

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



The Christmas season can seem hectic, but the angels sang of “peace on earth.” In what ways do you find peace in your celebration of Christmas?



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINA SMITH

For many years I tried to keep up with the tradition of exchanging gifts with my large extended family, many of whom live in other states. It was time-consuming, expensive, and stressful. One December my neighbor popped in for a visit. The entire living room floor was covered with boxes and half-wrapped presents, including homemade fudge and caramel corn. “What *is* this?” she asked. I explained that I was mailing presents to family.

Her reply was just what I needed

to hear. In her warm Southern accent she exclaimed, “Honey, why don’t you do what we do? We send cards and say, ‘I love you!’ ”

That was my last year of sending presents. Since then I have sent cards and sincerely told my family how much I love them. Peace replaced stress, and presents are no longer the focus of my Christmas. Instead, I can focus on the Savior and service.

Corinne Brown Walker, Massachusetts, USA

Several years ago, during a period of financial hardship, our family began one of our favorite Christmas traditions. On Thanksgiving Day, the fourth Thursday in November in the United States, we placed a decorated box on a small table as the first Christmas decoration of the season. Each day, or as often as one of us thought of something for which we were grateful, we wrote it on a small piece of paper, folded it in half, and slipped it through an opening in the top of the box.

On Christmas morning, before opening any gifts, we read the Christmas story as told in Luke 2. Then we opened our little “Thankful Box” and took turns reading its contents aloud. Doing so filled our hearts with love, joy, and gratitude. We were so happy that we almost forgot to open the meager gifts we had purchased for each other.

That was the best Christmas we had ever shared, and we have kept the “Thankful Box” tradition alive every year since.

Timothy R. Nipko, California, USA

Since joining the Church in 2003, I have felt a lot more peace and joy during the holiday season. In the past I felt alone, but now I find happiness and comfort during the holidays because of things I have learned



through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First, I attend Church social gatherings during this time of year. Usually there is a ward activity and dinner. I enjoy visiting with Church members, sharing a delicious meal, and listening to the music presented. Staying until the end and helping clean up provides me with the opportunity to serve others, and I leave feeling uplifted and edified.

Next, I offer to babysit for friends with young children so they can go Christmas shopping with their spouses. Playing with the children always helps me feel good. I often feel the pure love of Christ when I am around them.

Another thing that brings me comfort when I am feeling stressed and overwhelmed during the busy holiday season is attending the temple. Going to the family history center, gathering names of my family members, and taking them with me makes my temple trips even more special. Performing services for my

Something that comforts me when I feel overwhelmed during the busy Christmas season is attending the temple.

deceased relatives gives me a feeling of satisfaction.

Finally, I try to share with others who are alone. For instance, in years past, I visited an elderly friend in a retirement center. We visited, played games, and shared our testimonies with each other. I enjoyed our time together, and it gave her the opportunity to interact with someone besides her regular visitors.

I feel blessed to understand that when I am giving to others I don't have time to feel sorry for myself. By doing things for others at Christmastime my love for the Savior has intensified.

Anne Wendt, Washington, USA

The following simple ideas have brought peace and the Spirit into our home as we enjoy and look forward to—rather than just survive—the holiday season.

- **We limit travel.** Four years ago, my wife and I decided not to travel to far-away relatives' homes during December



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG DIMOND

while we have young children. Our three children are all under the age of seven, and not having to travel has eased a tremendous burden on our whole family. We have gently explained our reasoning—the high cost of holiday travel, the difficulty of traveling with small children, and our desire to start our own traditions, among other things—to our families, who have supported our decision. It has been wonderful to experience peace in our home without having to worry about travel.

- **We shop early.** My wife starts shopping for Christmas gifts in the middle of the summer and finishes by October. Casual shopping here and there eliminates the stress of last-minute shopping. In many cases, she is able to order items online and get free shipping.

The “Thankful Box” emerged because of financial hardship, but it turned into a part of the best Christmas our family has ever shared. We’ve kept the tradition alive ever since.



