently for the temple,” Brother Mikhailenko says. “There was never a thought to leave the Church. The path has always been clear.”

After President Thomas S. Monson dedicated the temple in August 2010, the couple’s eagerness to be sealed couldn’t be contained. “We came so early on the day we were to be sealed that the temple was not open yet,” Sister Mikhailenko says.

The couple wasn’t alone. Many fellow ward members came to the temple that day as well, excited to share in the Mikhailenkos’ joy.

“The sealing was wonderful,” Sister Mikhailenko says. “There was a feeling like you never really loved your spouse like you love him at that moment.”

The feeling of love has persisted since that day. “There is an absolute difference in our relationship,” Brother Mikhailenko says. “We have been married for a long time, but there is now a different feeling. We want to do more for each other, and we do it with more love.”

Back on the Path

Andrei and Valentina Dudka of the Vynohradars’kyi Ward were introduced to the gospel by neighbors in 2003. After meeting for several weeks with missionaries, the couple decided to join the Church.

Although the Dudkas were excited to learn gospel truths such as the need for latter-day temples and the potential of having an eternal family, they gradually slipped into inactivity. “We just found reasons not to go to church,” Sister Dudka says. “We let things come up—like we were just too tired or there was

The Kyiv Ukraine Temple, the Church’s 134th operating temple, serves members in nine countries.

a show on TV we wanted to watch.”

The Dudkas’ lack of activity adversely affected their happiness. “We started to see a real difference between Church life and worldly life after we left the Church,” Brother Dudka says. “We weren’t happy.”

After about four months of not attending church, Sister Dudka reached her breaking point. “A certain Sunday came, and I said, ‘If I don’t go today, I might not survive,’” she says. “I was like a person who had gone days without water. I needed that water.”

After returning to activity, Sister Dudka patiently prayed for and encouraged her husband to come back to church with her. About half a year after she returned to church, so did her husband.

“My wife’s prayers affected me,” Brother Dudka says. “I realized that as a Melchizedek Priesthood holder, I had the responsibility to be an active member. I recognized that without God, I could not do anything.”

After the Dudkas returned to the Church, their thoughts returned to the saving ordinances of the temple. The couple joined with other Ukrainian Latter-day Saints in rejoicing in the temple groundbreaking in 2007.

“After they started building the temple, we would often come by and just look at the work being done,” Brother Dudka says.

“I jumped so high when I saw them lay the first stone,” Sister Dudka adds.

When the angel Moroni figure was placed on top of the temple, there was a lot of hugging and tears among the Saints and particularly among the Dudkas.

“When they finally finished building the temple, there was such relief that we knew we were worthy to enter,” Brother Dudka says.

The Dudkas say being sealed in the temple has built in them a stronger eternal perspective on life. “You understand that your family is no longer just you and your husband—now the Lord is part of it too,” Sister Dudka says. “We now look at each other with eternal eyes.” ■

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE PERPETUAL EDUCATION FUND

The Key to Opportunity



A decade after President Gordon B. Hinckley announced the Perpetual Education Fund, the initiative and its participants are thriving.

By Rebekah Atkin
Church Magazines

In 1850, just three years after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, President Brigham Young (1801–77) began establishing academies and universities to educate Latter-day Saints. Every prophet of this dispensation has encouraged the education of Church members.

Among them was President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), who introduced the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF), patterned after another of Brigham Young’s 19th-century initiatives, the Perpetual Emigration Fund. This new educational fund would become, in the words of President Thomas S. Monson, one of the hallmarks of President Hinckley’s administration.¹ President Hinckley had seen poverty and lack of education and training prevent many young adults in the Church from achieving their potential. He sought the Lord for answers.

In general conference on March 31, 2001, President Hinckley announced his vision for the program. He conceded that it was a “bold initiative” but held that “education is the key to opportunity.”² President Hinckley invited all who wished to contribute to do so, and the program was underway.

Now, 10 years later, contributions large and small from donors worldwide have allowed the initiative—and its participants—to thrive. Elder John K. Carmack, emeritus member of the Seventy and Executive Director of PEF, says it is “rescuing the Saints from the curse of poverty.” It has been successful in that rescue, says Rex Allen, volunteer director of training and communications for PEF, because it is established on eternal principles and comes with prophetic promises that have “an impact more far-reaching than any of us understand.”

In the decade since its inception, the Perpetual Education Fund has improved the lives of some 50,000 participants in 51 countries, like Kevin Moore of the West Indies and participants from Peru (left).



2001

CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY YEAR

2011



PEF PARTICIPANTS BY THE NUMBERS

The Perpetual Education Fund has blessed the lives of over 50,000 participants in 51 countries in the last 10 years. Here are some statistics about these young adults:

- 47 percent are men, 53 percent are women.
- 34 percent are married.
- 80 percent of men are returned missionaries.
- 82 percent work while in school.
- Their average age is 24.5.
- They take 2.6 years on average to complete their education.
- They receive three to four times greater income after education.

A Bold Initiative

As President Hinckley explained in 2001, the fund has been created from monetary donations; the interest generated by the principal is loaned to prospective students.

Young adults interested in participating can approach local priesthood leaders and institute directors. With their endorsement, these “ambitious young men and women,” many of them returned missionaries, receive loans to attend school in their own communities.³ While still in school, they begin repaying the loan, enabling other students to use the fund too.

In the decade since its inception, the program has improved the lives of some 50,000 participants in over 50 countries, helping them to “rise out of the poverty they and generations before them have known,” as President Hinckley said it would.⁴

Brother Allen describes PEF this way: “The prophet did something remarkable that day. Long ago, Moses stretched his staff over the Red Sea and the waters divided. President Hinckley mirrored this same faith when he figuratively held his prophetic mantle over the dark sea of poverty and initiated PEF.”

Principles

The Perpetual Education Fund is built on a foundation of gospel principles—faith and hope in Jesus Christ, education, work, sacrifice, self-reliance, integrity, and service. PEF participants and graduates worldwide are implementing these principles in their lives.

Carolina Tello Vargas, a graduate from Colombia, says PEF was “a ray of hope” and evidence of the help of Heavenly Father, who “is guiding [her] and opening the way to progress.”

She understands the importance of education and the work and sacrifice it takes. Before she participated in PEF, Carolina worked several jobs and sold all of her jewelry so she could study law. Her family made sacrifices as well.

“I knew that in order to study I should make sacrifices,” Carolina explains. “I was willing to do it so that in the future I would have better job opportunities.”

But then family challenges arose during her last year of school, and she was unable to pay tuition. She received a PEF loan and used it to successfully complete her degree.

Shirley Mwelase of South Africa exemplifies these principles as well. She used a PEF loan to finish a computer programming course and, after getting a job at an insurance company, quickly paid off the remainder of her loan, helping her feel “reliable and trustworthy.”

Shirley explains, “A better-paying job meant a better quality of life. It meant I could help out my parents and family, and the skills and refinement I have since acquired from working have helped me greatly to be of better service in all my Church callings.”

Working as a programmer, she has accomplished much. She says, “I feel that if it were not for my studies and my constant participation at church, I would not have had a job, nor would I have been able to achieve any of these good things.”

Promises and Blessings

When President Hinckley announced the Perpetual Education Fund, he promised it would bring blessings to individuals, to their families and communities, and to the entire Church through opportunities



10 FRUITS OF THE FIRST 10 YEARS

Elder John K. Carmack, Executive Director of PEF, says the fund has produced these fruits:

1. Building self-reliance and integrity: fulfilling obligations and providing for families.
2. Furthering eternal progression: gaining intelligence in this life that will be an advantage in the next (see D&C 130:18–19).
3. Building capable leaders: finding better jobs that allow time for Church service.
4. Opening opportunities through education: qualifying for jobs that require certain training and skills.
5. Enriching lives: broadening understanding and opening minds.
6. Encouraging the spirit of the law of consecration: inviting all to contribute, coming closer to being one (see D&C 38:27).
7. Helping care for the poor: fulfilling a key obligation of the Church (see D&C 81:5; 83:6).
8. Building stronger families: breaking out of the cycle of poverty.
9. Building traditions of excellence: implementing gospel principles.
10. Following the Savior's example of sacrifice: giving what we have to help others.



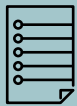
for employment, service, and leadership.

President Hinckley promised that participants “will be enabled to get good educations that will lift them out of the slough of poverty. . . . They will marry and go forward with skills that will qualify them to earn well and take their places in society where they can make a substantial contribution.”⁵

This promise has been fulfilled for thousands of PEF participants, including Pablo Benitez of Uruguay. Pablo was working 12-hour days at a grocery store, barely scraping together a living, when he decided to change his life. He started attending school, but as the cost of tuition and fees increased, he found he was unable to finance his education alone.

Through PEF he was able to complete a degree in physical education. As a result, he has received several jobs over the years, each one improving his income. He even reports, “I often receive job offers for full-time work

Miriam Erquiza, a returned missionary from the Philippines, was hired at a travel agency; the job's hours allowed her to serve as Young Women president and as an institute teacher.



HOW TO PARTICIPATE

PEF has outlined a five-step process for those who live in approved areas to participate in the program. For more information about the process or qualifications, visit pef.lds.org. To get started, talk to your local priesthood leader or institute director.

Step 1: Dream—Learn about the PEF program and availability in your area and attend your stake education and employment fireside.

Step 2: Plan and qualify—Attend the Planning for Success workshop at your institute and seek the endorsement and counsel of your priesthood leaders.

Step 3: Apply—Complete the PEF application online, based on what you learn in the Planning for Success workshop.

Step 4: Commit—If approved, participate in the PEF loan interview, where you agree to fulfill your commitments.

Step 5: Study, graduate, improve work, and repay the loan—Exercise your faith and demonstrate effort, integrity, commitment, and self-reliance; work hard to fulfill your dreams.



or substituting for others that I cannot accept because I do not have enough time. And all of this is thanks to the PEF and to the chances that opened up to me because of my schooling.”

Because of opportunities gained through education, Pablo can support his family while serving and building his community as a teacher.

Working long hours to barely earn enough to pay living expenses and tithing can make service in the Church a great challenge, says Brother Allen. This is a struggle for many members throughout the world, but President Hinckley made this promise about PEF participants: “They will become leaders in this great work in their native lands. They will pay their tithes and offerings, which will make it possible for the Church to expand its work across the world.”⁶

Many participants are finding that the education gained through PEF leads to

Vanderlei Lira of Brazil served as a branch president for six years while working as a laborer. After furthering his education thanks to a PEF loan, he found new work with an increased salary. His stake president describes him as “a giant liberated by opportunity.”

better jobs with hours that allow them more time to serve in the Church. Miriam Erquiza, a returned missionary from the Philippines, completed a two-year web design program and, through “mighty prayer,” obtained a job at a travel agency. This position allowed her to support her family and find time to serve as Young Women president and as an institute teacher.

