

Ensign

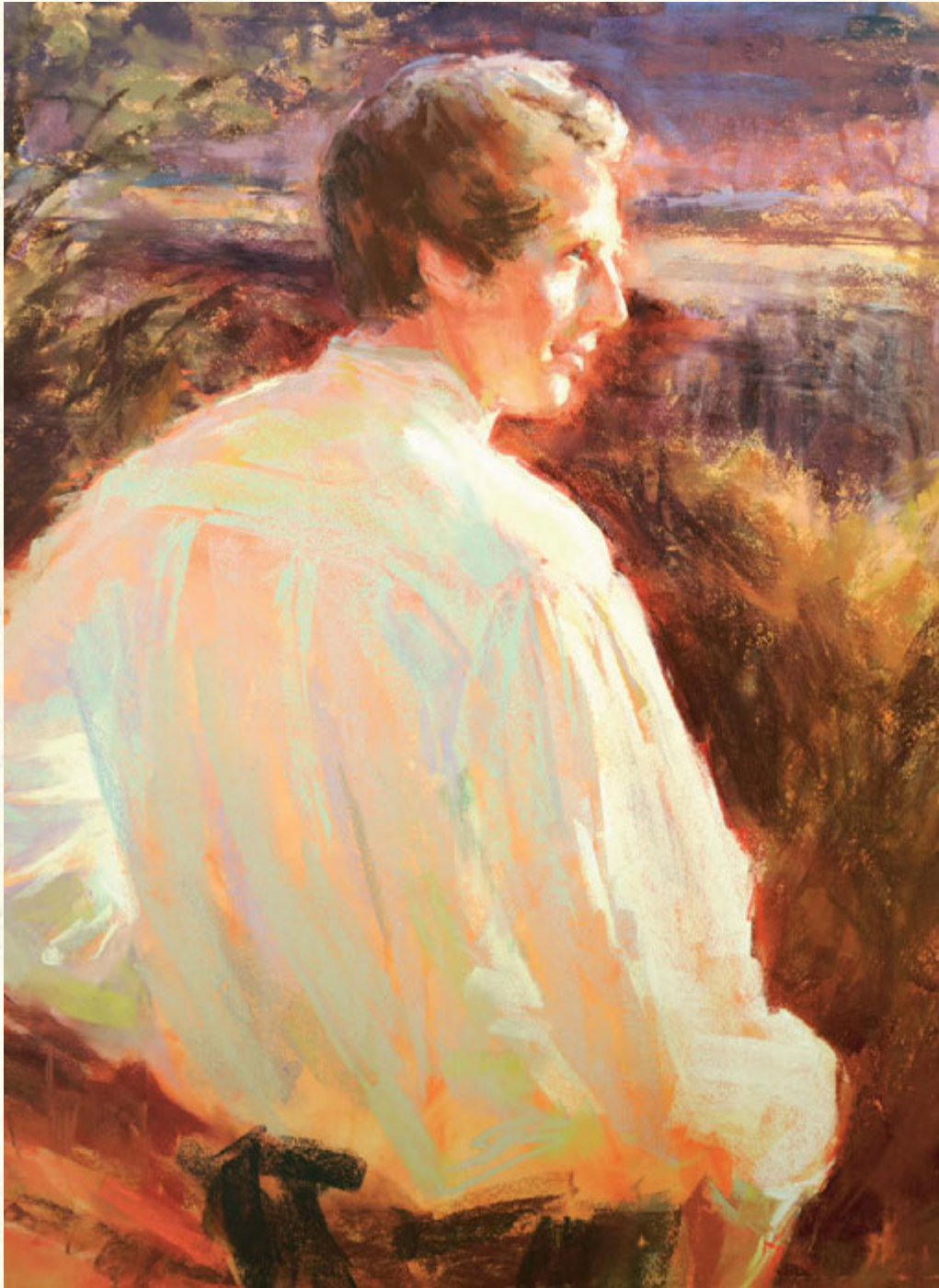
A detailed painting of the Nativity scene. Mary is seated in the center, holding the infant Jesus in her arms. Joseph stands to the right, looking down at the child. Two shepherds are on the left, one kneeling in prayer. A white sheep is in the foreground on the left. The scene is set in a stable with a manger. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the figures against a dark background.

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Christ Today p. 4**

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**How Some Members with
Disabilities Serve, p. 36**

**Another Look at the
Nativity, p. 52**



MAY NOT BE COPIED

Looking Westward, by Julie Rogers

After the Martyrdom of Joseph Smith, President John Taylor (1808–87) wrote: “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. In the short space of twenty years, he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, . . . has brought

forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, . . . gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, [and] founded a great city. . . . He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood” (D&C 135:3).



MESSAGES

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- 4 Can We See the Christ?**
President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

VISITING TEACHING MESSAGE

- 7 Our Responsibility to Participate in Temple and Family History Work**

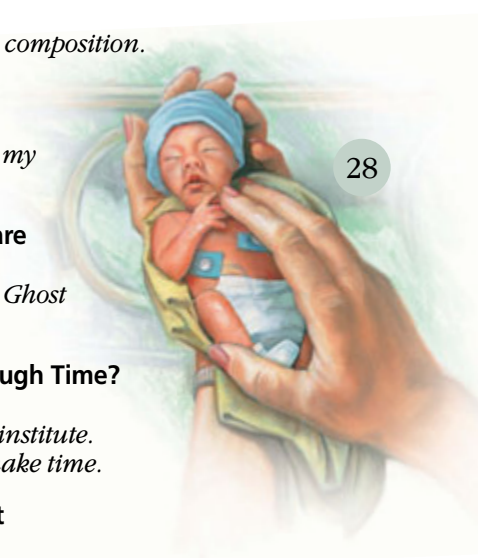
ON THE COVER

Front: *Birth of the King*, by Michael Dudash.
Back: *Good News of Great Joy—Shepherds by Night*, by Michael Dudash. Limited-edition canvas and prints available at somersefineart.com.



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By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in
the First Presidency



CAN WE SEE THE Christ?

One night a grandfather was reading a story to his four-year-old granddaughter when she looked up and said, “Grandpa, look at the stars!” The older man smiled kindly and said, “We’re indoors, honey. There are no stars here.” But the child insisted, “You have stars in your room! Look!”

The grandfather looked up and, to his surprise, noticed that the ceiling was peppered with a metallic glitter. It was invisible most of the time, but when the light struck the glitter a certain way, it did indeed look like a field of stars. It took the eyes of a child to see them, but there they were. And from that moment on, when the grandfather walked into this room and looked up, he could see what he had not been able to see before.

We are entering another wonderful Christmas season filled with music and lights, parties and presents. But of all people, we as members of the church that bears the Savior’s name need to look beyond the façade of the season and see the sublime truth and beauty of this time of year.

I wonder how many in Bethlehem knew that right there, close to them, the Savior had been born? The Son of God, the long-awaited and promised Messiah—He was in their midst!

Do you remember what the angel told the shepherds? “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” And they said to themselves, “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and

see this thing which is come to pass” (Luke 2:11, 15).

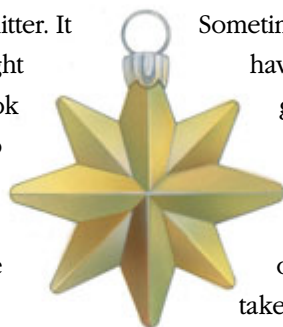
Like the shepherds of old, we need to say in our hearts, “Let us see this thing which is come to pass.” We need to desire it in our hearts. Let us see the Holy One of Israel in the manger, in the temple, on the mount, and on the cross. Like the shepherds, let us glorify and praise God for these tidings of great joy!

Sometimes the most difficult things to see are those that have been right in front of us all along. Like the grandfather who failed to see the stars on the ceiling, we sometimes cannot see that which is in plain sight.

We who have heard the glorious message of the coming of the Son of God, we who have taken upon us His name and have covenanted to walk in His path as His disciples—we must not fail to open our hearts and minds and truly see Him.

The Christmas season is wonderful in many ways. It is a season of charitable acts of kindness and brotherly love. It is a season of being more reflective about our own lives and about the many blessings that are ours. It is a season of forgiving and being forgiven. It is a season to enjoy the music and lights, parties and presents. But the glitter of the season should never dim our sight and prevent us from truly seeing the Prince of Peace in His majesty.

Let us all make this year’s Christmas season a time of rejoicing and celebration, a time when we acknowledge the miracle that our Almighty God sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the world! ■





IDEAS FOR TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

1. "Attention activities can be used to create interest and to help learners focus their attention on the subject of the lesson. . . . Pictures are valuable tools for strengthening the main idea of a lesson and helping learners remain attentive" (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 160, 176). As you begin sharing this message, consider using an attention activity such as showing a picture or sharing a scripture and asking the family to think about how it applies to the message.

2. "One of your most important goals should be to help others apply gospel principles in everyday situations. . . . Help learners discover the blessings that come when we live the gospel" (*Teaching, No Greater Call*, 159). After sharing this message, consider inviting family members to share experiences they have had as they have focused on the Savior during the Christmas season.

YOUTH

Missionary Christmas

By Loran Cook

During my second Christmas as a full-time missionary, my companion and I were visiting a recently baptized member and her family. After a great Christmas dinner, we shared with them a Christmas message.

We asked the family to draw pictures of things that reminded them of the season, such as stars, presents, nativities, and Christmas trees. We then read some scriptures, including 2 Nephi 19:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." We sang "Once in Royal David's City" (*Hymns*, no. 205), watched a movie about the Nativity, and bore testimony of Jesus Christ.

It was a Christmas in simple circumstances, away from our families and the usual Christmas celebrations, but as we bore testimony of the Savior, I felt a deeper love and appreciation for Him and His birth than I had known before. I realized it would be my last Christmas in full-time missionary service to my Heavenly Father, but I understood that His Spirit could testify to me of His Son wherever I was.



CHILDREN

Looking to See the Savior

President Uchtdorf said that at Christmastime we should look for things that remind us of the Savior's life. Look up the scripture references below. Find the picture that matches each scripture, and write the reference below the picture.