Thankful Box

• **We decorate on a set day.**

Our family usually decorates for Christmas the day after our American Thanksgiving. Having it scheduled means no procrastination. Plus, we have an entire month to enjoy the decorations.

December is a quiet time in our home. We make it a priority to hold meaningful family home evenings, offer service to others, and read uplifting stories. We are grateful to find peace amid the often-chaotic rush of the holiday season by preparing in advance. Avoiding this rush has allowed for a peaceful, slower December focused on the Savior, family, and service.

Nathan George, Indiana, USA

As the Christmas season approaches, I have reflected on a goal I set at the beginning of one year: in addition to my regular scripture study, I would read the *Ensign* cover to cover each month for the entire year. As I did so, I came to love the magazine. I found that my prayers were often answered through messages I was reading. I also kept a journal as I read, which helped me reflect on important insights I gained through my reading. As a result, my testimony of Jesus Christ has increased significantly.

Setting and keeping this goal has prepared me for the Christmas season because it has helped me feel the Spirit more regularly throughout the year. I now better appreciate why we celebrate His birth because in my study, I feel I have come to *know* Him.

Mari Black, Washington, USA



THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

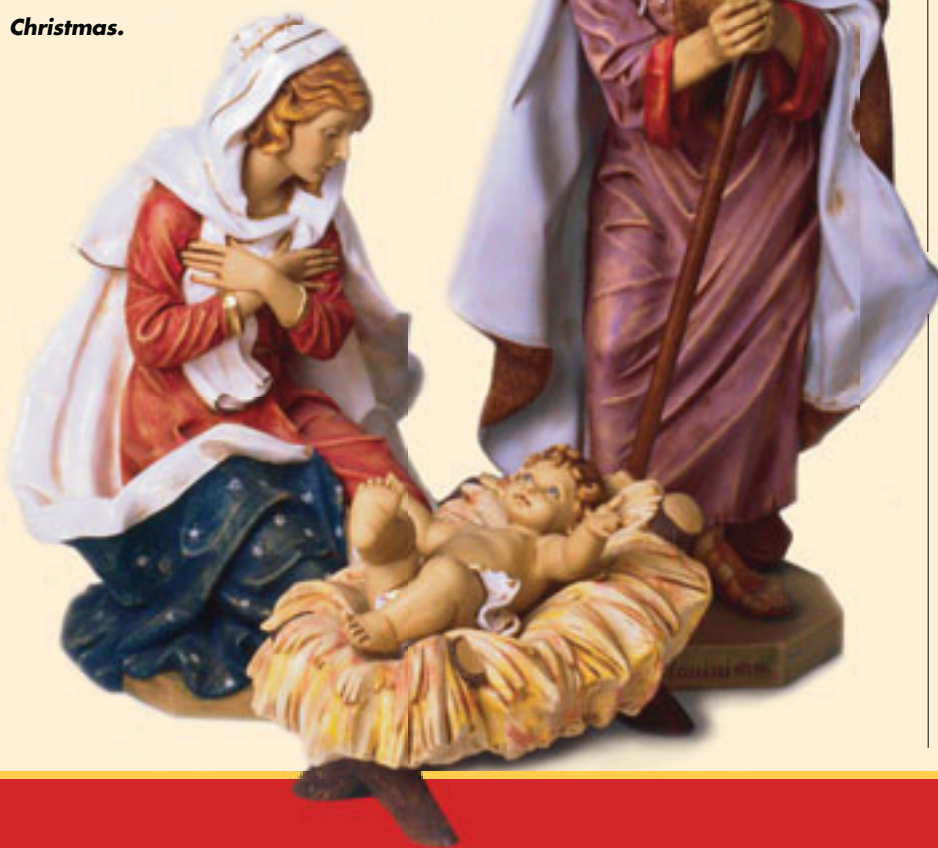
"The Christmases we remember best usually have little to do with worldly goods but a lot to do with the spirit

of caring, the spirit of love, and the spirit of compassion."