Vanderlei Lira of Brazil served for six years as a branch president, helping his branch grow from 18 to 110 active members, while working as a laborer because he lacked education. When PEF was announced, he was able to study occupational safety and find new work, which helped him increase his salary and quickly repay his loan. He continues to serve in the Church today. His stake president describes him as a great leader and father, “a giant liberated by opportunity.”

President Hinckley told members of the Church that the program would succeed because the Church has “the organization . . . and dedicated servants of the Lord” necessary for success.⁷ Indeed, the Perpetual Education Fund is succeeding because it involves the cooperation of participants and local priesthood leaders under the direction of the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and other general Church leaders. The Church’s employment resource centers and



A BRIGHTER FUTURE

“The Perpetual Education Fund . . . breaks the cycle of poverty for our members in many areas of the

world and provides skills and training which qualify young men and young women for gainful employment. This inspired plan has kindled the light of hope in the eyes of those who felt doomed to mediocrity but who now have an opportunity for a brighter future.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “They Marked the Path to Follow,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2007, 6; *Ensign*, Oct. 2007, 8.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

The success of the fund depends largely on the generosity and assistance of members and volunteers worldwide. Here are a few ways you might be able to help:

- Volunteer part-time at a local PEF service center.
- Serve full-time with your spouse as a senior missionary couple in the PEF program.
- Donate to the Perpetual Education Fund.

seminaries and institutes are also fully engaged in the endeavor.

The effects of the fund are perpetual not only financially, as the money is repaid and then loaned to other students, but also spiritually and socially as participants, donors, administrators, and countless others are blessed indirectly. “Education is the key,” says Brother Allen, “to open a door in a solid wall, not just for individuals but also for their families and communities.”

Over the last 10 years, technology and experience have helped refine the process for participants and facilitators, but the Perpetual Education Fund still seeks to fulfill the prophetic vision established for it. This “bold initiative” will remain a prophetic endeavor. President Monson continues the work of the fund, which, he says, will “go far into the future.”⁸ ■

NOTES

1. See “16th President Fields Questions from Media,” *Church News*, Feb. 9, 2008, 15.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Perpetual Education Fund,” *Liahona*, July 2001, 62, 67; *Ensign*, May 2001, 52, 53.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Liahona*, July 2001, 62; *Ensign*, May 2001, 52.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Liahona*, July 2001, 62; *Ensign*, May 2001, 52.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Church Goes Forward,” *Liahona*, July 2002, 6; *Ensign*, May 2002, 6–7.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Reaching Down to Lift Another,” *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 62; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 53–54.
7. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Liahona*, July 2001, 67; *Ensign*, May 2001, 53.
8. Thomas S. Monson, in “16th President Fields Questions from Media,” *Church News*, Feb. 9, 2008, 15.

Visit pef.lds.org to read more stories from PEF participants and to learn how to get involved.



*Losing our way is easy if our
daily decisions don't connect to
our eternal destination.*

LOST & FOUND



By Adam C. Olson

Church Magazines

Shortly before turning 30, Roberta Tuilimu realized she wasn't happy. She had three beautiful children, and she loved their father, Daniel Nepia, but Roberta and Daniel weren't married. Daniel wasn't a member of the Church, and it had been a long time since Roberta had attended regularly.

She was a long way from the temple marriage she had always dreamed of as a young girl who went to church every week with her parents in Auckland, New Zealand. But turning her back on her eternal goals wasn't a one-time decision; it had been a slow turn completed gradually through little decisions she made each day.

“I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick” (Ezekiel 34:16).

Decisions Disconnected

For Roberta one decision clearly sticks out as the moment she first stepped off the gospel path, though a number of other choices had likely brought her to that point. As a teenager Roberta skipped going to church a couple of weeks to do homework. “It’s interesting that it can start with something that seemed so small at the time,” she says.

After missing a couple of weeks it was much easier for her not to go the next week. Weeks of only sporadic attendance turned into months. After she turned 18, her friends convinced her to go clubbing late at night on Saturdays, which made it even harder to get to church on Sundays. It also led her to start drinking.

“I knew it wasn’t right, but I thought that I could stop straightaway if I wanted to,” she says. “I tried to justify my decisions.”

She was living a lifestyle incompatible with entering the temple, yet after meeting Daniel, she took him to the Hamilton New Zealand Temple grounds and told him she wanted to be married there.

“I knew that’s where I wanted to go,” she says. But each bad decision seemed to make the next bad decision easier—leading her further from her desired destination. Soon Roberta and Daniel were living together.

“There was a disconnect between what I wanted—what I knew was right—and the decisions I was making,” she says. “I was in the now. I didn’t connect current decisions with where they would take me.”

The Lord Seeks the Lost

As far as she was from where she had intended to go, Roberta was not lost to the Lord. Though Daniel and

Roberta didn’t realize it at the time, the Good Shepherd, who came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), had been seeking after them all along.

The Spirit had been working on Daniel, such as when Roberta had taken him to the temple grounds and when Roberta’s father had blessed their children. Though they had moved several times, with each move they ran into—and occasionally studied with—the missionaries.

Then, after relocating again in 2006, they ran into some old schoolmates, Dan and Lisa Nathan, who were active members of the Church. Daniel and Roberta had just moved into the Nathans’ ward boundaries.

For three weeks Roberta put off Lisa’s invitations to go to church with her. “I didn’t want to have to explain my situation,” she says. “But I decided I wanted my kids in Primary.”

Soon Daniel and Roberta were meeting with the missionaries again. Daniel began attending church, where a good Gospel Principles teacher made a difference. The visiting teachers visited every month. The couple even met Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles during a special devotional.

Roberta sees in their experiences evidence that Heavenly Father had prepared “a whole bunch of good people who helped us.”

Consider Your Ways

Through various experiences and people, Heavenly Father had provided Daniel and Roberta opportunities to “consider [their] ways” (Haggai 1:7). But they had to “commit [their] way unto the Lord” (Psalm 37:5) before they could make any progress.



“I knew my ways had not been His ways,” Roberta says (see Isaiah 55:8–9), “but I hadn’t known how to connect the two.”

The turning point came when the missionaries asked Daniel and Roberta to decide where they wanted to go, spiritually speaking, and what they needed to do to get there.

“When we decided in the end that what we wanted was to be where His way leads,” she says, “we started looking at what it would take to follow His way there.”

In the months that followed, Roberta worked to turn her back on the poor decisions in her past and return to the path she had left more than a decade earlier. Just as her turn from the gospel path as a teenager began with small decisions, Roberta’s return to the path began with doing seemingly little things each day.

“When I started trying to do the basics every day—individual and family prayers, reading the scriptures, taking the kids to church, helping others when I can—I could feel Heavenly Father looking after us and hearing our prayers,” Roberta says. “Our family was happier.”

Those little decisions helped strengthen Daniel and Roberta when it came time to make the big decisions. They decided to get married. Then, nearly a year after Daniel and Roberta started meeting with the missionaries, their desire to be together with their family forever led Daniel to be baptized.

Finally, after two years of trying to match what they did each day to what they wanted in the future, Daniel and Roberta were sealed in the temple—fulfilling Roberta’s childhood dream.

Live Today for Eternity

As part of Heavenly Father’s plan, Daniel and Roberta have the opportunity to decide each day which way they will choose—theirs or His. The couple is now more conscious of the direction their daily choices will take them.

From personal experience they understand how easy it is to lose their way when daily decisions are made without considering their effect on eternal destinations. But they are also grateful to have learned firsthand that there is a way back.

“I know the Lord loves me and wants me back because He blessed our lives with the people we met along our journey who helped us return,” Roberta says. “He never forgot me during my time away from the Church.”

Thanks to the love—and the atoning sacrifice—of the Good Shepherd, “the wicked [can] forsake his way, and . . . return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him . . . , for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

Now the Nepias are trying to stay focused on where they want to be. “When you realize there is more to this life than what’s *now*,” Daniel says, “it changes your choices.” ■



DECISIONS DETERMINE DESTINY

“It has been said by one, years ago, that history turns on small hinges, and so do people’s lives. Our lives will depend upon the decisions which we make—for decisions determine destiny.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Decisions Determine Destiny,” *New Era*, Nov. 1979, 4.



יהושע בן נצרתי
מלך היהודים
JESUS NAZARENUS
REX
IUDAEORUM

THE Condensation OF Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ descended below all things that we might receive hope and joy in this life and exaltation in the next.

By David L. Frischknecht

Curriculum Department

During the time my family and I lived in Europe, we visited the Frederiksborg Castle in Denmark, where many of the Carl Bloch paintings of the Savior are displayed. The paintings are crowded into a small room, sometimes called the King's Oratory. There is a glass partition on the floor in front of the altar.

As we viewed the paintings, our family members took turns explaining what was happening in each one. We progressed from the birth of the Lord through His temptation by the devil and His preaching and healing. When we got to the Crucifixion I said, "And this is when He died."

The two youngest children insisted, "No, He's alive." I stooped down to ask them to use their quiet voices and to explain more about the Crucifixion. That's when I saw what they were seeing. From their angle, we could see on the glass partition the reflection of one painting superimposed on another painting. One was the painting of the Lord on the cross, and the other was the painting of His Resurrection. In both paintings His arms are stretched out, in the one on the cross and in the other as He is leaving the tomb. When I first saw the paintings imposed one

on the other, it startled me. In that moment the images seemed to match perfectly. It seemed as if I were looking at the Savior's spirit leaving His body on the cross.

Upon closer inspection I discovered the illusion, then enjoyed looking at each painting separately—*The Crucifixion* and *The Resurrection*. But the memory of the two paintings superimposed is imprinted on my mind. In a single view, they encapsulated the Lord's condescension and His transcendent glory. And in one moment, the reality of the Crucifixion and of the Resurrection was confirmed by the Spirit in my heart and soul.

This experience has come to my mind over the years when I have studied and pondered three aspects of the Lord's condescension: the reality of His condescension, the breadth and totality of His condescension, and the continuing blessing of His condescension for us today.

The Reality of the Condescension

The condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ generally refers to His leaving His high and holy station in heaven and coming to live as a man on earth to accomplish the Atonement and

Resurrection. Jesus came to live where mankind lives and as mankind lives so He could raise mankind to live where the Father lives and as the Father lives. Because He descended to earth to lift us to heaven, each one of us can have the “perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20) of progressing into the kingdom and presence of God.