Matthew 2:1-2

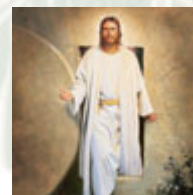
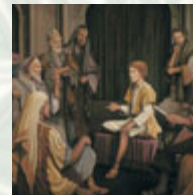
Luke 2:46

Luke 8:49-55

Matthew 15:32-38

Luke 23:33-34, 44-46

John 20:11-20



LEFT: ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL MANN; ILLUSTRATION OF ORNAMENTS BY JOE FLORES; CHRIST RAISING THE DAUGHTER OF JARUS; BY GREG OLSEN © 1990; BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE; BY GRANT ROMNEY CLAWSON © 1971; THE CRUCIFIXION; BY HARRY ANDERSON © 1971; ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL MANN; HE IS RISEN; BY DEL PARSON; THREE WISE MEN; BY PAUL MANN



Faith • Family • Relief

Our Responsibility to Participate in Temple and Family History Work

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.

Over the centuries many people have died without knowledge of the gospel. Some of those people are your near and distant relatives. They are waiting for you to do the necessary research to link your families together and perform saving ordinances on their behalf.

Most of the temples of the world are not busy enough. The Lord has promised that your hearts would be turned to the fathers so that the earth would not be utterly wasted at His coming (see D&C 2:2–3).

There are personal blessings you receive as a result of participation in temple and family history work. One of these is the joy that you feel as you serve your ancestors. Another is that you are able to qualify for a temple recommend, which signifies your worthiness before the Lord. Those who are not worthy today of the privilege of having a recommend should be working with a bishop or branch president to qualify as soon as possible. Please don't be without this vital qualification. I testify that the Atonement is real and that sins can be forgiven upon proper repentance.

As we participate in temple and family history work, we are certain to have the Spirit to comfort us in our challenges and to guide us in important decisions. Temple and family history work is part of our work of providing relief, or service, to our own ancestors.

Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president.

From the Scriptures

Malachi 4:5–6; 1 Corinthians 15:29;
1 Peter 3:18–19; D&C 110:13–16; 128:24

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

What Can I Do?

1. How can I help my sisters search out their ancestors and perform temple ordinances for them? Consider the circumstances of each sister as you ponder how to meet her needs. You might consider that family history work can often strengthen new, returning, and less-active members.
2. When has temple and family history work comforted me in my challenges or guided me in important decisions?

From Our History

“The Prophet Joseph Smith said, ‘The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead’ (*History of the Church*, 6:313). From the beginning, Relief Society sisters have supported this great work. In Nauvoo in 1842, Sarah M. Kimball’s desire to help the temple construction workers prompted a group of sisters to organize themselves so that they could serve more effectively. As they began to meet, the Prophet . . . organized the first Relief Society after the pattern of the priesthood. From that time on, the Relief Society sisters helped further the work on the Nauvoo Temple. . . .

“In 1855, eight years after the Saints first arrived in Utah, the Endowment House was established. Eliza R. Snow, who had been one of the original members of the first Relief Society and had preserved the records of that organization, was called by President Brigham Young in 1866 to be the general Relief Society president. She and other sisters were faithful workers in the Endowment House. Then, as the St. George, Logan, and Manti Temples were completed, these sisters traveled to each temple so they could do work for the dead there.”¹

NOTE

1. Mary Ellen Smoot, “Family History: A Work of Love,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1999, 15.



JESUS CHRIST

IS THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD

Jesus was the only person to be born of a mortal mother, Mary, and an immortal father, God the Father. That is why Jesus is called the Only Begotten Son of God. From His Father, He inherited divine powers (see John 10:17–18). From His mother, He inherited mortality and became subject to hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, and death.

The mortal life of Jesus Christ began when He was born in Bethlehem. Luke gave this account: “The angel Gabriel was sent from God . . . to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph. . . . And the angel said unto her, . . . 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. . . . 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 1:26–27, 30–32, 35; see also 1 Nephi 11:16–21; Alma 7:10).

Matthew recorded that an angel also appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “[Mary] shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall

save his people from their sins” (see Matthew 1:20–21). Mary and Joseph both understood that the son to whom Mary would give birth and who would be called Jesus was the Only Begotten Son of God.

The angel Gabriel also told Mary that her relative Elisabeth was pregnant with a son. When Mary visited her, Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost and said, “Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (see Luke 1:39–45). Elisabeth knew then that Mary was to be the mother of the Son of God.



Others also received a witness from the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Following are some of their testimonies.

1. Some of the Savior's disciples were in a ship when they saw Jesus Christ walking on the water. They "came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).



2. When Jesus asked His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15, 16).



3. Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He asked Lazarus's sister Martha if she believed He was "the resurrection, and the life." She answered, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God" (John 11:25, 27).



4. Adam and Eve offered sacrifices as "a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father" (Moses 5:7).



5. God taught Adam that he must "be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ" (Moses 6:52).

The Apostle John taught, "The Word [Jesus Christ] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14; see also D&C 93:11).



6. In the Americas, five years before the Savior's birth, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied, "The Son of God cometh to redeem all those who shall believe on his name" (Helaman 14:2). ■

For more information, see *Gospel Principles* (2009), 52–53; *True to the Faith* (2004), 87–89; and Richard C. Edgley, "The Condescension of God," *Ensign*, Dec. 2001, 16–21.

FROM LEFT: BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN, BY WALTER RANE © IRI; ADAM AND EVE OFFERING SACRIFICES, BY DEL PARSON; CHRIST WALKING ON THE WATERS, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY HYUN GYU LEE; DETAIL FROM COME AND SEE, BY LIZI LEMON SWINDIE; FOUNDATION ARTS, MAY NOT BE COPIED; SAMUEL THE LAMANITE PROPHECIES, BY ARNOLD FRIBERG © IRI; MARTHA GREET'S JESUS, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT

THE GIFT

By Joan M. Olenycz

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “For unto Us a Child Is Born” from Handel’s *Messiah*. It is a reminder of what Christmas is all about. I often wonder what Mary felt when she was told by the angel Gabriel, “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

Mary was troubled by this, and the angel continued:

“Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

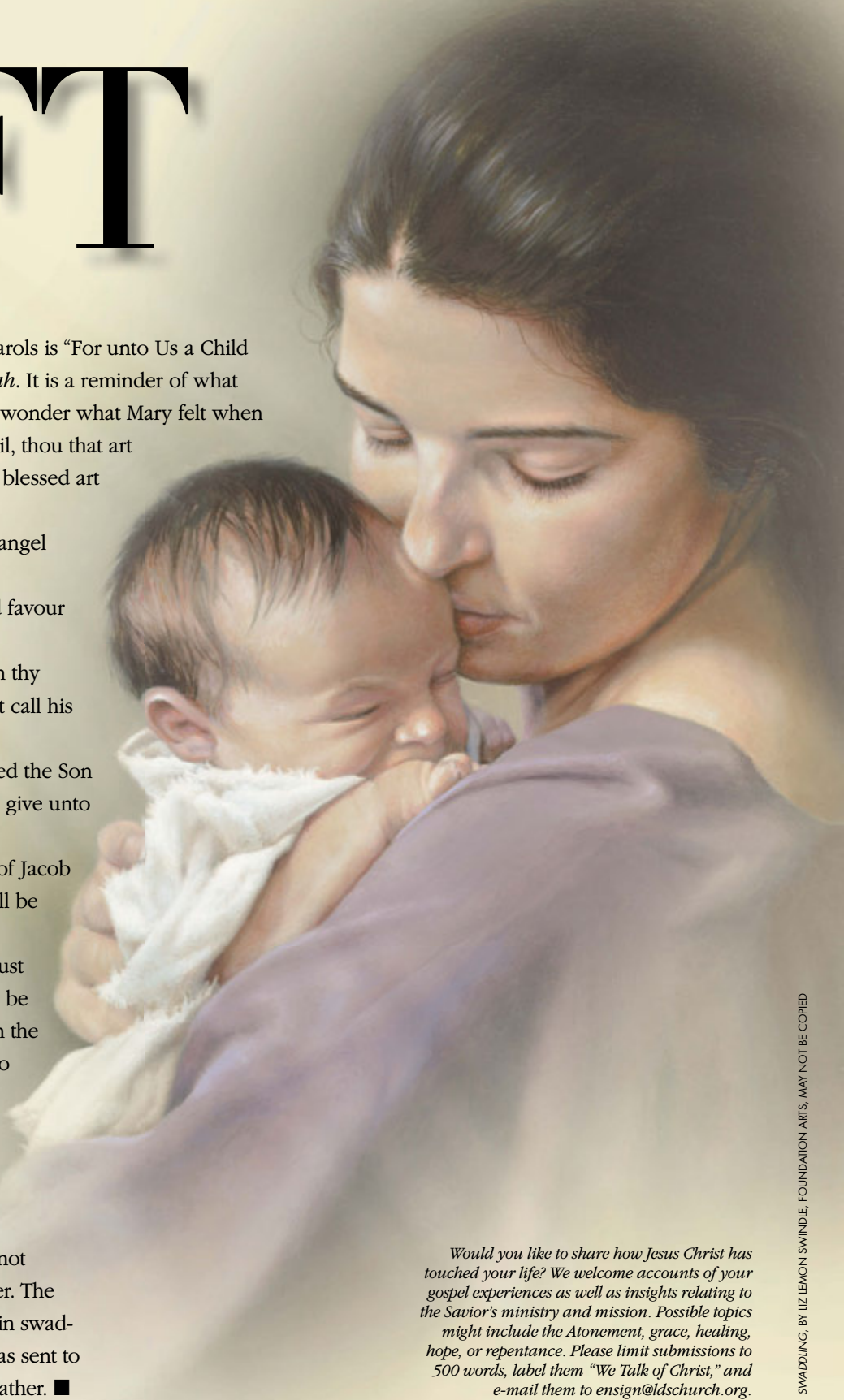
“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

“And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:30–33).

What a wondrous experience this must have been! Mary’s promised son was to be Heavenly Father’s Only Begotten Son in the flesh. She had been chosen to bring into the world the greatest gift of all: our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father gave this gift to all of us, young or old, rich or poor. We did not have to search the shops for it. It did not cost us a single penny. It did not come wrapped in shiny wrapping paper. The most treasured gift of all was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. It was sent to all of us with love from our Heavenly Father. ■



Would you like to share how Jesus Christ has touched your life? We welcome accounts of your gospel experiences as well as insights relating to the Savior’s ministry and mission. Possible topics might include the Atonement, grace, healing, hope, or repentance. Please limit submissions to 500 words, label them “We Talk of Christ,” and e-mail them to ensign@ldschurch.org.

