



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.