President John Taylor (1808–77) said of the condescension of Christ, “It was further necessary that He should descend below all things, in order that He might raise others above all things; for if He could not raise Himself and be exalted through those principles brought about by the atonement, He could not raise others; He could not do for others what He could not do for Himself.”¹

Nephi’s vision may be the best scriptural summary of the Lord’s condescension, to the degree a summary is possible (see 1 Nephi 11:14–33). His description of the condescension includes the Redeemer’s coming to earth; His being baptized by John; the Holy Ghost descending upon Him; His going forth among the people with great power; their casting Him out from among them; His calling of twelve apostles; His providing for angels to come down from heaven to minister unto the children of men; His healing the sick and afflicted with all manner of diseases; His casting out of devils and unclean spirits; and His being judged by the people, lifted up upon a cross, and slain for the sins of the world.

The Lord’s coming to earth was essential to the Father’s plan. There had to be a Savior, a Redeemer, a Great Mediator. Jesus told the Father, “Send me” (Abraham 3:27) because He loved God our Eternal Father and because He loved us. He explained to the Nephites, “I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13).

The Breadth of the Condescension

The wonder of the Lord’s condescension is most meaningful when we contemplate how far He descended. The irony of the Jews’ rejection of Him pierces more deeply when we contemplate who He had been for them before He came to earth.

For example, before the Lord Omnipotent came to earth, He was known as “the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Mosiah 3:8; Helaman 14:12). Contrast that with the Jews’ query, “Is not this the carpenter?” (Mark 6:3). The Creator of all things became a carpenter.

Similarly, consider the contrast between “Shepherd” and “Lamb.” In the Old Testament the Lord was called the “Shepherd of Israel” (Psalm 80:1). Isaiah described Him as the One who gathers His lambs with His arm (see Isaiah 40:11). In His earthly life, that lamb-gathering Shepherd became God’s Lamb, sacrificed for Israel and for the whole world (see John 1:36).

Consider this difference. Before Jesus came to earth He was called “the Father of heaven and earth” (Mosiah 3:8). On earth He was mistaken as “the son of Joseph” (John 6:42).

When the Israelites were finally ready to enter the promised land, it was Jehovah who stopped the River Jordan and made it stand in its place so His people could cross on dry ground (see Joshua 3). Contrast His power in performing that miracle with His humility when, as Jesus of Nazareth, He was immersed by John in the same River Jordan (see Matthew 3:13–17).

In ancient Israel, Jehovah spared thousands and thousands of firstborn sons on the night of the Passover (see Exodus 12). When He came to earth in the flesh, Jesus rased from the dead the only son of a widow (see Luke 7:12–15).

The Lord saved thousands. The Lord saved one.

For those of us who live after the Savior’s life and suffering on earth, the hymn “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth” (no. 196) reminds us that Jesus came to earth in humble circumstances but will return one day in power and glory:

*Jesus, once of humble birth,
Now in glory comes to earth.*

But the Lord’s faithful followers who lived before His life on earth could have sung of His condescension with the same hymn, only reversing the order of the concepts in each couplet:

*Once in glory o'er all the earth;
Now He comes of humble birth.
Once in heaven did He reign,
Now He suffers grief and pain.*

*Once, the Lord, the great I Am;
Now a meek and lowly Lamb.
Once His chariot was the cloud;
Now upon the cross He bows.*

*Once in glory He appeared;
Now He groans in blood and tears.
Once their King He was known;
Now rejected by His own.*

*Once exalted to a throne;
Now forsaken, left alone.
Once the great Anointed Heir;
Now all things He meekly bears.²*

And each Christmas we sing in the last verse of "Silent Night":

*Jesus, Lord, at thy birth; Jesus, Lord, at
thy birth.³*

But we would be correct, too, if we sang, "Jesus, Lord *before* Thy birth." Long before.

Consider the Psalmist's attempt to describe how far the Lord descended:

"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

"Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high,

"Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

"That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people" (Psalm 113:4–8).

The Lord Omnipotent, who reigneth, who was and is from all eternity to all eternity,



Isaiah described Him as the One who gathers His lambs with His arm. In His earthly life, that lamb-gathering Shepherd became God's Lamb, sacrificed for Israel and for the whole world.



He was and is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Holy and Only Begotten Son of the Living God. He was with the Father from the beginning. He is in the Father and the Father in Him; and in Him has the Father glorified His name.

descends from His most lofty position to the very lowliest—raising the poor out of the dust and the needy out of the dunghill.

He descended below all, that all might be raised with Him and the Father.

The Lord Still Condescends to Lift Us

Another aspect of the Lord's condescension that helps us exercise faith in Him is this: His mercy, grace, loving-kindness, and long-suffering bless us today, tomorrow, and forever. Because He experienced the condescension of mortality, He knows how to bless and succor us. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17–18; see also Alma 7:11–13).

Can we have faith enough in Him and in the inclusiveness of His love to believe He hears and answers and helps us, even us, in our lowly, dingy, feeble state? That He still reaches to those who are spiritually in-the-dust poor and spiritually dunghill-filthy?

The Lord continues to do for mankind the things He did during His earthly ministry that were part of His condescension. He, Himself—or by angels or authorized servants on earth—preaches the gospel, administers ordinances, performs miracles, and heals the afflictions of people today. He continues to be mindful of us. He is mindful of us as a people. But most miraculously He is still mindful of us individually. In some marvelous way, and though He is not physically

present with each of us, He still feels the tug on the hem of His garment from a humble handmaiden in the midst of a multitude. He still hears the cry of the blind, perceives the longing of the sincere publican, calls common men to be His servants, tells the repentant sinner to go and sin no more. He still pleads our cause universally and individually before the Father. He still calls us by name and invites us to arise and come forth unto Him. He still condescends from His high and holy place to lift us.

The gift of His grace, His love, and His condescension blesses us all. Many of us have felt that divine strength and support in our lives. I have felt it many times, but perhaps none more so than in the following experience.

One day during my service as bishop, I felt burdened, even overwhelmed, by the troubles and trials of the ward members. It seemed that every single one was suffering. In every home there was some kind of pain, heartache, sorrow, or worry. I knelt to pray, but as the sum of all the troubles accumulated in my mind, I sank from an upright kneeling position to a position of being stooped over, all the way to the floor.

In my prayer I poured out my soul, saying things like this (names have been changed):

“Father, Mary is expecting a baby out of wedlock. She is no more than a girl herself. What will she do? How can she do it?”

“And her mother,” I cried. “Mary’s mother is heartbroken and devastated. How will she go on?”

The name and face of another ward member came to mind. “What about Roger? He has multiple sclerosis. The doctors say he is going to die. What will his wife and sons ever do?”

“And in the Smiths’ home. Their son is so crippled. They have taken care of him night and day for 35 years. How can they go on?”

And there were others. In every case, the answer came clearly and powerfully that God was very aware of each individual. He knew the unwed teen. He knew her mother. He had a plan for the husband with multiple

sclerosis and for his wife and sons. And for 35 years, night and day, the Lord had watched over the crippled son and his family.

As each person appeared in my mind, the undeniable witness came, in words too sacred to repeat, that the great plan of happiness and the Atonement were active and efficacious in each life. One by one the burdens of these brothers and sisters were lifted from my soul. The Holy Spirit imparted feelings of comfort and reassurance as if to say, “Bishop, let the Lord take these burdens. Rise up. Do the best you can. Things will work out for these people. You’ll be fine, too. Go be their bishop. The Lord will be their Savior.”

I discovered that I had returned to an upright kneeling position. Little by little the load *had* been lifted. I knew with a sure conviction that the Savior knew each person. His suffering and death thousands of years ago had atoned for them. But just as certain and much more immediate was the sure knowledge that He bore their present burdens. His love was complete, His power comprehensive, and His intercession current.

Conclusion

May we remember the Lord—who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised to do. Before and after He was a baby in Bethlehem and a carpenter in Nazareth, He was and is the God of Israel and the God of the whole earth. He was and is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Holy and Only Begotten Son of the Living God. He was with the Father from the beginning. He is in the Father and the Father in Him; and in Him has the Father glorified His name (see 3 Nephi 9:15). May we remember and believe that He has all wisdom and all power in heaven and in earth (see Mosiah 4:9). And may we have faith that He yet condescends to help and lift the least and the last, even you, even me. ■

NOTES

1. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (1892), 144.
2. Compare “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth,” *Hymns*, no. 196.
3. *Hymns*, no. 204.



FORGIVENESS AT

Wakayama

By Ferron A. Olson

On September 25, 1945, I awoke in my bunk on the deck of our landing ship, *LST-952*. After the punishment the ocean had given us, I was relieved that we had arrived in Japan. It was World War II, and my U.S. Army Signal Corps unit was assigned to set up newly developed communications for the top command of the Sixth Army in its part of Japan's occupation. I saw a scattering of lights on the mountainside and thought they must be from a few homes. No doubt the Japanese occupants were staring at the hundreds of American ships sailing in to take control of their country.

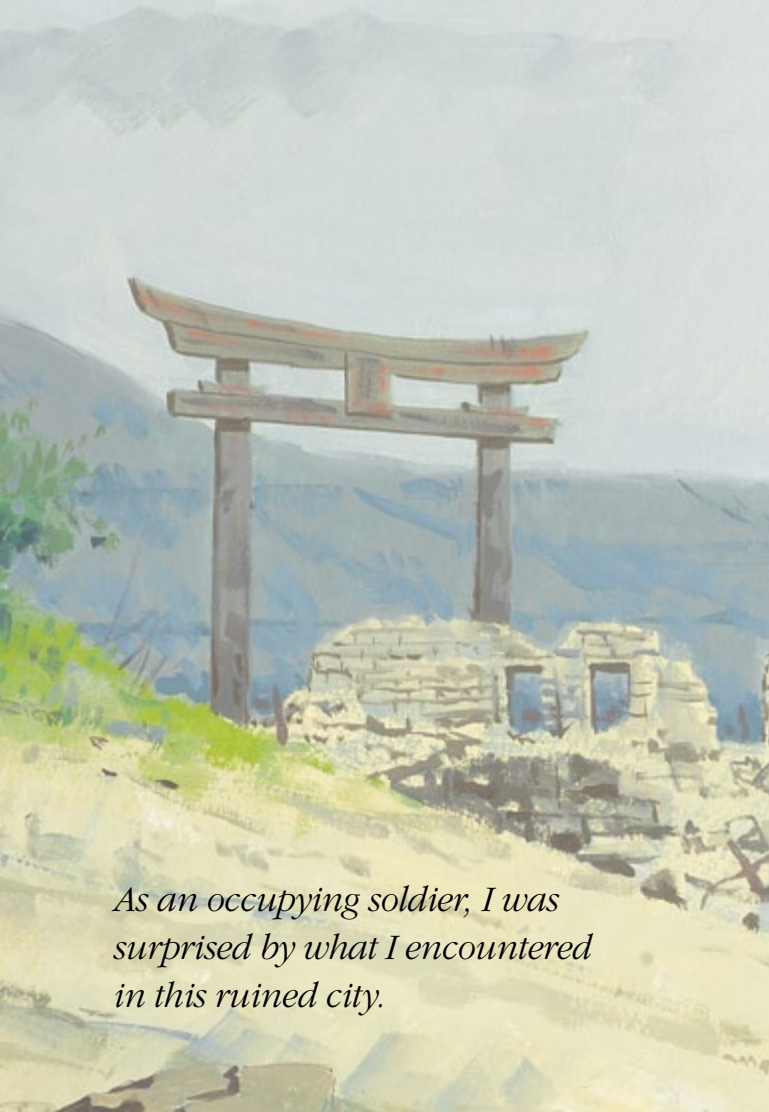
I wondered how I would feel if it were the Japanese army taking control of *my* beloved home. I recalled the things I had learned about their action in this war, starting with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Bitterness swept over me toward them.