MODERN-DAY FIERY SERPENTS

By David R. Smith

At one point during the 40-year wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness, the people spoke against God and Moses, so “the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people” (Numbers 21:6). Many were bitten and died. Repentant of their sins, the people went to Moses. He prayed for them, and the Lord provided a way for the people to be protected. He instructed Moses to make “a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole” (verse 8). Those who had been bitten would live if they simply looked at the brass serpent.

In Alma 33:19–20, Alma said that many looked and lived but many did not believe they would be healed, so they would not look and perished.

Then Alma asked, “If ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes . . . would ye not behold quickly?” (verse 21).

When I read this story, I would say to myself, “How could the people not do something so simple when their lives depended on it?” I couldn’t understand. All that changed when the Spirit showed me how

similar I was to the Israelites.

One morning, as I thought about the Savior, I recalled the sacrament prayer, which says that we may have His Spirit to be with us if we always remember Him (see D&C 20:79).

It seemed so easy. Then I realized how often I get caught up in my daily life and give little thought to the Savior. I remembered that the brass serpent symbolized Jesus Christ being lifted up on the cross. Suddenly I realized that the “remember Him” in the sacrament prayer could be considered the latter-day version of looking to Him in the story of Moses and the brass serpent.

The Israelites had fiery serpents that could poison them. Today we have modern-day “serpents” that can poison us. Bad music, movies, books, drugs, immorality, pornography, and alcohol are only a few of the things Satan uses to tempt us. Even though these modern-day serpents



The Israelites had fiery serpents that could poison them. Today we have modern-day “serpents” that can poison us.

may not seem as dangerous as a venomous snake, they are just as deadly—if not more so. Fiery serpents can kill the temporal body, but sin can destroy our immortal souls.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, can purge out the poison, sanctify our souls, and lead us to eternal life. With my newfound understanding of the similarities between ancient Israel and my own life, I am trying to lift my thoughts to Jesus Christ, knowing that if I will always remember Him, particularly His sacrifice and Atonement for me, and keep His commandments, I may have His Spirit to be with me. ■



Helping Children Exercise Their AGENCY

Just as Heavenly Father taught Adam and Eve about agency, we need to help our children understand and exercise theirs.

By Marcos Fernando dos Santos

When Heavenly Father formed Adam and Eve, they were innocent. They didn't know a lot about life and its consequences. But Heavenly Father walked with them and taught them, and He was patient with them as they learned about their existence here.

As parents we also have the privilege to be with our little ones and teach them. However, I think that sometimes we may forget that our children are also the spirit children of our Heavenly Father. We have a responsibility to help them learn their first lessons, and it is our mission to guide them toward the Savior Jesus Christ.

If we follow the example of Heavenly Father in the Garden of Eden, we will take upon ourselves the responsibility of nurturing our children and instructing them about the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we do so, we need to teach them about the consequences of their actions. This is not an easy task, since we ourselves

are still learning, and we sometimes fail to do our Heavenly Father's will. And sometimes we want to step in and rescue our children even when they would benefit by learning from their mistakes.

Heavenly Father patiently taught Adam and Eve about agency from the beginning. He gave them commandments, consequences, and the ability to exercise their agency, saying, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, *thou mayest choose for thyself*, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Moses 3:16–17; emphasis added).

We may wonder how to encourage our children to follow the commandments without forcing them to do so. There are several things we can do that can help. We can teach our children the gospel, especially from the scriptures, then live in accordance with

those principles. We can teach them by word and example to rely on our Heavenly Father and share with them the blessings that come through living the gospel. We can teach them that because of our weaknesses, we as parents need His love, mercy, and patience as much as our children do.

Sometimes, when our little ones misbehave, we may begin to lose hope, but our Father in Heaven will never lose hope in us. We must learn to see our children as our Heavenly Father sees us: as His sons and daughters with the potential to become like Him through the power and grace of His Son. We do not have the power to save our children, but we can be good examples

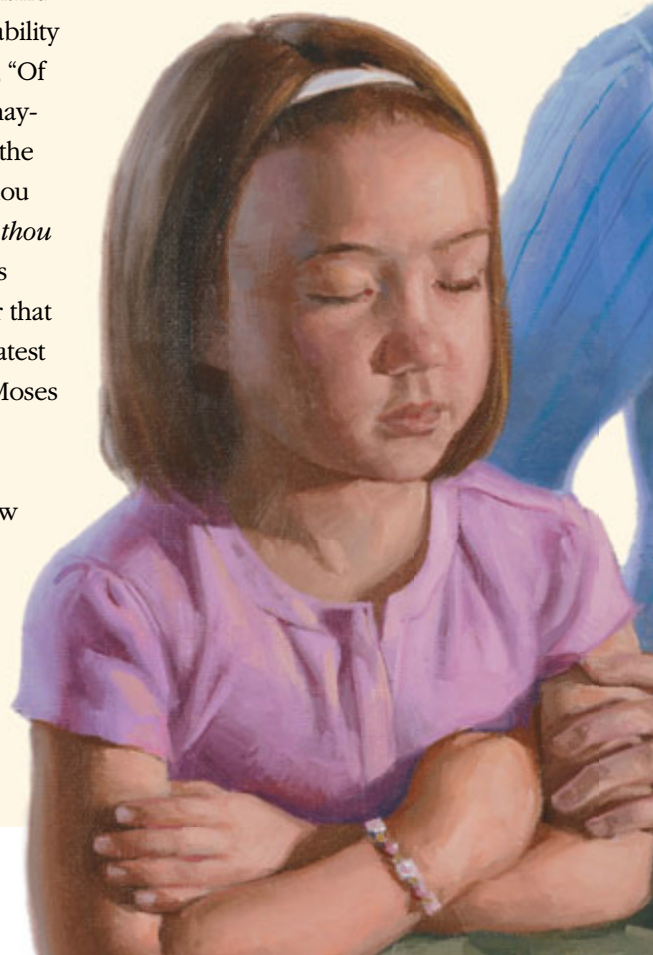


ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PARKER

and exercise faith in their behalf.

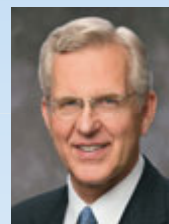
We are not here to force anyone to do Heavenly Father's will. Of course, the amount of freedom and responsibility we give our children will

depend on their age and abilities. As we help our children exercise their agency appropriately, it will be easier to teach them and love them, no matter what they do.

Our Heavenly Father knew that Adam and Eve would be tempted and would eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He had already prepared a way for them to come back through His Son. He sent an angel to teach them about the atoning sacrifice of our Savior, the principles of repentance, and how they could call upon God in the name of the Son and gain a remission of their sins through the mercy and love of Heavenly Father (see Moses 5).

As we express love for our children and teach them that even if they go astray, we will stand firm, hoping and praying for them that they will find joy through faith in Jesus Christ and true repentance. As we keep these principles in mind,

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING

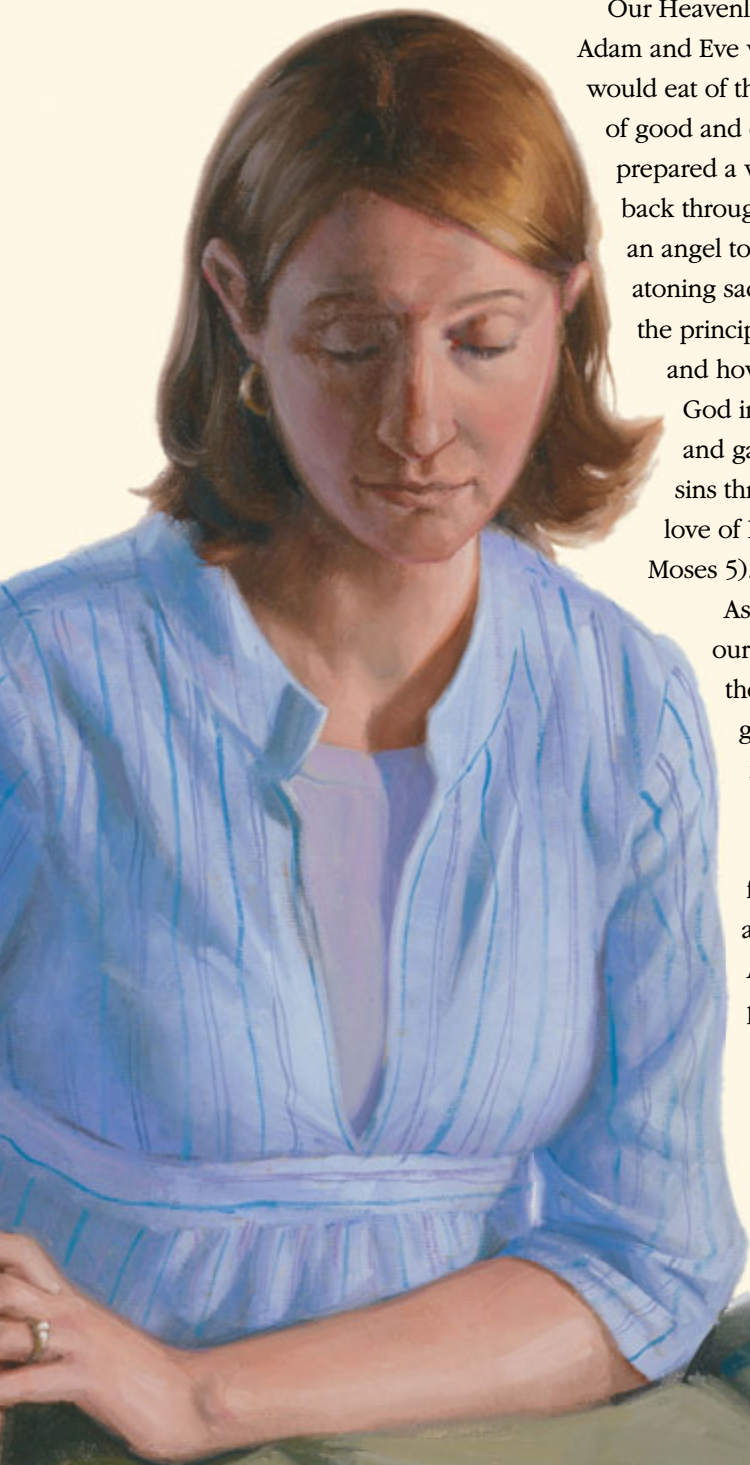


"I have heard a few parents state that they don't want to impose the gospel on their children but

want them to make up their own minds about what they will believe and follow. They think that in this way they are allowing children to exercise their agency. What they forget is that the intelligent use of agency requires knowledge of the truth, of things as they really are (see D&C 93:24). Without that, young people can hardly be expected to understand and evaluate the alternatives that come before them."