President Thomas S. Monson, First Presidency Christmas Devotional, Dec. 3, 2006.

During the first part of December, I prioritize the various holiday events that our family is invited to attend. I like to ensure that we can still spend plenty of time together. In instances when we are the ones hosting a holiday party, we like to schedule it at the beginning of December to kick

Keeping family traditions (like adding a piece to my Nativity set) helped me feel close to my family when I couldn't be with them for Christmas.



off the Christmas season. Doing this early helps us enjoy the time we have with family and friends and prevents stress from building up later in the season. In doing this, I feel more receptive to the Spirit, and our family can focus on Christ and His birth, the true meaning of Christmas.

Tasha Slade, Arizona, USA

I often find peace during the holidays by reflecting on the blessings, trials, and accomplishments of the past year. In thinking about my trials, I identify the ways in which I have





QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

grown. Reflecting on accomplishments helps me consider goals for the coming year and helps me find ways that I can better become the husband and father that my Savior wants me to be.

Brian Steffen, New York, USA

Several years ago a sister in our ward shared her formula for getting and keeping the Christmas spirit during the holiday season. Her simple suggestions have sweetened my holiday experience:

- Faithfully attend all of your Church meetings.
- Have regular scripture study focusing on the Savior's birth and mission.
- Read uplifting Christmas stories from Church magazines and other sources.
- Listen to peaceful Christmas music.
- Set aside a quiet time to read Christmas cards from family and friends.
- Set up a Nativity display as a visual reminder of the reason we rejoice.

Over the years, I have added two more items to the list:

- Pray often with gratitude and praise for the gift of our Savior.
- Seek the guidance of the Spirit in reaching out to others in small acts of service.

Cindy Galbraith, Missouri, USA

After finishing graduate school I moved from my hometown to a bigger city to work. Because my new job started December 1 and because I did not yet have vacation time, I was not able to go back home for Christmas. A few things made it easier for me to make it through the holiday season

away from family for the first time and in a new city. One of these was to carry out family traditions. For instance, my grandmother had a large Nativity set which she added to each year. I also had my own Nativity set, and I made a point of adding pieces to it the way my grandmother had done. Additionally, on Christmas Eve, I read the Christmas story in Luke 2, just as I knew my family would be doing. In keeping up family traditions—even when I wasn't with family—I felt a connection to them.

I also attended ward- and stake-sponsored holiday activities. I met people in my ward who made me feel welcome. In addition, I kept in touch with my family through phone and mail. These things helped me feel the spirit, love, and peace of the holidays, and I was able to enjoy them.

Tania Charette, Utah, USA

For my family and me, attending or viewing the First Presidency Christmas Devotional has been a wonderful tradition that sets the proper tone for our holiday season. The music from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the inspirational messages from the First Presidency set the proper tone for our holiday season and remind us to focus on the Savior's birth.

One of the most memorable broadcasts for me was in 1994, when President Howard W. Hunter (1907–1995) was the President of the Church. He was the concluding speaker. The focus of his comments

was Luke 2. At first, I thought this would be just another reading of already familiar verses. But I realized there was something special about having a prophet of God reading the Christmas story from the scriptures. It is the confirming witness of more than one person that the words are true which strengthens my testimony and reaches into my heart. I appreciated President Hunter's confirming testimony. It still touches me these many years later. ■

Robert J. Crossett, Vermont, USA

*Editors' note: For information about this year's First Presidency Devotional, taking place December 6, please visit **LDS.org**. Click on **News and Events**, then **Calendar**. Click on the **First Presidency Christmas Devotional** link (listed on December 6) for broadcast details.*

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Q&A feature will focus on the following topic:

Prophets and apostles have taught us to be frugal in our spending, meeting real needs instead of wants. But in today's world, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between legitimate needs and desires. How can I teach my children about using temporal resources according to spiritual priorities?

If you would like to share your ideas, please label your submission "temporal resources" and follow the guidelines under "Do You Have a Story to Tell?" in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words and submit them by January 15.