Three days later, with our communications running smoothly, some of my buddies and I had the opportunity

to relax. Staff Sergeant Carl Campbell asked John Moard and me if we would like to go with him in a jeep to see Wakayama, a city about the same size as Salt Lake City. With our carbines in our hands, John and I got in the jeep with Carl, who had his gun in a mount on the dashboard. We knew we had to be ready.

Our jeep drove over a slight rise and the city lay there before us. Carl made a sound of amazement as he jerked the jeep to an abrupt stop. "Did we do that to them?" he blurted out.

We just sat there, the throbbing of the little jeep's motor the only sound we could hear. John broke the silence as he said with a hushed voice, "I've heard about firebombing, but I had no idea it left this—just ashes." As we scanned the scene, we realized that nothing but concrete or stone remained, and even then, there wasn't much of that. Metal was twisted and scorched. All of it had happened in a single day: July 9.



As an occupying soldier, I was surprised by what I encountered in this ruined city.

Carl asked, “Where are the people? I see a few, but thousands lived here.”

“Probably dead,” John answered.

As silence settled over us, I envisioned what had happened in this once-beautiful valley. Wave after wave of bombers had swooped over the mountains, carpeting the city with firebombs. I shuddered as I said, “The Japanese must really hate us.”

As we slowly moved through the ashes, John pointed and said, “Look. There are a few buildings still standing. And people have started rebuilding.” As our jeep neared them, men, women, and children stopped what they were doing, smiled, and waved at us. I sat there stone-faced and muttered, “Who is putting them up to this? Why are they pretending to welcome us?”

Carl stopped the jeep in front of a building that the firebombing had missed. We thought it might be a shrine or a Buddhist temple. Suddenly the door opened and some

Japanese men and women stepped out. With friendly smiles, they beckoned us to enter.

We jumped out of the jeep with carbines hung over our shoulders. A lady held the door open for us. After removing our shoes and hats, we entered. We were amazed at the beauty inside—rich cloths and beautiful ornamentation. Everyone welcomed us humbly and sincerely, apparently pleased by our respect for their building. One woman gave each of us a trinket.

As I looked into their eyes, their spirits touched mine, and I felt an amazing change in my feelings toward them. My bitterness melted and I realized that these people accepted me as an individual. They honored me even though my country had heaped destruction on them and their friends and families.

I placed a 10 yen note in the temple’s collection plate. Carl and John did the same as we reverently left the building. The people gave us friendly bows, which we awkwardly returned along with smiles of respect.

Once in the jeep, we felt awkward holding our carbines, so we placed them on the floor. Silently we drove away, and I thought about what had happened in that shrine and the amazing transformation I felt toward the people there.

Then I thought about the Japanese people and how friendly they had seemed toward us; I realized that their waves and those big smiles were sincere. They weren’t putting on a front. Even after all that the war had done to them, they felt good toward me. Shame swept over me as I remembered my earlier rude thoughts. As I reflected further, I decided that if they could forgive me, an American soldier, in spite of what the war had done to them, then I could do the same and love these sweet Japanese people as individuals.

I pondered all that had happened and remembered that all people are God’s children. He loves all of us. I then recalled my recent reading of the scriptures: forgiveness is a fundamental element of the gospel. I must forgive others their trespasses for Heavenly Father to forgive me mine (see 3 Nephi 13:14–15). I really needed that forgiveness, because I had not loved these people before I entered their shrine. I did now. A sweet sense of peace swept over me. I smiled and waved to another group of Japanese as we passed by. ■

Questions and Answers



How do I achieve balance in my life given all the demands on my time?

When I was serving as the Relief Society president in my singles ward, I felt overwhelmed with all of my responsibilities. I went to a leadership training meeting, admittedly with the wrong attitude. I anticipated being told that there was something more I needed to do. I wasn't sure I could listen to that message because I honestly didn't feel that I could do any more.

The message of the visiting authority that day was very different from what I had expected. He said he wasn't there to tell us one more thing that we needed to do; he was there to tell us to find one *less* thing to do. He encouraged us to look at where we were spending our time and decide which activities were not beneficial. He

told us to cut these things out of our lives and free ourselves up for more meaningful and important things.

A weight was instantly lifted from my shoulders. I felt the Lord was watching over me with His love and knew my thoughts and feelings. I realized that He was aware of the pressures I was under, and to Him, my doing my best was enough.

Alicia Doure, Utah, USA

Years ago, I heard this quote from President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994): “When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities.”¹

I decided to put it to the test. I started to get up before our children to spend time in the scriptures and in prayer. I noticed that I was able to accomplish more during the day. I had more patience and was more able to keep calm. It was also easier for me to recognize the promptings of the Spirit.

My husband and I felt that it was important for our children to be at home in the evenings and that they didn’t need to be running from one activity to another. We told each of them they could be involved in one sport or music activity per year, and they could pick which one. This helped us keep some balance in our family life and spend time at home together.

Carrie Norman, Utah, USA

We face a lot of demands on our time. It is essential that we constantly evaluate how we are using our time. We want to be sure that the activities we choose will help us be obedient to Heavenly Father’s counsel so we can reach our greatest potential and ultimately inherit eternal life.



At times it may be necessary to say no to some obligations. We are counseled not to “run faster than [we have] strength” (Mosiah 4:27). We may want simultaneously to have immaculate homes, hold a position in the school’s parent-teacher organization, spend hours working on our family history, and train for triathlons. However, “to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). It is important that we have the courage to forgo commitments that do not make us better.

As difficult as it can be to say no, we can say yes to a lot of worthwhile things. As we do so, our Heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ will be pleased that we are choosing to use our gift of time wisely.

Chandice A. Richards, Ohio, USA

I am a doctoral student and a research assistant in graduate school. I am also a second counselor in a bishopric, a home teacher, and most important, a husband and father. I have learned one key principle in managing my schedule: to have faith in God so He can help me be able to do everything He has asked. It is

I have learned one key principle in managing my schedule: to have faith in God.



I made a promise to Heavenly Father that I would dedicate my time and talents to build up His kingdom.

a simple solution, but it requires constant faith.

Sometimes we may be tempted to give up Church callings or personal spiritual development so we can dedicate all of our time to secular work. When I was a teenager, I made a promise to Heavenly Father that I would dedicate my time and talents to build up His kingdom. I have learned that accepting a calling doesn't mean just accepting the title. It also means accepting the responsibilities.

As I keep my commitments to my Heavenly Father, I see blessings in my work and study. Most of the graduate students I know need to dedicate all of their time to their research to attain success. I have found that even though I am not able to give that kind of time because of my other responsibilities, when I put the Lord first, He blesses me to be able to perform well anyway. I am certain that without His help, I would never be able to do what I need to do.

I know that when I seek first the kingdom of God (see 3 Nephi 13:33), He grants me sufficient strength to take care of everything else. Gary Wong, Hong Kong

I have come to realize that our lives aren't ever perfectly balanced. There will always

be times when one thing is more important than another. Now that I understand this, I no longer feel burdened by not getting everything done. The following strategies help keep me from feeling overwhelmed:

- I write down the things I need to do. The list often is shorter on paper than it feels swimming around in my mind.
- I don't try to get everything done in a single day. I commit myself to only one major project a day. If it's laundry day, that's the project. If I feel I have enough time and energy to get other things done, I do them, but I don't worry if they need to be put off to another day.
- My husband and I work from a job chart. Our children are too young to be included on the chart at this point, but my husband and I use the chart to track daily and weekly household chores. I like this because it helps me realize the things I regularly do. I also appreciate getting help from my husband on jobs that I often don't have time to complete.
- Finally, I have a night for me. On Tuesday nights, my husband enjoys time with our children while I focus on tasks I wouldn't be able to otherwise. I have used that

time to work on homework for a course I'm taking, to write Christmas letters, or to catch up on journal writing. (We also make sure that my husband gets time for his personal projects, too.)

With these strategies and my change of perspective, I have reduced my stress level. I believe that "doing our best" is really feeling our best about what we do.

Rebecca Shaw, Connecticut, USA

Inspired leaders of the Church counsel us to set our priorities based on eternal perspectives.

Elder O. Leslie Stone of the Seventy (1903–86) taught: "Time is one of our most valuable possessions. Use it wisely. Remind yourselves often that things that matter most should not be left to the mercy of things that matter the least."²

Some things I try to do regularly include feasting upon the word of God and offering meaningful prayers, as well as getting appropriate exercise, adequate sleep, and proper nutrition. These things take some time, but they develop a physical and spiritual fitness that allow me to accomplish more with the rest of my day than I can without them.

Kenneth Hurst, Alabama, USA

Balance has been an important focus for me from the time I was a teenager. During my youthful years of competitive wrestling, I quickly learned that five pounds out of balance could lead to surrendered points.

Since then, I've learned that balance includes health (physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional), service (to God, family, and others), and work. The further I go in life, the more I realize I can do nothing in a balanced way unless I follow the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. I find I receive clearer directions from the Holy Ghost through regular prayer, meditation, scripture study, listening to the prophets, and attending Church meetings. I have also found that the Holy Ghost eventually leads me to the temple, where I am taught and empowered by truth.