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Moral Discipline," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 107.

we will be blessed to be filled more abundantly with the pure love of Christ and will have greater success as parents (see D&C 121:41–46). ■





By Kirsten Bradford

I was anxious as I walked into the empty classroom. It was my first day back as a substitute teacher after my marriage, and I had been assigned to teach a high school family life and child development class. I was also thrilled to be assigned to a class that was so relevant to the period of life I was entering.

After stashing my purse under the teacher's desk, I grabbed the lesson plan and started reading:

"Dear Substitute, Thank you for taking my class today. Please remind students that their marriage planning projects are due on Friday. Today they will be creating a five-year plan for their lives. Please pass out one strip of white paper to each student and have each one create a time line for things they hope to accomplish in the five years after high school."

I looked at the long strips of white paper and thought about my own five years since I had graduated from high school. I had gone to college, graduated, started a job, and met and married my husband.

Students began filing in and taking their seats as the bell rang. I picked up the stack of paper strips and stood in front of the class to explain the assignment. As they worked, I walked around talking to students and reading some of the things they hoped to accomplish: go to college, graduate, get married, buy a house. Some students' plans included having children.

Although many of their goals sounded similar to what I had done, there was one thing on many of the time lines that was very different. The simple phrase caught me by surprise—*Find a church*.

It was scrawled on at least half of the students' papers. Of all the complex and life





changing decisions I had made during the past five years, I had never worried about that one. When my husband and I were married and left the young single adult ward, we went to lds.org and found out what time our new ward met. It was simple. The only searching we had to do was finding out how to get to the building.

For at least half of these students, though, they would be searching for a new church once they left home.

I felt gratitude sweep over me for the organization of the Church, for members united around a faith in Jesus Christ, and for the leadership of a prophet of God.

Several years later, I felt that same gratitude as I sat in a mothers' lounge at a department store holding our new baby girl. I was speaking with a person not of our faith who was telling me about her recent attempt to find a church now that she had a family of her own. I testified to her that we have the fulness of the restored gospel and a

living prophet who receives revelation—God's word for us today. Because of that, there is no confusion between congregations. We all believe the same things. We are all taught the same things. We are truly united.

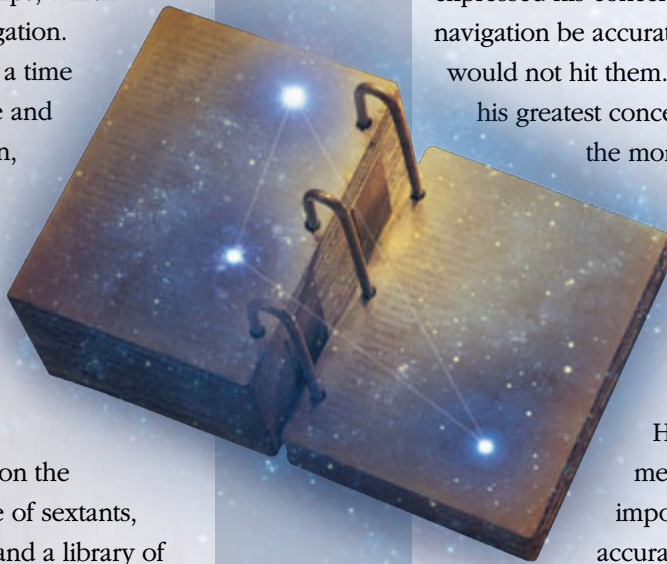
This is the Lord's Church. I am so grateful for that stability and this blessing in my life. ■

THREE STARS

By John B. Rowe

During my younger years, I served in the U.S. Navy as an officer. My assignments most often had to do with steering the ships, which included navigation. Since this was a time before satellite and GPS navigation, we had to navigate by the tried-and-true method of star sights. Accuracy was dependent upon the navigator's use of sextants, mathematics, and a library of books. Our training taught us that navigation by the stars required at least two star sights, and a third star was necessary if we wanted to be sure of our location. This rule of two stars for position and three for assurance proved to be a true principle and became the standard that helped me, as a junior officer, have confidence in navigating a ship.

This was brought forcefully to me shortly after reporting to my first ship. We were leaving Japan and planned to stop for refueling at Pearl Harbor in



I came across the scripture that says, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” This sounded like the rules of navigation to me. I knew it was a true principle.

Hawaii before continuing on to San Diego, California, USA. The captain warned me of the shoals and reefs around Hawaii and expressed his concern that our navigation be accurate so we would not hit them. He said his greatest concern was for the more than 900 lives on our ship, one of which was mine. He helped me realize the importance of accuracy in my navigation. Lives depended on it. Two stars for position and three stars for accuracy guaranteed we would be safe. Throughout my 28 years of service, I found that every commanding officer of the 11 ships on which I served had the same need for assurance in navigational accuracy.

When investigating the Church and reading the Doctrine and Covenants, I came across the scripture that says, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (D&C 6:28; see also Deuteronomy 19:15

and 2 Corinthians 13:1). In other words, establish the word by two persons and a third for accuracy and assurance. This sounded like the rules of navigation to me. I knew it was a true principle.

Then I read “The Testimony of the Three Witnesses” in the Book of Mormon. I believed Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris had borne witness that they had seen “the engravings, which are upon the plates” and they knew “that [the plates had] been translated by the gift and power of God.” I knew that the testimony of three witnesses established accurate assurance that gospel principles would keep me safe from the sins of the world, just as using three stars would establish the accurate navigation for our ship and keep those on board safe from the dangers of the sea. This understanding became the beginning of my testimony and led to my baptism. Of course, each of us needs to gain our own witness of the truth through the power of the Holy Ghost, which testifies of truth, but these additional witnesses helped me to recognize truth and take the time to seek an answer. ■

UNTO THE LEAST OF THESE

By Dianne W. Stoddard

As the mother of four small children, I didn't seem to have a spare moment. During one of my busy and hectic days, our bishop called and asked if he could meet with my husband and me. To my surprise he called me to be Relief Society president.

I told the bishop I would have to pray about it. I just didn't know how I would be able to fulfill such a time-intensive calling at that time in my life. Feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty filled my mind, and I cried off and on for two days.

One of my visiting teachers, who had no idea what turmoil I was experiencing, called and made an appointment to see me. During her visit she shared a story about Emma Somerville McConkie, who had served as a Relief Society president during the early days of the Church in Utah. A woman in Sister McConkie's ward had several children, including a new baby. Because the woman's family was poor, Sister McConkie went daily to the home, taking food and helping the mother care for the child.

"One day [Sister McConkie] returned home especially tired and weary. She slept in her chair. She dreamed she was bathing a baby

which she discovered was the Christ Child. She thought, *Oh, what a great honor to thus serve the very Christ.* As she held the baby in her lap, she was all but overcome. . . . Unspeakable joy filled her whole being. . . . Her joy was so great it awakened her. As she awoke, these words were spoken to her, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"¹

The story filled my heart and soul with comfort and peace. I knew that the Lord was aware of my circumstances, that He wanted me to serve the sisters in the ward, and that He would bless me so that I would be able to fulfill all of my responsibilities. I accepted the calling.

I am still amazed that I was able to fulfill my calling while tending to the needs and wants of my family, and I am grateful for a visiting teacher who was inspired to share a timely message. Since then I have never hesitated to accept a call. I have a testimony that when we serve our Heavenly Father, He blesses us with the time, energy, and ability we need to fulfill our callings. ■

NOTE

1. Bruce R. McConkie, "Charity Which Never Fails," *Relief Society Magazine*, Mar. 1970, 169; emphasis added.



SERVING WISELY

It takes wisdom to balance leadership callings with the demands of family, work, and other responsibilities. Here are six suggestions:

1. **Focus on people not programs.** Focus council, presidency, and leadership meetings on people's needs.
2. **Be innovative.** Use creativity and the guidance of the Spirit within the framework of Church policies and principles.
3. **Delegate responsibility, and allow others to grow.** A leader should counsel, advise, and motivate but not do the work of others.
4. **Eliminate guilt.** Realize that we must do all things "in wisdom and order" (Mosiah 4:27), giving greater attention to different priorities at different times.
5. **Do the best you can.** Understand your capabilities, pace yourself, and prioritize your resources to help others while protecting your health.
6. **Be mindful of the needs of new members.** Give them opportunities to learn the gospel, get to know other members, and give meaningful service.

From Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "O Be Wise," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 18–20.



By Elder
James J. Hamula
Of the Seventy



COMMANDMENTS, CALAMITIES, and the SECOND COMING

The power to avoid the “great judgments” that are coming upon the earth came through the priesthood keys that Elijah helped restore to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple.

On Sunday, August 28, 2005, I was in Houston, Texas, USA, on a Church assignment. Upon returning to my hotel that night, I found the parking lot filled with cars with Louisiana license plates. In the lobby, many guests of the hotel were talking with some anxiety about a hurricane approaching the Gulf Coast of the United States.

Early the next morning, I flew from Houston to Atlanta.

Prior to departure, I watched television monitors in the gate area broadcasting news reports of



the expected landfall of what was characterized as a monstrous storm.

During my flight east, I observed that the entire southern horizon was consumed by a dark, menacing storm front. Although I was more than a little troubled by the enormity of the storm, I did not appreciate its ferocity until images of Hurricane Katrina's impact began to appear in the news media.

A week later, President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve visited Hurricane Katrina survivors. I will never forget their observations. They reported that the overriding concern of the people was not the loss of their material things but the loss of connection to family members.

"The thing that kept going through my mind everywhere we were was the children," President Packer said. "They don't understand, and can't understand, what has happened. And then there were the mothers with their little children; in many cases, the men were not there."

Elder Ballard added: "One of the things that was so heart wrenching were the people trying to get in touch with their own, people trying to find their families—their parents, children, siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles. They were just trying to make some connection."¹

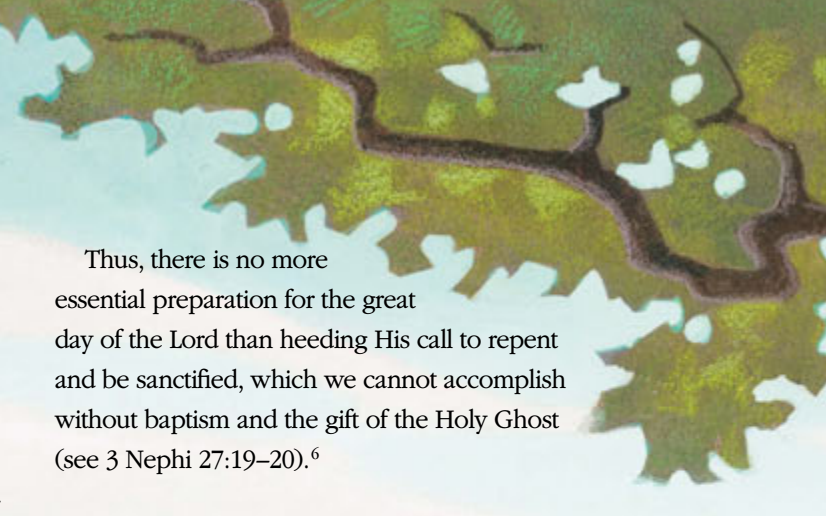
These observations, coupled with an assignment I received to assist in locating displaced Church members and their families in the Houston area, gave me a vision of the anguish that awaits those who may lose their families

in the eternities as a result of the storms of mortality. In the last days, the storms of mortality seem to be particularly intense and seem to be gathering in scope and fury. Latter-day conditions were foreseen to come upon mankind "as a whirlwind" (D&C 112:24), to be vexatious (see D&C 97:23), perilous (see 2 Timothy 3:1), and calamitous (see D&C 1:17; 45:50; 136:35), and to "not be stayed until the Lord come" (D&C 97:23). With no one knowing when the Lord will come (see Matthew 24:36; D&C 39:21; 49:7), and with all people enduring such difficult conditions, it is no wonder that the Lord's disciples "were troubled" (D&C 45:34) after hearing of such conditions prior to His Second Coming.

Ancient prophets who foresaw the last days also seemed to have been troubled. Referring to the Lord's latter-day coming, Joel asked, "Who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11). Similarly, Malachi exclaimed: "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" (Malachi 3:2; see also 3 Nephi 24:2; D&C 128:24). And after seeing the signs of the last days, John the Beloved cried out, "The great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:17).² These are expressions of concern about the ability of people to endure the calamities and perils of the last days. Fortunately, the Father and the Son have addressed these prophetic concerns.

Preparing for the Future

"Knowing the calamity" that was coming, the Father and the Son called upon the Prophet Joseph Smith and gave him—and through him, the rest of us—commandments



(D&C 1:17). Perhaps the most important commandment was given by the Father when He and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820. Referring to His Son, the Father commanded Joseph, “Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17; see also Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). On that day and thereafter, Jesus Christ gave Joseph doctrines, covenants, and commandments to “prepare [all people] for that which is to come” (D&C 1:12; see also D&C 133:10). Only by receiving such doctrines, covenants, and commandments can the world be properly prepared for the Lord’s coming and everything leading up to that event. “If ye are prepared,” the Lord has counseled, “ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30).

Among the essential instructions given by the Lord to prepare for His coming is that we listen to and obey His voice. “Hearken and hear, O ye inhabitants of the earth . . . hear the voice of the Lord” (D&C 133:16). Significantly, “the voice of the Lord is unto all men” so that “all that will hear may hear” (D&C 1:2, 11). The Lord’s voice is manifest to us in various ways. It is manifest in the voice of His servants: “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38; see also D&C 133:8–10, 16, 36–38, 71).³ It is manifest in the administration of His Spirit: “My voice is Spirit” (D&C 88:66).⁴ In addition to His voice, manifestations in the commotions of the earth will be a witness of the warnings: “After your testimony cometh the testimony of earthquakes. . . . And . . . the testimony of the voice of thunderings, . . . lightnings, . . . tempests, and . . . waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds” (D&C 88:89–90).

Regardless of the form of the voice, the substance of the Lord’s message is the same. “Sanctify yourselves. . . . Go ye out from Babylon. . . . Hear the voice of the Lord; for he . . . commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (D&C 133:4, 5, 16). The call to repent and be sanctified is a call to prepare “to meet the Bridegroom” (D&C 133:10; see also D&C 133:19; 88:92; Matthew 25:1–13), who is Jesus Christ (see D&C 65:3). When the Lord returns, He “shall stand in the midst of his people, and shall reign over all flesh” (D&C 133:25).⁵ To dwell with the Lord in that day, we must be clean, for no unclean thing can dwell in His presence (see 1 Nephi 10:21; 3 Nephi 27:19; Moses 6:57; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 5:5).

Thus, there is no more essential preparation for the great day of the Lord than heeding His call to repent and be sanctified, which we cannot accomplish without baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 27:19–20).⁶

Standing in Holy Places

It is important that we not only leave Babylon but also that we remain worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man” (2 Nephi 26:11; see also D&C 1:33; 20:32; Moses 8:17). To ensure the continued companionship of the Holy Ghost, the faithful must “stand in holy places” (D&C 101:22). “Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly, saith the Lord” (D&C 87:8). The holy places where the faithful should stand are in the temples of the Lord. It is in such places that the power to overcome the world is delivered to them. The nature and significance of this power should not be underappreciated.

Three years following the First Vision, Joseph Smith received another heavenly messenger, Moroni (see Joseph Smith—History 1:27–48). His message included recitation of biblical prophecies concerning the latter-day coming of the Lord and the conditions leading up to His coming. Quoting Malachi, Moroni declared: “For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven,” leaving the proud and the wicked “neither root nor branch” (Joseph Smith—History 1:37). But “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord,” Moroni continued, “I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet” (Joseph Smith—History 1:38). And Elijah “shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (Joseph Smith—History 1:39).

Clearly, Moroni’s message was important. He delivered it three times that night and once the next morning “without the least variation” (Joseph Smith—History 1:45). It was the first heavenly communication the Prophet Joseph Smith had received since the appearance of the Father and the Son,

which had initiated the work of the Restoration. The thrust of Moroni's message was that "great judgments . . . were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence" (Joseph Smith—History 1:45) and that the power to avoid such judgments was coming in the priesthood keys that Elijah would help restore to the earth.

Thirteen years later, Elijah came as promised, bestowing upon Joseph in the Kirtland Temple the sealing power. By this power, "all covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations" have "efficacy, virtue, [and] force in and after the resurrection from the dead" (D&C 132:7). Without such power, every human undertaking has an end after death (see D&C 132:13–14). This, then, will be the great waste that awaits the world unless the children of men receive the sealing power that Elijah restored. It is not the physical destruction that accompanies war, pestilence, earthquake, and famine but rather that men and women will be left alone, without root (connection to ancestry) or branch (connection to posterity).

In conclusion, they who will endure the storms of the last days and will stand when the Lord appears are they who know and obey His voice. As the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith: "They . . . [who] have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but *shall abide the day*" (D&C 45:57; emphasis added). Such persons will have sanctified themselves

through receipt of the saving ordinances and obedience to the covenants associated with such ordinances, understanding that when the veil is rent and all men shall see Him, "he that is not purified *shall not abide the day*" (D&C 38:8; emphasis added). Such persons will be those who have availed themselves of the blessings of the temple and made such blessings available to their kindred dead (see D&C 128:24; Revelation 7:14–17).

May we do as the Lord has instructed so that we may be build on a solid foundation and endure successfully the raging storms of mortality (see Matthew 7:24–27; Helaman 5:12). ■

NOTES

1. "Church leaders tour devastation of three states," *Church News*, Sept. 10, 2005, 11.
2. The Lord posed a similar question to the people of our day: "Vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it?" (D&C 97:22).
3. The voice of the Lord's servants includes the "elders of my church," who are sent unto the nations of the earth (D&C 133:8–10, 16, 36–38, 71).
4. As prophesied by Joel and affirmed on the day of Pentecost, the Lord's Spirit was poured out upon all nations (see Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17–18).
5. See also Zechariah 14:4 ("his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives"); Revelation 1:7 ("every eye shall see him"); D&C 38:8 ("day soon cometh that ye shall see me"); D&C 76:63 ("he shall come . . . to reign on the earth"); D&C 88:95 ("the face of the Lord shall be unveiled"); D&C 104:59 ("prepare my people for . . . when I shall dwell with them").
6. See also Moroni 10:32–33 (sanctified "by the grace of God"); D&C 88:21 (sanctified through obedience to "the law of Christ"); D&C 84:33 (sanctified through "magnifying their calling" in the priesthood).



Without the sealing power bestowed upon Joseph Smith by Elijah, every human undertaking has an end after death. This is the great waste that awaits the world unless the children of men receive the sealing power.



Messiah
verture

George Frideric Handel

Handwritten musical notation, including notes and clefs, is visible in the background.



By Elder
Spencer J. Condie

Served as a
member of the Seventy
from 1989 to 2010



HANDEL AND THE GIFT OF MESSIAH

*At the end of our divinely ordained days,
may we be able to acknowledge, with Handel,
that God has visited us.*

George Frideric Handel seemed to have been born a musician. As a young lad in Germany, he became proficient on both the violin and the organ. After composing his first opera in Germany, he moved to Italy, the operatic center of the world, to try his hand at musical composition in the Italian style. There he achieved some success in composing operas and chamber music.

In 1711, at age 26, Handel decided to move to England, where his operas and oratorios initially gained acceptance. By the late 1730s, however, British audiences had become less enthusiastic about operas sung in German or Italian; instead, they favored comedic performances such as *The Beggar's Opera*. Thus, for several years Handel struggled to keep the wolves—his creditors—away from the door.



In 1737, after pushing himself to his physical limits by composing four operas within 12 months, the 52-year-old composer suffered a stroke, leaving his right arm temporarily paralyzed. A doctor told Handel's faithful secretary: "We may save the man—but the musician is lost forever. It seems to me that his brain has been permanently injured."¹

The composer defied the diagnosis. Over time his body responded to treatment in the thermal springs at Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen, Germany), and he recovered his physical strength. After testing his ability to play the organ at a nearby cathedral, he jubilantly proclaimed, "I have come back from Hades."²

When he returned to London and resumed composing operas, his work was not well received, and creditors began to hound him again. In the depths of despondency, he

A poet and previous collaborator left Handel a manuscript that quoted liberally from the scriptures, particularly the words of Isaiah, foretelling the birth of Jesus Christ and describing His ministry, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.



began to wonder, “Why did God permit my resurrection, only to allow my fellow-men to bury me again?”³ In April 1741 Handel held what he assumed would be a farewell concert. His creativity was spent. A biographer wrote: “There was nothing to begin or to finish. Handel was faced with emptiness.”⁴

Late one August afternoon that same year, Handel returned from a long and tiring walk to find that a poet and previous collaborator,

Charles Jennens, had left him a manuscript. This libretto quoted liberally from the scriptures, particularly the words of Isaiah, foretelling the birth of Jesus Christ and describing His ministry, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. The work was to be an oratorio. Given his previous failures, Handel was apprehensive as he began to read through the text.