Imbalance in a wrestler is always exposed by greater opposition; if a wrestler can adapt, he can overcome that opposition. As we face opposition in life, we can choose to overcome or succumb.

Jesus Christ overcame the world (see John 16:33). Our victories are limited, but His grace is sufficient for us if we "humble [ourselves] before [Him] . . . and have faith in [Him]" (Ether 12:27). Through faith, repentance, and obedience to Him, we can overcome all opposition. Our feeble and incomplete attempts at balance can be made whole and complete through Him.

Richard Gieseke, Texas, USA

Editors' note: For more on how students are balancing their time, visit ensign.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Great Commandment—Love the Lord," *Ensign*, May 1988, 4.
2. O. Leslie Stone, "Making Your Marriage Successful," *Ensign*, May 1978, 57.

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Questions & Answers feature will focus on the following question:

When people ask me, "Are you a Mormon?" or "Are you a Latter-day Saint?" I'm happy to respond that I am. I'm just not sure what to say next to engage people in a conversation about the gospel. What are some ways I might respond so that I can positively represent the Church?

If you'd like to contribute your ideas and experiences, please label them "Are you a Latter-day Saint?" and follow the submission guidelines under "Do You Have a Story to Tell?" on the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words and submit them by January 20, 2012.



FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING

"Not long ago, one of my children said, 'Dad, sometimes I wonder if I will ever make it.' The answer I gave to her is the same as I would give to you if you have had similar feelings. Just do the very best you can each day. Do the basic things and, before you realize it, your life will be full of spiritual understanding that will confirm to you that your Heavenly Father loves you. When a person knows this, then life will be full of purpose and meaning, making balance easier to maintain."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Keeping Life's Demands in Balance," *Ensign*, May 1987, 16.



Tithing: A Key to Peace in a Troubled World

While cutting costs everywhere else, these families were blessed because they continued to pay tithing.

By Breanna Olaveson

In a world where many people place great value on wealth, willingly giving a tenth of your income may seem strange. Many may even argue that no one can afford such a sacrifice. But obedience to the Lord's commandments always brings blessings. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, "Those who place their faith in the Lord's promises say, 'I can't afford not to pay tithing.'"¹

Even in financially difficult situations, the Lord's promises remain unchanged. When Church members faithfully pay their tithing, He will "open . . . the windows of heaven, and pour . . . out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). Below, five Church members tell about blessings they received after paying their tithing and other offerings, even when times were hard.

Modern-day Miracles

Samara Anderson of Western Australia says she sees blessings consistently as she and her family faithfully pay their tithing.

"We are considered a low-income family, but only in the eyes of the world," Samara says. "Yet somehow, we are always able to pay the bills. There are food specials when we have run out of groceries, and petrol [gasoline] prices always seem to be lowest when we need to fill our car."

Samara compares these blessings to the miracles recorded in the scriptures.

"Miracles do exist, just like Daniel being saved in the lions' den or Moses parting the Red Sea. I have seen them in my own life," Samara says. "The Red Sea did not open up for me, but the housing market did. I did not survive the lions like Daniel; instead, I survive bills and rates [taxes]. I know that my Heavenly Father watches for all my needs, great or small, and this love from God is the greatest blessing of all."

Unforeseen Help

Shawn McCausland of Florida, USA, joined the Church in 1992 and married shortly thereafter. He and his wife made tithing a priority and saw the blessings. But paying tithing became more challenging when Shawn lost his job.

"My wife and I did odd jobs as I searched for new employment, but each month as we drew up our budget, we could not see how we would make it," Shawn says. "At times it was tempting to use our tithing for bills or groceries, but we trusted in the Lord and submitted the tithing to our bishop instead. And each month the Lord provided for us in ways we had not foreseen, whether through an allotment from the bishops' storehouse, a

timely gift from a relative, or an unexpected refund."

Shawn eventually secured a new job and could again support his growing family. After receiving so many blessings, the McCauslands determined to continue to pay their tithing, increase their fast offering, and seek to be wise stewards of their resources. With their finances again stable, the McCauslands continue to remember the help the Lord gave them in trying times.

Abundant Blessings

The Hopkins family from Texas, USA, learned that blessings from tithing can come as both direct and indirect answers to prayers. The Hopkinses needed expensive medical treatments to have children, and they learned that paying tithing brings blessings that can last forever.

"The cost of the medication was well outside our means," Trish Hopkins says. "We fasted, prayed, and continued to pay a full tithing. That money could have gone toward the medications, but we knew we would be blessed for paying our tithing."

"When the time came to purchase the medications, the Lord made good on His promise of blessings. Though we couldn't explain it, we found we had more money in our bank account than we had thought. We were truly blessed by paying our tithing."

The medications worked, and today the Hopkinses are raising their two children in the gospel. Their desire to have children was realized years ago as they faithfully paid their tithing, but the Hopkinses have continued to see the Lord's hand in their lives.

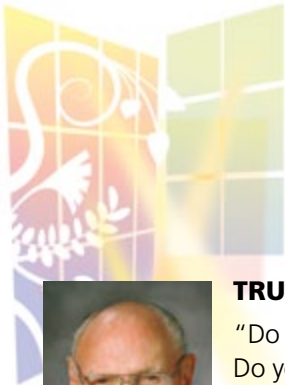
"Over the years, the blessings have come, whether in the form of money for food storage, heating oil during a blizzard, or air conditioning during a heat wave. The Lord has kept His promise, and we have kept our part by paying a tenth of our income," Trish says.

Timely Assistance

Although some blessings do come suddenly, others come quietly. Dan and Rachel Harrison of New Zealand found themselves without a major source of income when

the university student who was boarding with their family decided to leave unexpectedly. They worried about how this might affect them, but their expenses somehow never became unbearable.

“Without the money for board, we knew that we could not afford to pay the rent even though we were living in the cheapest house we could find,” Rachel says. “But we budgeted our money, avoided debt, and always paid a full tithe. To this day, I have not figured out where the extra money came from every week.”



TRUST IN THE LORD

“Do you want the windows of heaven opened to you? Do you wish to receive blessings so great there is not room enough to receive them? Always pay your tithing and leave the outcome in the hands of the Lord.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Earthly Debts, Heavenly Debts,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 41.

The Harrison’s blessings continued to come just as they were needed—even when those needs became urgent. Dan’s student allowance was scheduled to stop just as a new semester began, and the Harrison’s worried they wouldn’t be able to afford necessities.

“At the same time it ran out, he was awarded a scholarship that provided for our rent and food with some left over,” Rachel says. “The Lord’s ways are mysterious, and as we use our finances wisely, I know our needs will be met.”

A Nudge in the Right Direction

Claude and Laura Mikulecky of Texas, USA, didn’t think they could afford to pay tithing. When the Mikuleckys were transferred to Hawaii for Claude’s job, they suddenly faced a higher cost of living without additional income. “We knew we needed

financial help,” Laura says. “We also knew the Lord’s admonitions and promises.”

They had an important decision to make. Although they understood that tithing would bring blessings, they couldn’t imagine how they would have enough money to get by.

“The Lord helped us with our indecision by giving us a nudge in the right direction,” Laura says.

She says that Heavenly Father blessed them as they met with unexpected trials. In the next few months the Mikuleckys faced medical emergencies, car accidents, plumbing problems, surgery, appliance failure, and a burglary (which resulted not only in financial loss but also in the loss of important family history documents). Laura found a job working as a doctor’s secretary, but still each trial brought with it emotional stress and additional financial burdens. So she and Claude made the effort to faithfully pay their tithing.

When they did so, the blessings became obvious. Claude’s surgery was completely paid for by insurance and Laura’s employee discount. Their son David was born. The book of remembrance that was lost in the burglary was returned in good condition. And when the family’s time in Hawaii ended, their home sold at a good price in one day.

“Sometimes the Lord tests us, but He always keeps His promises,” Laura says. “We learned that if we keep the law, the reward is sure.”

The windows of heaven are open today, just as they have always been. And through obedience to the law of tithing, there “shall not be room enough to receive” all the blessings that will come—sometimes in ways we don’t expect (see Malachi 3:10). ■

NOTE

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Tithing,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 34.

The Lamb of God

A Christmas Hymn

Fervently ♩ = 108-116

Words and music by Tom Edward Clark

1. The Lamb of God was born on earth To
2. The an - gels' ti - dings quick - ly spread To
3. A star shines bright to lead the way For
4. We de - mon - strate our love for Him Through

of - fer us sal - va - tion. _____ With
ev - 'ry soul and na - tion. _____ His
faith - ful men to hast - en, _____ In
faith and de - di - ca - tion. _____ Join

joy we ce - le - brate His birth,
life for us He free - ly shed,
search of Him, to kneel and pray,
now, our joy - ful Christ - mas hymn,

Al - le - lu - ia! _____ ia! _____

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PHOTO BY MATT REIER

AS CHRIST COMFORTS US

It was our first Christmas on the North Island of New Zealand—a beautiful and fascinating land. Yet despite the sunshine and the kindness of the Church members, I felt deep pangs of loneliness for my parents and siblings. We had moved from the United States earlier that year, and I felt homesick.

In our new area my husband and I became friends with the Wilsons, a young Irish family of another Christian faith who had also recently arrived in New Zealand. Noleen Wilson was my co-worker, and we soon became good friends, sharing experiences of immigrating and of our love for our new home. As our friendship grew, I became aware that their family was also struggling with

loneliness as well as feelings of being overwhelmed. They had three young children and a fourth on the way.

One evening when I was feeling particularly lonely and sorry for myself, I had the impression that the best way to overcome my loneliness was to serve another—specifically the Wilsons. My husband and I decided that night to begin celebrating the 12 days of Christmas with the Wilsons by anonymously leaving messages and small gifts on their doorstep. Each night my loneliness was replaced with excitement and anticipation as we sneaked up to their home, left our message and gift, knocked on their door, and then ran away with big grins on our faces.


Each day at work Noleen would tell me about the mysterious “Christmas elves” who had visited the night before. She would relay stories of her children anticipating the arrival of their visitors, who were making the family’s Christmas a happy one. On several evenings the ward youth joined us in our fun.

On the final night, Christmas Eve, the Wilsons left a message and cookies on their doorstep, asking that they be able to meet their elves. When we arrived with the youth to sing carols as our final gift, the children were ecstatic and our friends embraced us with hugs and tears of gratitude. The loneliness in my heart was replaced with love and joy, and the bond of friendship between our families was strengthened.

Later we received an e-mail from a man in the Wilsons’ church who said he was so touched by what we had done for the family that he asked about our Church and the acts of service we provide for others. The congregation had never heard of the 12 days of Christmas and now associates this tradition with Latter-day Saints.