“Comfort Ye,” the first words of the manuscript, seemed to leap from the page. They dissipated dark clouds that had been pressing upon Handel for so long. His depression waned and his emotions warmed from interest to excitement as he continued to read of angelic proclamations of the Savior’s birth and of Isaiah’s prophecies of the Messiah, who would come to earth to be born as other mortal infants. A familiar melody Handel had composed earlier flooded into his mind as he read “For unto Us a Child Is Born.” The notes distilled upon his mind faster than he could put pencil to paper as he captured the image of the loving Good Shepherd in the aria titled “He Shall Feed His Flock.” Then came the overpowering exultation reflected in the “Hallelujah Chorus,” followed by the soft, supernal testimony of “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth.” The work came to its majestic conclusion with “Worthy Is the Lamb.”

After all the music he had composed throughout his lifetime, Handel would eventually be known worldwide for this singular work, *Messiah*, largely composed in just three weeks during the late summer of 1741. Upon completing his composition, he humbly acknowledged, “God has visited me.”⁵ Those who feel the touch of the Holy Spirit as they experience the overpowering testimony of Handel’s *Messiah* would agree.

“IF I WERE THERE”

Words and music written by a young man from South Africa encourage each of us to think deeply about the Savior, not only at Christmas but always.

The tune begins as gently as a whisper, a melody that fills your soul as quickly as it fills your ears. It becomes even more memorable when the choir begins singing:

*If I were there to see this man arrive,
this man, a carpenter called Jesus,
When I would see thousands flock
to Him, would I not follow them
and hear Him?*

*When I would see Him, with one
glance would I know Him
instantly?*

Would I know that He is the Christ?

Look at the choir, and you can see that all the members are singing from their hearts. Look at the accompanists carefully constructing each chord and the sound technicians balancing the entire performance into well-blended harmony. Look and see the young adults of the Pretoria South Africa Stake, themselves a blend of backgrounds and experiences, joining their voices together in praise of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And at the center of it all is a 20-year-old conductor who penned every word, composed every note, coordinated each rehearsal and performance, and created what ended up as a Christmas present for his friends, for Church members, for the community, and even for his Savior and his Father in Heaven.

Michael McLeod, who will soon be serving a full-time mission, didn't expect his celebration to grow into such an event—performances at four chapels, each one filled to capacity with hundreds

of thrilled audience members. He was simply responding to an assignment given to the young single adults (YSA) of his stake to prepare a cantata, a program of music and words to help people worship the Savior. In fact, the program was originally scheduled for June or July 2009 but after several delays was moved to December.

“When the stake YSA representatives told me what they'd been asked to do, I instantly said, ‘Why don't we use original music instead of borrowing other people's music?’” Michael remembers. The YSA representatives agreed. And they also knew just the right person to put it all together—Michael McLeod.

Michael is a University of Pretoria student, majoring in English and mathematics education. “What I really want to be is a teacher,” he says. But Michael has always been interested in music. In fact, he studied it seriously until he was 17.

“Music became my hobby,” he explains, “and I still love it. I love the way music is able to touch people's hearts. I love to conduct and to feel the energy that comes from a choir, especially when it's a gospel song. I love to watch the

congregation as the music draws them in and to feel the Spirit as they feel the Spirit. I think I'll be involved with music my whole life because it means so much to me.”

But most of all, Michael loves to share his testimony of the Savior, and doing that with music at Christmastime became a perfect opportunity. “The whole point was to share our testimonies of the Savior through the music and the words of the cantata,” he says. “We wanted powerful music and at the same time to have powerful testimonies, so we used the testimonies from the scriptures of people who knew the Savior: Mary, Joseph, Anna, Simeon, Peter, James, John the Beloved, Mary Magdalene, and those Christ healed and taught. We tried to convey what they knew, and it's powerful. We also used the Savior's own testimony. It came together wonderfully.”



TO SEE A VIDEO OF PORTIONS OF THE CANTATA, GO TO WWW.LIAHONA.LDS.ORG.

Each of us, like Handel, is engaged in a creative spiritual enterprise in this life. I pray that we may be sensitive to inspiration from on high, that we may be inspired in such a way that the fruits of our labors are inspiring to others.



To the sponsors of the first performance of the oratorio, Handel stipulated that profits from this and all future performances of *Messiah* “be donated to prisoners, orphans, and the sick. I have myself been a very sick man, and am now cured,” he said. “I was a prisoner, and have been set free.”⁶

Following the first London performance of *Messiah*, a patron congratulated Handel on the excellent “entertainment.”

“My lord, I should be sorry if I only entertained them,” Handel humbly replied. “I wish to make them better.”⁷

He had finally been relieved of his restless quest for fame, fortune, and public praise—but only after composing his crowning work for an audience that included those not of this earth. The things that mattered most were no longer at the mercy of the things that mattered least. Handel, the restless composer, was now at rest.

Lessons from Handel’s Life

What lessons may we learn from the life of George Frideric Handel and the composition of a piece of music that has become a spiritual landmark?

- 1. We must develop confidence in our abilities and learn to live with criticism of our work.** In the words of poet Rudyard Kipling: “Trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too.”⁸
- 2. Quantity is no substitute for quality and variety.** Handel’s earlier operas have largely been forgotten. Their predictable, formulaic templates simply failed to inspire; each opera sounded much like the others he had composed.
- 3. When we act on inspiration, we are doing the work of heaven.** We cannot force the Spirit, but when inspiration and revelation come, we must listen and act upon the promptings. The Lord has promised that “the power of my Spirit quickeneth all things” (D&C 33:16).



4. We must acknowledge our source of inspiration and revelation.

We are only instruments in the work we do that blesses others. We must realize, as Handel did when he deflected the honor given upon his achievement, that “God has visited [us].”

5. We must never underestimate the power of the word. There is a power in the word of God that far surpasses the narratives of this world’s most gifted writers (see Alma 31:5).

6. Real spiritual meaning in a work is conveyed by the witness of the Holy Ghost. “When [an individual speaks or sings] by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).

7. Power is in God and His works, not in our words. Speaking of the professors of religion of the day, the Savior told Joseph Smith, “They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, . . . having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19). Handel had composed other oratorios and operas with biblical texts, but the form of his

music did not match the power of the scriptures—Isaiah’s powerful prophecies of the Savior’s birth and ministry or the fulfillment of those prophecies as found in Revelation and the Gospels of Luke and John. In Handel’s *Messiah*, we find both the form of godliness *and* the power thereof. In *Messiah*, lips *and* hearts are drawn nearer to heaven.

Each of us, like George Frideric Handel, is engaged in a creative spiritual enterprise in this life. Both the physical fostering of mortal life and the righteous living of our days on earth are spiritual achievements. I pray that we may be sensitive to inspiration from on high, that we may be inspired in such a way that the fruits of our labors are inspiring to others. As we seek to rescue others, may we not be bound by time-tested templates and self-imposed perceptions that restrict our spiritual creativity and lock out revelation.

In her epic poem, *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed the eloquent thought:

*Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.⁹*

May each of us unlatch our shoes and cram our labors with the essence of heaven, and may none of us be found plucking blackberries when a much grander, loftier work needs to be done.

And at the end of our divinely ordained days, may we be able to acknowledge, with Handel, that God has visited us in our labors. ■

NOTES

1. In Stefan Zweig, *The Tide of Fortune: Twelve Historical Miniatures* (1940), 104.
2. In *The Tide of Fortune*, 107.
3. In *The Tide of Fortune*, 108.
4. In *The Tide of Fortune*, 110.
5. In *The Tide of Fortune*, 121.
6. In *The Tide of Fortune*, 122.
7. In Donald Burrows, *Handel: Messiah* (1991), 28; see also “A Tribute to Handel,” *Improvement Era*, May 1929, 574.
8. Rudyard Kipling, “If—,” in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, sel. Hazel Felleman (1936), 65.
9. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in John Bartlett, comp., *Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed. (1968), 619.

Lullaby for Timothy

By Katherine Clement Poulsen

My heart ached for my struggling baby until I remembered the gifts brought by another Child 2,000 years ago.

I remember the terrifying words of my labor nurse: “I think he has some anomalies.” At the same time, the population in the delivery room escalated to allow for the resuscitation of my severely compromised newborn.

I had lived similar scenes many times before, but from the other side, as a nurse. I was supposed to be the one reviving the newborn. Now I was the mom reaching through an incubator door to touch the hand of my son, while a transport team waited to take him to another hospital.

The next morning I received a telephone call from the newborn intensive care unit (NICU), where my husband, Andrew, sat surrounded by doctors, as they explained the surgery Timothy would immediately require to remove giant abdominal tumors.

I clung to the hope that surgery would cure our child and that he would lead a normal, happy life. I envisioned him as a chubby toddler with a cute scar, a reminder of the short-lived scare he gave his parents.

Three weeks later in that same

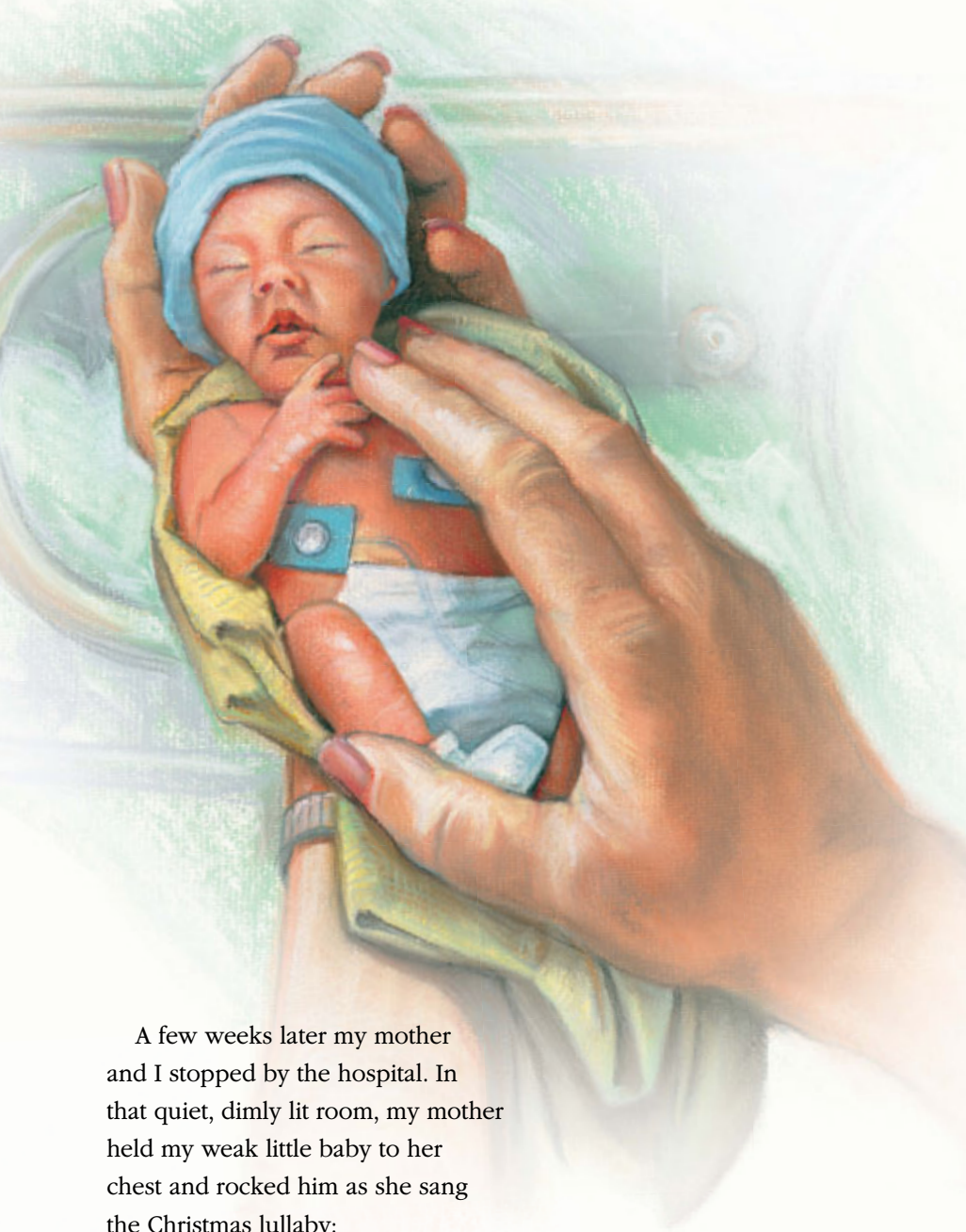
hospital conference room, a neurologist attempted to explain the brain malformation that would leave our child with significant cognitive delay, speech difficulty, and eventually seizures.

A few days after that, in the same room, the neonatologist said, “I can’t conceive that Timothy will go home without a feeding tube.” Our baby was an emaciated three pounds (1.4 kg) less than at birth, anemic, and virtually unresponsive to stimulation. When offered a bottle, his suck was weak at best, and he choked on its contents.

Expectations for our baby seemed reduced to nothing. My world was crashing down on me. I questioned the Lord’s promise that He will never allow a trial that is beyond our capacity to bear. I felt this burden was crushing me physically, mentally, and spiritually. During long daily hours at the hospital, I longed to be with my two older children and to resume our peaceful life. When I was at home, I obsessed over the welfare of my baby and, honestly, what I thought were our newly destroyed lives.

At my lowest point I pleaded with the Lord, letting Him know all the wonderful ways I would serve Him if He would just take Timothy back, let me mourn his loss, and allow me to get on with my life. Anything else was clearly more than I could handle.

While all of this was going on, my own personal miracle was beginning. Many members of our ward, along with several family members and friends, were fasting and praying for our family. One Sunday morning when I woke up, I had a strong impression that something great was going to happen that day as a result of all the fasting and prayers. I was hoping, of course, that Timothy would suddenly become alert and miraculously begin to feed. When I arrived in the NICU, Timothy was as nonresponsive as ever, and he still had no interest in bottle-feeding. Naturally, I was disappointed, but as I held him, an intense feeling came over me that he was going to be OK. I didn’t know what “OK” meant, but I had no doubt the Lord was in charge and was aware of our family.



A few weeks later my mother and I stopped by the hospital. In that quiet, dimly lit room, my mother held my weak little baby to her chest and rocked him as she sang the Christmas lullaby:

*Oh, hush thee, my baby; a story
I'll tell,
How little Lord Jesus on earth came
to dwell;
How in a far country, 'way over
the sea,
Was born a wee baby, my dear one,
like thee.
Lullaby baby, lullaby dear.
Sleep, little baby; have nothing
to fear.
Lullaby baby, lullaby dear.
Jesus will care for his little one
here.¹*

I knew peace would come through my Savior, who came to this earth to bring peace and eternal happiness for each of us. Surely He would care for this dear little one and lift those of us who were chosen to care for him.

A few weeks later Timothy was transferred to the special-care nursery where I currently work. There he miraculously learned how to eat. And I again experienced an incredible feeling that he would be OK. And although he has improved in so many

ways, I still don't know exactly what that means. But I have had such a comforting presence with me since that time. And whenever I find something that I should probably worry about, that feeling washes over me, and the message is the same: "Don't worry. Everything is going to be OK. Just enjoy him."

This Christmas season my thoughts turn to the beautiful gifts the Savior has given us. In so many ways He allows us to have peace here on earth. One of the most wonderful gifts of peace is the opportunity to prayerfully do all we can and then give *our* sorrows to *Him*.

By putting our trust in the Lord, we can give our worries to Him, and He in turn will lift us, giving special gifts to sustain us—often through other people. For me these gifts came in the form of babysitters for my two older children, meals from ward members, wonderful nurses and doctors, and loving support from family and friends. The most powerful gift, however, has been the peace granted by Heavenly Father as His Son has carried my sorrows and worries. Because of Him, I am free to love and enjoy baby Timothy and to celebrate all of the people and blessings that have been placed in my path because of his special life. ■

NOTE

1. "Oh, Hush Thee, My Baby," *Children's Songbook*, 48.



**By Elder
Neil L. Andersen**

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

A Gift Worthy of Added Care

*With all the blessings our modern age has given to us,
let us not give up the things that promote the workings
of the Holy Ghost.*

It has been more than 50 years, but I vividly remember Christmas morning 1959. With childish anticipation, I hoped desperately for a new bicycle. My older brother and sister and I shared the same bicycle, a 24-inch (61 cm) antique we had each used to learn to ride. It had long been less than stylish, and I had appealed to my parents for a new bicycle. Looking back, I am a little embarrassed that I did not have more sensitivity to the cost of such a present to a family with limited income.

Christmas morning came, and I leaped up the stairs from our basement bedroom. Running into the living room, I looked in vain for a bicycle. My heart dropped as I noticed a small present under my stocking, and I tried to control my disappointment.

As we sat as a family in the living room, my father asked me to get a knife from the adjoining kitchen so we could open a box holding a present for my brother. I walked into the small kitchen and fumbled for the light switch to find my way. As the light illuminated the room, my excitement soared. Right before me stood a beautiful black 26-inch (66 cm) bicycle! For many years I rode that bicycle, took care of it, watched over it, and befriended it—a gift long appreciated and treasured.

A Greater Gift

Just three months before that Christmas, I had been given another gift far more important and consequential than a bicycle. I had been baptized and given the gift of the Holy Ghost. In those early years and perhaps too often in the many years since then, I was like the Lamanites the Savior described as being “baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not” (3 Nephi 9:20).

Jesus stressed the incalculable value of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). And to ease the difficulty of His announcement to His disciples that He would shortly leave them, the Savior promised this heavenly gift: “I will send him [the Comforter] unto you” (John 16:7).

This is a gift of enormous power. From the scriptures we learn what this gift will bring to those who eagerly receive it: “The Holy Ghost . . . beareth record of the Father and of the Son” (D&C 20:27; see also 1 Corinthians 12:3; 3 Nephi 28:11; D&C 42:17). The Holy Ghost teaches us all things and brings all things to our remembrance (see John 14:26). He guides us to truth



and shows us things to come (see John 16:13). He enlightens our mind and fills our soul with joy (see D&C 11:13). By His power we may know the truth of all things (see Moroni 10:5). He will unfold the mysteries of God unto us (see 1 Nephi 10:19).

He shows us what we should do (see 1 Nephi 4:6; D&C 8:2). He inspires those we teach (see 2 Nephi 33:1). More important, the remission

As disciples of Christ, we must make the gift of the Holy Ghost a conscious, daily, prayerful part of our lives.

of sins comes through the Atonement “by baptism, and by fire, yea, even the Holy Ghost” (D&C 19:31; see also 2 Nephi 31:17), allowing us finally to be sanctified by this gift and to stand spotless before Christ at the last day (see 3 Nephi 27:20).

This gift of the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost is available only to those who have been baptized and confirmed members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹ The Holy Ghost can influence at times all seekers of truth, but the *gift* of the Holy Ghost is reserved in its fulness for those who have taken upon themselves the covenants of the restored gospel.² This gift is real. It is a supernal blessing to members of the Church.

The Holy Ghost is not a gift reserved only for the few—the patriarch, the devoted visiting teacher, the inspired friend—but is promised to

all of us if we diligently seek our way back to our heavenly home. President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) emphasized the need every Saint has for the Holy Ghost: “Let us labor to obtain the Holy Spirit. . . . This is the Spirit that we must have to carry out the purposes of God on the earth. We need that more than any other gift. . . . We should pray to the Lord until we get the Comforter. This is what is promised to us when we are baptized. It is the spirit of light, of truth, and of revelation, and can be with all of us at the same time.”³

The Need for Personal Inspiration

We live in a time when transportation, communication, and access to information all tower in comparison to the past. But moral issues such as honesty, chastity, Sabbath observance, family responsibility, and even the sanctity of life—issues long held in unison by the world and by Latter-day Saints—now find themselves interpreted in every way and open to debate (see D&C 1:16).