I will never forget that first Christmas in New Zealand, where I learned an unexpected way to forget myself, go to work, and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9)—just as Jesus Christ comforts us in our times of need and loneliness. ■

Angela Fallentine, New Zealand



When we arrived with the youth to sing carols as our final gift, the children were ecstatic and our friends embraced us.

MY CHRISTMAS CARD FROM OBREGÓN

While I was serving my mission in Mexico, my companion and I met a man from Obregón, a city in northwestern Mexico near the Gulf of California. He was interested in our message about the Restoration of the gospel, but he had only 10 minutes to talk because he had to catch a train. We taught him all we could in that short time and gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon and all of the tracts we had. At the time, our mission had no missionaries in Obregón.

Several months later I received a Christmas card from someone in Obregón. I looked at the card and wondered who could have sent it. Then I realized it had been sent by the man we had talked to for 10 minutes. I hung up the card in our apartment with the rest of the Christmas cards the other elders and I had received.

After Christmas I was about to throw the card away when I felt an impression to keep it. The impression was not an audible voice but a feeling in my heart. Instead of throwing the card away, I put it in my suitcase.

A few months later as I was reading the monthly letter from the mission home, I noticed an announcement that missionary work would be opened in Obregón. Once again I thought, "What does that city have to do with me?" Then I again remembered the man we



After Christmas I was about to throw the card away when I felt an impression to keep it.

had met from there. I dug through my suitcase and found the Christmas card. I wrote on the card, "These elders are friends of mine, and I am sending them to teach you more about the gospel." Then I sent the card to the elders assigned to serve in Obregón and told them to take it with them and visit the man.

Soon I received a letter from the elders in Obregón. It read: "Dear Elder Ramos, the work here has been so difficult that the mission president was planning to pull us out until we

received your card. We went to see this brother, and he was so excited about our message that he took us to meet all of his family and friends. Because of this brother, we have started a branch."

Years have passed, and now three stakes have been organized in Obregón. I am humbled to know that because I had listened to the promptings of the Spirit, I was blessed to play a small part in helping my brothers and sisters in Obregón receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

Robert Ramos, Oregon, USA

WE HAD NOTHING TO EAT

I woke up early the day before Christmas worried because we didn't have any food for our Christmas dinner that night; nor did we have any money to buy food. I was then living with my sister Edicta in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

When I got out of bed, I knelt down and began to pray. I pleaded with my Heavenly Father to remember us. I asked Him to grant us at least some food for that very special day, *la Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve).

As I prayed, I was filled with peace. I seemed to hear a soft voice saying to me, "Everything is going to be fine. Don't worry." When I had finished my prayer, I knew that something good would happen that day.

After waking up my sister, I went to sweep the front porch. The neighbor across the street saw me and came over to give me 1,000 bolívars that she owed me for a Christmas tablecloth and decorations I had embroidered for her. I was surprised because I hadn't remembered that she owed me money.

I ran to my sister's room and showed her the money I had received. Surprised, she asked me where I had gotten it. "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), I responded.

A few minutes later we heard someone outside calling for my sister. When we realized it was the same neighbor, we went out to talk to her. She then paid my sister 1,000 bolívars she owed her for some sewing. My sister and I were very happy

because now we could buy breakfast, lunch, *and* dinner.

After we had returned from grocery shopping, we found a friend waiting for us. He asked if he could spend *la Noche Buena* with us because he didn't want to spend Christmas Eve alone. We explained that we would be having just a small dinner at home but that he was welcome to join us. He contributed 2,000 bolívars to help with the cost of dinner. We could hardly believe how much God was blessing us.

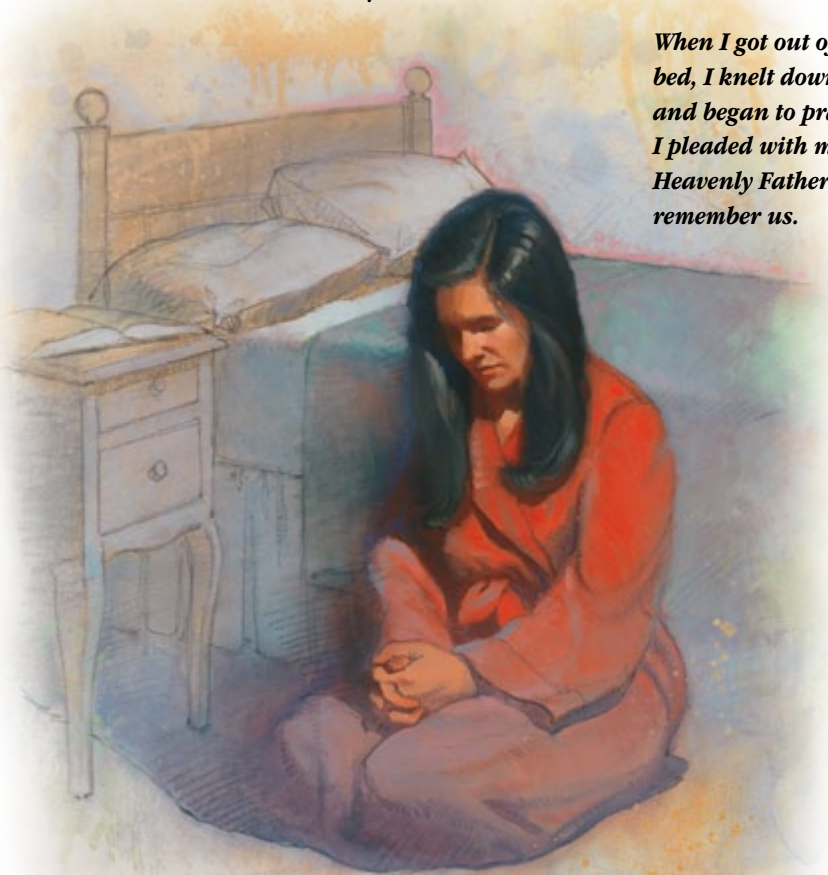
Later my niece called to tell us that she would be arriving that night and would be bringing 33 pounds (15 kg) of marinated meat. And at noon my

nephew arrived with his wife and their children. They asked if they could return that evening with some food and celebrate Christmas Eve with us.

"We're not going to have a grand dinner," we answered, "but we will have enough for everyone."

That evening Edicta and I made baked chicken, potato salad, a lemon dessert, and *majarete*, a traditional coconut pudding dessert, which we enjoyed with all of our guests. But first we gave thanks to Heavenly Father for the great blessings He had given us. That day we were reminded that if we have faith and doubt not, He will bless us when we ask for His help. ■

Estilita Chacin Hart, Utah, USA



When I got out of bed, I knelt down and began to pray. I pleaded with my Heavenly Father to remember us.

LINDA'S LAST CHRISTMAS

During my sophomore year at Brigham Young University, our ward bishopric signed the ward up for a Sub-for-Santa program, through which we would provide Christmas presents for a family in need.

Our ward name, however, kept disappearing from the list of volunteers. As Christmas neared, we still had no family to help. Then one of the bishop's counselors told us of a family that might be able to use our help instead. When we learned about this family, we all felt certain that we should focus on them.

Linda (name has been changed), who had several sons ages 9 to 15, had fought a grueling battle with breast cancer. During the stress of that illness, her husband had left her. She had just moved from another state to take a job in Provo, Utah, but the job fell through, and she was left with no income.

When we met Linda, we immediately took her into our hearts. We were blessed to see her the way the Savior did—as a great and noble spirit who had overcome many difficult challenges. She was never a *project* to us; rather, she was an eternal friend. Every member of the ward contributed something to help her and her boys. We were all young college students and poor in



While Linda was at our ward Christmas party, several ward members went to her apartment and filled her cupboards and refrigerator with food.

our own right, but we gladly gave because we loved her.

Linda came to our ward Christmas party, during which several ward members went to her apartment and filled her cupboards and refrigerator with food. They decorated a Christmas tree and surrounded it with presents for the whole family. They also left her four new car tires and paid her rent for several months. I'm not sure how our meager contributions managed to accomplish all that, but I knew that Heavenly Father had used our sacrifices to bless her.

A year later I was in another student ward, but I returned at Christmastime to visit my previous bishopric. I learned that Linda's husband had returned to the family and that their finances had stabilized. But then her cancer had returned and claimed her life. I realized that we had helped give Linda her last Christmas.

In feeling "the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47) so strongly through that experience, I learned that real charity is a priceless spiritual gift that propels us to act in the Savior's place. ■

J. Audrey Hammer, Utah, USA

Small & Simple Things

“By small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).

CHURCH HISTORY AROUND THE WORLD



Mexico

The first Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in Mexico in 1875. They divided into two groups. One sent selections of the Book of Mormon in Spanish to influential leaders throughout the country and taught many people, but they had no converts. The other group baptized Mexico’s first five

members of the Church, in Hermosillo, Sonora. Four years later, one of the leaders who had received the Church literature in 1875, Plotino C. Rhodakanaty of Mexico City, requested baptism for himself and others. By 1885 a Spanish translation of the Book of Mormon was completed.

For many years the country faced political tension, but the early members remained faithful. The first Spanish-speaking stake in the Church, the Mexico

Stake, was organized on December 3, 1961. The Church opened several schools, including Benemérito de las Américas, founded in Mexico City in 1963, which is still in operation.

The first temple built in Mexico, located in Mexico City, was dedicated in 1983. In 2000, eight temples were dedicated in Mexico.

In 2004, Mexico became the first country outside the United States to have one million members.



Church leaders participate in the ground-breaking for Benemérito de las Américas on November 4, 1963.



THE CHURCH IN MEXICO	
Membership	1,234,545
Missions	23
Stakes	221
Wards and Branches	2,009
Temples	12 in operation; 1 announced

Christmas for the Early Pioneers

Harsh winter months made for difficult times for most pioneers, and resources for Christmas presents and celebrations were often scarce. Yet that didn't deter the early pioneers from creating special memories during the holiday season. Here are a few records of how Christmas was celebrated in pioneer times:

My Happiest Christmas

"My first Christmas in the [Salt Lake] Valley came on Saturday. We celebrated the day on the Sabbath. All of us gathered around the flag pole in the center of the fort. There we held a meeting. What a meeting it was. We sang praises to God. We joined in the opening prayer, and the speaker that day has always been remembered by me. There were words of thanksgiving and cheer, not a pessimistic word was uttered. People were hopeful and buoyant, because of their faith in the future. After the meeting there was handshaking all around. Some wept with joy. Children played in the enclosure and around the sagebrush fire that night. We gathered and sang, 'Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear; but with joy wend your way.' We had boiled rabbit and a little bread for dinner. We all had enough to eat and there was a sense of perfect peace and good will. I never had a happier Christmas in my life."

Unknown author, quoted by Bryant S. Hinckley, in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (1958–77), 14:198.

My, How Time Flies

"One night when I was sixteen years old, Father gave a Christmas party for his own children and their families and the nearest neighbors. We danced. My brothers were the musicians. We knew it was Father's aim to end the party at ten o'clock, which he did right in the middle

of a square-dance by ordering the musicians to stop. But Father didn't know that my brothers had lifted me up to the clock many times that night. Each time I turned it back thirty minutes. It must have been past midnight when the party broke up."

From Christian Olsen family records, in Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 15:199.

A Jolly Time

"When the children awoke on Christmas morning in 1849, not a doll was to be found in all the land, no, not even a stick of candy, or an apple was found in the cabins. But the children and their parents were happy for all that. They were glad that they still had a little to eat, and prospects before them in their new homes

were beginning to grow brighter every day. But, if there were no dolls or toys for the children, the fathers and mothers could not forget Christmas, and before the day was over they all had a jolly time.

"In the evening they met at the cabin of John Rowberry. This was the house where the first meetings were held. There they had an old fashioned dance to wind up the day, and it was the merriest crowd that ever met in a Christmas gathering. . . . But the great drawback was music. Not an instrument of any kind was to be found. Cyrus Call was a very good whistler and he whistled tunes while the merry pioneers danced."

Sarah Tolman, in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Treasures of Pioneer Heritage*, 6 vols. (1952–57), 4:197–98.



GREAT LIVES REMEMBERED

President Lorenzo Snow (1814–1901)



Though he later became the fifth President of the Church, Lorenzo Snow had little interest in being baptized until his sister, Eliza, invited him to attend Hebrew classes at the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio. Also attending the school were Joseph Smith and other Church leaders. Lorenzo soon became interested in the gospel and joined the Church on June 19, 1836. Elder Snow then served missions to Italy, the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii), and Great Britain, where he presented a copy of the Book of Mormon to Queen Victoria.



Elder Snow possessed remarkable gifts that he used to serve the Lord. In his patriarchal blessing he was promised that although he would live to an old age, he would not feel the effects of aging. His vitality allowed him to remain active in his later years as an apostle and a prophet. He also used the priesthood to raise several people from the dead.

During President Snow's time as prophet, Latter-day Saints in southern Utah were suffering from a drought. While speaking at a conference in the southern Utah town of St. George, President Snow was inspired to promise the Saints that it would rain and they would enjoy a bountiful harvest if they would pay tithing. Though the members paid their tithing, several months passed without rain. President Snow implored Heavenly Father to send rain. Later he received a telegram announcing, "Rain in St. George."

For more information, see Francis M. Gibbons, Lorenzo Snow: Spiritual Giant, Prophet of God (1982).

Top: Portrait of Lorenzo Snow in about 1865. Middle: President Snow (middle) with his counselors in the First Presidency, George Q. Cannon (left) and Joseph F. Smith (right) in 1900. Bottom: Latter-day Saints were blessed with rain for their crops after heeding President Snow's counsel to pay tithing.



Members Follow Prophetic Counsel in Holding Day of Service

By **Melissa Merrill**

Church Magazines

In April 2011, President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, announced that units of the Church everywhere would be invited to participate in a day of service to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Church welfare program, an invitation that officially came in a First Presidency letter sent to all units. President Eyring then shared four principles that he said have guided him when he “wanted to help in the Lord’s way” and when he has been helped by others (see “Opportunities to Do Good,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2011, 22).

In the remaining months of 2011, members across the world responded to that prophetic call, in the process embodying the principles President Eyring outlined.

Principle 1: “All people are happier and feel more self-respect when they can provide for themselves and their family and then reach out to take care of others.”

Among the first stakes to respond to the First Presidency’s invitation to participate in a day of service was the David stake in Panama, which organized a preparedness fair for the broader community. The event, which took place in April, was supported by several public entities and featured workshops and demonstrations on topics related to home storage, family finances, emergency preparedness, and health.

It isn’t enough just to know these principles for ourselves, said Itzel Valdez Gonzalez, who participated in the day of service. It’s also important to serve others by sharing them.

“Service to others is an important characteristic of the followers of Jesus Christ,” she said. “This

event provided opportunities for members of the Church to give of their time and talents to bless those in need.”

Principle 2: “When we join hands to serve people in need, the Lord unites our hearts.”

Members of the Arusha Branch in Tanzania decided to volunteer at Shanga House, a facility that gives vocational training to people with disabilities and teaches them to provide a living for themselves and their families.

On August 20, 2011, 35 participants—adults, youth, and children; Church members, investigators, and missionaries—worked alongside people with disabilities in making craft items and jewelry that would later be sold. The volunteers also helped with household chores like cleaning and sweeping.

Just before the group departed, Shanga House coordinators asked them to come to a central area so that the people they had served could shake their hands and thank them. “It was quite an emotional experience,” said Sister Sandra Rydalch, who is serving a mission in the area with her husband, Elder Rich Rydalch. Since that time, when people from Shanga House see members of the branch downtown, “they readily recognize us, wave, and stop to visit,” Sister Rydalch said.

Patience Rwiza, who organized the branch’s project under the direction of priesthood leadership, points out that the activity was beneficial not just for those at Shanga House but also for those who offered the service. “People developed a sense of love by helping others, and along the process, people learned things from

the community that they didn't know before," he said. "My testimony has been strengthened with what I did and saw—from the members' participation and the community as a whole."

Principle 3: "Draw your family into the work with you so that they can learn to care for each other as they care for others."

Members of the Coimbra Portugal Stake realize that service is not a one-time event. In fact, the stake participates in several activities each year under the Mormon Helping Hands umbrella. Last year's activities included cleaning a public park and taking Primary children to visit other children who were living in an orphanage. In these and other activities, it is important to involve whole families, said Anabela Jordão Ferreira, who serves as the public affairs director for the Coimbra stake.

"In our projects, we sometimes say that we accept people from 8 months old to 88 years old," said Sister Jordão. "That is completely true. We see mothers with babies and grandfathers who have mobility difficulties, but they also have a strong testimony and the will to serve the Lord."

Principle 4: "The Lord sends the Holy Ghost to make it possible to 'seek, and ye shall find' in caring for the poor as He does in finding truth."

When Michael Hatch, who serves on the high council in the Farmington New Mexico Stake, was given the assignment to organize a stake day of service in response to President Eyring's invitation, he wondered where they would find ideas for ministering to the poor in their community. He met in council with his committee, and they and other stake leaders encouraged stake members to share their ideas relating to needs in the community.

Roberta Rogers knew of a particular need among several organizations in the



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area—including the hospital where she works in community relations. While clothing drives usually generated helpful donations of used pants, shirts, shoes, and coats, what many charities still needed were things like socks, underwear, and pajamas—donations that needed to come new. Sister Rogers suggested that the stake organize a collection of such items.

On October 15, stake members distributed in their neighborhoods 1,000 cardstock door hangers that explained the project, invited the community to participate, and listed items needed. A week later stake members returned to collect the items and then brought them to the stake center for sorting and distribution among 10 local charitable organizations.

That combined effort met an urgent need in their community, Sister Rogers said. "It was something different, and it helped people. And because it was not really expensive, one family could spend a few dollars and really be able to help somebody." ■

Members around the world have participated in service to their communities in response to the First Presidency's invitation.

Volunteers Can Help Build Church Media Library Online

Create.LDS.org, recently launched on LDS.org, details the current media needs of the Church—as well as announces contests or casting opportunities—and invites members to share their talents to fill those Church media needs.

The photo, video, audio, and music sections of the Create site are ready to explore. The other sections (design and scripts) will be completed in the coming months.

The new create.LDS.org website is a companion to the recently launched volunteer site, vineyard.LDS.org.

When there is an immediate

need for media materials, details for the project are listed on the Create website. “A member out there can take the photo we need and submit it through the Vineyard,” said Scott Olson, product manager of member engagement. “This way we don’t have to send someone from here to Africa to take a picture. Someone there can take it and submit it.”

The purpose of the site, said Marianne Jennings, associate producer in the Media Services Department, is to provide a repository of content that serves as an alternative to a general web search for materials. “We are creating a safe place to go and find

good content to help members share the gospel,” she said.

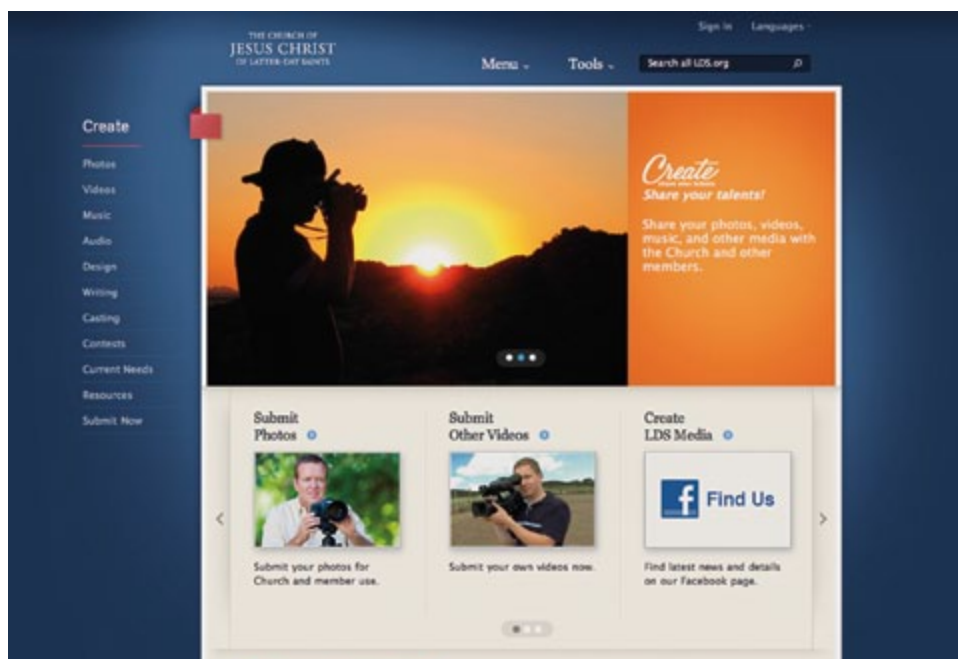
The new online LDS Media Library will be available for general Church membership to use in teaching in the home and performing their callings. They will also use it for personal blogs, websites, and other places where they would like to share gospel messages. Content could also be used in official Church publications and materials.

Online tutorials for aspiring photographers teach how to take useable pictures with good lighting and framing. They also include other helpful hints and standards for shooting photos and video.

Content submitted through Create is directed to and uploaded into the Vineyard. Materials that are accepted are relayed to other member volunteers to edit and tag. Finished materials will then be placed in the LDS Media Library and made available for use.

“This is a way for members to get involved,” said Ashton Smith, associate producer in the Media Services Department. “There are photo galleries, spotlights, and a photo of the week—volunteers are not just throwing stuff over a wall and not getting anything back. They are engaging with members and seeing what others are doing.” ■

At create.LDS.org, members of the Church can now submit photos, videos, music, and testimonies for the Church and other members to use.





Members of the South Jordan Utah Glenmoor Stake and the Cheltenham England Stake perform Faith, the Musical in the Conference Center Theater.

Musical Brings Saints Together across Oceans and Time

Rehearsal can be tricky when those involved in the production are separated by the Atlantic Ocean.

From August 4 through 13, members of the South Jordan Utah Glenmoor Stake joined with Saints from the Cheltenham England Stake at the Conference Center Theater in Salt Lake City, Utah, to perform *Faith, the Musical*, which portrays the story of the approximately 500 men, women, and children of the Willie handcart company who set out from Iowa City in June 1856, responding to a prophet's call to "come to Zion."

The two groups rehearsed 7,000 miles (11,265 km) apart for four months, communicating by telephone, e-mail, and Internet video software.

Despite the distance, the members involved in the musical were unified as they learned about the pioneers' sacrifices and made their own.

Much of the musical's text has been taken from the journals of the Oakey family, which tell of the family's trials and triumphs as they left

England, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, traveled across the midwestern plains, and pulled a handcart through icy rivers to reach the Salt Lake Valley.

Only one or two stake productions are performed in the Conference Center Theater each year, so getting the production to Salt Lake took some work and a lot of faith, said Ben Lowater, Cheltenham England Stake president, who plays the part of main character Thomas Oakey.

David R. Markham, director and composer of the musical, said this is the first time a group of people from another nation has been brought to the Conference Center Theater. "I think the uniqueness is [we're] this big ocean apart, but we're all on the same wavelength," he said.

Other members of the cast and choir agreed that preparing for the musical increased their own faith.

Blake Earl, a member of the Glenmoor stake, coordinated much of the interaction between the British and American Saints. "I think the biggest blessings have been the appreciation

for the pioneers and the unification that has occurred between us [and the members in England] as we've worked on a common purpose, even seven hours apart," Brother Earl said.

According to Brother Markham, the creative process of capturing the story of the faith of the early pioneers has taken more than 1,000 hours—"one hour for every mile those wonderful Saints pushed and pulled their handcarts," he said.

In one scene President Lowater, playing the part of Thomas Oakey, carries his daughter's body into the Salt Lake Valley.

"I think only by [acting out] their experiences . . . living in their shoes, and experiencing some of the emotions that they felt . . . do you . . . really get the feeling that they must have felt," he said. "So my appreciation for their dedication, their commitment, the consecration of their lives to the gospel has changed dramatically." ■

Read more of these stories—and many others—at news.lds.org.



President Eyring Dedicates Temple in El Salvador

On August 21, 2011, Latter-day Saints in Central America gathered in the San Salvador Temple in El Salvador and in meetinghouses throughout El Salvador, Belize, Nicaragua, and Honduras. President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, dedicated the temple, the fourth in Central America.

Three dedicatory sessions accommodated the large number of Latter-day Saints in the area who attended. The temple opened for member ordinance work on Tuesday, August 23, 2011.

President Eyring Breaks Ground in Philadelphia

On Saturday, September 17, 2011, President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, broke ground for the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple.

Also in attendance were Elder Jay E. Jensen of the Presidency of the Seventy and Elder William R. Walker of the Seventy, who serves as the executive director of the Church’s Temple Department.

Members within the temple district gathered in their respective meetinghouses, to which the service was broadcast.

The temple will be the first in Pennsylvania. Nearly 50,000 members in the state will benefit from it.

Elder Oaks Presides at Groundbreaking in Payson

Thousands braved light rainfall and temperatures in the 30s (between -1 and 4

degrees Celsius) on October 8, 2011, to witness Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles preside over the groundbreaking for the Payson Utah Temple.

Elder Oaks was joined by Elder Steven E. Snow and Elder Jay E. Jensen, both of the Presidency of the Seventy, and Elder William R. Walker of the Seventy.

The new temple will serve approximately 22 stakes from Spanish Fork to Nephi, which comprise some 78,000 Church members.

Ground Broken in Trujillo Peru

The Church broke ground for the Trujillo Peru Temple on Wednesday, September 14, 2011.

Elder Rafael E. Pino of the Seventy, South America Northwest Area President, presided. His counselors, Elder Juan A. Uceda and Elder W. Christopher Waddell, also attended.

In his remarks, Elder Pino urged members to spend time prior to the temple’s dedication to help less-active members return to full activity and prepare to enter the house of the Lord.

Sapporo Japan Temple Now Underway

The groundbreaking for the Sapporo Japan Temple took place on October 22, 2011.

First announced by President Thomas S. Monson on October 3, 2009, the temple will be located on the Atsubetsu River, near Hokusei Gakuen University.

An artist’s rendering of the Sapporo Japan Temple and site plan were publicly released in conjunction with the groundbreaking ceremony.

Sapporo is Japan’s fifth largest city and is located on the northern island of Hokkaido. This temple will be the third in Japan, following the Tokyo Japan Temple (1980) and the Fukuoka Japan Temple (2000). ■

Leadership Training Available as Video Library

The Priesthood Department has announced an interactive supplement to the updated *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*. The Leadership Training Library is an online collection of short training videos that highlight the principles taught in the manual. The new resource is available now at leadershiplibrary.lds.org.

The library is initially available in English. Portions of the library will also be provided in 10 additional languages in early 2012.

Book of Mormon Videos Updated

Updated *Book of Mormon Stories* videos are now available in English at the scripture stories section of LDS.org. The videos will be made available in 10 additional languages later this month, in time for 2012’s Gospel Doctrine curriculum focused on the Book of Mormon.

Originally available online as slide-shows, the once two-dimensional images were given a new, three-dimensional look using a technique called parallax animation. The videos also feature sound effects and an original soundtrack.

In addition to being on lds.org, the videos are also available as podcasts on iTunes and as clips on YouTube and Roku. ■

In Other Church Magazines

THE NEW ERA



Bringing a Friend to Church

Two sets of friends in Kansas City became united in the gospel when one friend was not afraid to talk to the other about the Church. The welcome the friends felt at church motivated them to learn more. Read their story in “The Power of a Friend” on page 10.

THE FRIEND



New Christmas Song

Need a new Christmas song for your family to learn this season? Turn to “Softy Falls the Evening Light” on page 14 for a new song by Janice Kapp Perry.

Singing of the Savior's Birth

In “Finding a Message in the Music” on page 24, a youth group reports on the profound experiences they had while putting on the musical *Savior of the World*. They found that acting and singing of the Savior's birth added to their testimonies and helped them better understand the special season of His birth.

Memorizing the Articles of Faith

Have your children been learning the Articles of Faith this year? Help them memorize the thirteenth article of faith by completing the activity on page 23 of the December *Friend*. Use the Articles of Faith poster on page 22 to review each of the articles with your children. Visit lds.org/friend with your children and play “Articles of Faith Memory Quest” for more help.

Temple Cards

Find temple cards on page 11 for nine recently dedicated temples. Print these cards at lds.org/friend/2011. Find previous temple cards in September 2007, April 2005, and all 2002 issues of the magazine.

COMMENT

Stunning Article on the Bible

The article in the August 2011 issue on the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible [page 40] was a highlight for me. It was so clearly and concisely presented through the charts, map, and photographs. I finally understood who the scholars and translators were and the part they played in bringing forth the Bible. I have read about these heroes before, but now I am motivated to learn more about their lives. From front to back, this issue was wonderful. Thank you for an excellent, inspiring read.

Lyn Thomas, Oregon, USA

CORRECTION

The photograph on page 73 of the October 2011 issue was incorrectly credited. The credit should have read “Photograph by Megan Tolman.”

THE LIGHT OF THE SON

By Jeff S. McIntosh

After working in department stores selling men's clothing for several years, I became quite proficient at coordinating shirts and ties with the suits I sold. It was rewarding to pick the perfect assortment, and my customers were usually pleased with the choices I presented them.

However, in one particular store, the suits were in an area illuminated with fluorescent lighting while the shirts and ties were displayed in another area under incandescent bulbs. This difference in lighting proved to be quite challenging.

It often happened that after a customer had decided upon a suit or two, I'd go select an array of shirts and ties that I thought would work well. But once the shirts and ties were moved from one section to the other and placed next to the suits, the result was surprising—the colors “changed” in the new light and did not match at all.

Taking a suit to the area that displayed the shirts and ties worked better. But even with this approach, customers often became confused, noticing that the suits we had in hand didn't look like the ones they had just selected. A suit that looked olive green under the fluorescent lighting now appeared gray, taupe, or brown when viewed under



Light helps us see truth—and see it more clearly.

incandescent lights. Black, charcoal, and navy suits underwent similar transformations.

More often than not, I had to solve the problem by taking customers out a nearby door to look at their selections in the daylight. By seeing with the light of the sun, we could quickly discern true colors and make appropriate choices.

In the real world outside a department store, we are faced with choices every day. Sometimes those choices are discolored by the precepts of men. Others are clouded by the temptations of this world. Options placed before us may not always seem right, or we may be confused about what is or is not real. We may wonder how to discern what is true.

I have found that the solution is to look at those options with the light, or example, of the Son, for He promised, “I will also be your *light* in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; . . . and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led” (1 Nephi 17:13; emphasis added).

Striving to choose with true light will help us make proper choices for our families and ourselves. And by looking to God through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, we will not be deceived but will know good from evil (see Moroni 7:16).

As we make choices to follow Him, our loving Savior has even promised to share His light with us: “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). ■



In the Arms of Mary, by Simon Dewey

“Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father

and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given” (3 Nephi 1:14).



“I testify that Jesus the Christ is the divine Son of the living God,” writes Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “He will love you, lift you, and manifest Himself unto you if you will love Him and keep His commandments (see John 14:21). Indeed, wise men and women still adore Him.” See “The Peace and Joy of Knowing the Savior Lives,” page 16.