As the developments of technology and communication ever press the modern world upon us, being in the world but not of the world requires that we make constant choices and decisions (see John 17:14). Spiritual discernment is paramount. As disciples of Christ, we must make the gift of the Holy Ghost a conscious, daily, prayerful part of our lives. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said, “No one of us can survive in the world of today, much less in what it soon will become, without personal inspiration.”⁴

How can we use this heavenly gift as a vital compass for our daily actions? We must believe that even in our weaknesses, the still, small voice we feel comes from our Father. We must pray and ask and seek and then not be afraid when



answers come into our heart and mind. Believe they are divine. They are.

In February 1847 the Prophet Joseph Smith appeared to Brigham Young in a dream or vision. President Young asked the Prophet if he had a message for the Saints. The Prophet said: “Tell the people to be humble and faithful and sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach [them what] to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to *keep their hearts open to conviction* so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it.”⁵

Believing that revelation will come to you as well as to others is keeping your heart open to conviction.

Workings of the Holy Ghost

Examples of how the Holy Ghost works daily in the lives of members of the Church are numerous and inspirational. Most are quiet and personal, seen only as dramatic when we look back at the changes they brought. Think of your own experiences as you read a sampling of experiences that have been shared with me.

- A woman had been thinking about some of the job options she might pursue as her children returned to

school. As she sat in sacrament meeting, the stake president stood to bear his testimony. He read a scripture: “Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you” (Alma 39:14). That verse sank deep into her heart that Sabbath day as a spiritual confirmation of the things she should pursue during the coming year.

- An eight-year-old child was baptized and then confirmed a member of the Church, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost at the hands of his father and grandfather. As the boy happily stood to share his testimony, he unexpectedly felt such emotion that he could scarcely speak. A brother recounting that experience said, “I felt the feelings of the Spirit so strongly at that time.”
- A missionary and his companion knocked on the door of an investigator to whom they had given a Book of Mormon. As the elderly woman answered the door, the missionary felt a powerful feeling flood over him. The woman welcomed the missionaries and explained that she had read and believed what they had taught her. The young missionary was so affected by the feeling he felt that he prayed, “Dear Father, please let me never forget the feeling I have felt today.”
- A young college student far from home had begun to feel terribly alone. She pleaded in her prayers that she might receive help in her crisis. One morning in class, she felt an extraordinary feeling of comfort. A thought came into her mind: “You are never alone.” Her prayers were answered, and her feeling of homesickness was gone.
- A faithful father was en route to help a son who had made some wrong choices and now would suffer the consequences of his choices. In the long silent hours it took him to reach his son, the father prayed as he anguished over his son’s mistakes. Then came into this father’s mind clearly and distinctly this thought: “He is My son also.”
- A 16-year-old Laurel sat in a Sunday School class listening to a teacher. It was Easter time, and the teacher

had prepared a lesson on the Atonement. Speaking about the suffering the Savior had endured, he talked about what it meant to bleed at every pore, to be scourged, and to suffer on the cross. The young woman had never thought about the Atonement in such detail. There came into her mind a mental image. More than 25 years later, she spoke emotionally about the experience: “On that day the Holy Ghost testified to me that Jesus is the Christ.”

The Importance of Obedience

We live in an age when the most corrosive elements of evil surround us. Communication technology, which brings many wonderful things into our lives, also invades our communities—and even our homes if we are not careful—with that which can quickly numb us to the gift of the Holy Ghost. We must be vigilant as to what we allow to influence our spirits.

If you want greater clarity in understanding and believing the still, small voice, there is no better medicine than greater obedience. Jesus said unto His disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, suggested a simple solution for selecting the right voice to follow: “Listen to and follow the voice of the Spirit. This is an ancient solution, even eternal, and may not be popular in a society that is always looking for something new. It requires patience in a world that demands instant gratification. This solution is quiet, peaceful, and subtle in a world enamored of that which is loud, incessant, fast paced, garish, and crude. This solution requires you to be contemplative. . . . This solution requires us to walk by faith in a world governed by sight.”⁶

Quiet Time for Reflection

I have thought at times how different my children’s lives are from my own growing up on a small family farm



in southern Idaho in the 1950s and 1960s. Long days building a fence with my father, silent hours of moving irrigation pipe in potato fields, a home with one television that received only three channels, no computer, no MP3s, no mobile phones, few trips beyond nearby towns, few distractions, and much time with family—these were the building blocks of many of my generation.

In today’s world we must provide quiet, reflective times for our children and teach them how to listen to the still, small voice. With all the blessings our modern age has given to us, let us not give up the things that promote the workings of the Holy Ghost: time alone to pray, ponder, meditate, and read the scriptures; and time with family undisturbed by noise, distractions, and too many activities.

Responding to Promptings

By following the feelings that come to us, we learn to trust that they do come from our Father. We “grow up” (D&C 109:15) in learning to discern this voice.

President Thomas S. Monson has counseled us to never postpone a prompting. “We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice,” he said in general conference. “When it speaks, wise men and women obey. We do not postpone following promptings of the Spirit.”

President Monson then shared an experience about a friend named Stan, whose illness had left him partially paralyzed. Despite the finest medical care and the prayers of family and friends, Stan remained confined to a bed and began to despair.

“Late one afternoon I was swimming at the Deseret Gym, gazing at the ceiling while backstroking width after width,” President Monson recalled. “Silently, but ever so clearly, there came to my mind the thought: ‘Here you swim almost effortlessly, while your friend Stan languishes in his hospital bed, unable to move.’ I felt the prompting: ‘Get to the hospital and give him a blessing.’”

“I ceased my swimming, dressed, and hurried to Stan’s room at the hospital. His bed was empty. A nurse said he was in his wheelchair at the swimming pool, preparing for therapy. I hurried to the area, and there was Stan, all alone, at the edge of the deeper portion of the pool. We greeted one another and returned to his room, where a priesthood blessing was provided.”

Stan eventually regained strength and movement in his legs and learned to walk again. President Monson continued: “To some [Stan] reveals the dark thoughts of depression which engulfed him that afternoon as he sat in his wheelchair at the edge of the pool, sentenced, it seemed, to a life of despair. He tells how he pondered the alternative. It would be so easy to propel the hated wheelchair into the silent water of the deep pool. Life would then be over. But at that precise moment he saw me, his friend. That day Stan learned literally that we do not walk alone. I, too, learned a lesson that day: Never, never, never postpone following a prompting.”⁷

The Lord, in speaking of His Second Coming, emphasized that the gift of the Holy Ghost must be powerfully active among His Saints: “For they

that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day” (D&C 45:57).

We live in a wonderful day of opportunity, learning, and prosperity. But with these wonders come also the degrading deceits of the adversary, trying to push their way into the fabric of our

In today’s world we must provide quiet, reflective times for our children and teach them how to listen to the still, small voice.

lives, even attempting to burrow into the safe refuge of our homes. If we will receive the Holy Ghost as our guide and be wise in knowing, guarding, and building upon this gift, we will not be deceived. And as evil increases in the world, there will be a compensating power of the gift of the Holy Ghost for the righteous.

As we give greater care to this divine gift, we “shall abide the day” and again live with our Heavenly Father. ■

NOTES

1. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (2004), 49.
2. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Always Have His Spirit,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 59–61.
3. *Teachings: Wilford Woodruff*, 41, 51.
4. Boyd K. Packer, “Reverence Invites Revelation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 23.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 98; emphasis added.
6. James E. Faust, “Voice of the Spirit,” *Liahona and Ensign*, June 2006, 6.
7. Thomas S. Monson, “The Spirit Giveth Life,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 68, 70.

ONE HEART AND ONE MIND

Everyone needs to feel accepted, loved, and included. The Savior taught that His people should be “of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Meaningful service can be received or extended by members with disabilities, and when that happens, Christlike love grows, as the following stories from members illustrate.

Dedicated Service

Our daughter Kelly is in her late 40s. She looks like an adult but has the mind of a small child. This special child of God demonstrates what it means to be pure and without guile.

No one thought Kelly would ever be able to hold a calling except our neighbor and Sunday School president, Glenn Hammer. He knew she was dependable, and he felt that with a few weeks of training, she could grow into her calling, as we all must do.

Brother Hammer recommended Kelly to be the Sunday School bell-ringer, and shortly thereafter, she was sustained in sacrament meeting.

We gave her a watch and a small card with the time and pictures of bells to represent the number of times to ring the bell: two short rings first, followed five minutes later by one long bell. At first, the loud sound frightened her, but she persisted and overcame her fear.

Kelly has been reliable and faithful in her duty. She doesn't know how to use the telephone, but if she is going to be out of town on a Sunday, she asks her father to dial

the number of Brother Hammer. With great concern Kelly asks him, “Who ring the bell? Who ring the bell?” Brother Hammer assures her that he will take care of it. She smiles and replies, “OK.”

Kelly's faithful service soon led to a second assignment. Our Relief Society president asked Kelly to distribute hymnbooks to the sisters before Relief Society. After the meeting she gathers the books and stacks them neatly on a shelf. The Relief Society sisters have done much to reinforce Kelly's feelings of self-worth. In turn, as Kelly offers faithful, Christlike acts to the best of her ability, her example is a powerful spiritual influence on others.

Kelly has come to understand that she is needed and that we all have something of worth to give in service to the Lord and His children.

Carol and Gale Wilson, California, USA

Kelly

Ward members have done much to reinforce Kelly's feelings of self-worth as she serves in her callings. She, in turn, offers Christlike acts of service to the best of her ability.





Ian

When I found the gospel of Jesus Christ, I was thrilled to learn that Joseph Smith taught that all minds are 'susceptible of enlargement.' It reflected what I had always felt for our son Ian, and we found a renewed hope and determination to help him grow.

Enlarging Capacities

When I held our son Ian for the first time on the day my husband and I adopted him, I felt certain he was a gift to me from Deity. When he was 10 months old, doctors informed us that he was legally blind and mentally disabled. I felt devastated as the specialist explained that it

would be best to expect little of his future. In my heart, I knew Ian was an individual with a meaningful purpose, and I could not believe that he was incapable of growth. Shortly thereafter, my husband and I divorced, and I was left to raise Ian on my own.

Six years later, after I had been introduced to the gospel and joined the Church, I met and married a man who became Ian's father in wonderfully supportive ways. We learned that Joseph Smith taught that "all the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement."¹ We felt the Spirit witness truth to our belief that there was someone of great worth underneath our son's disabilities. We found a renewed hope and determination to help our son grow.

By the time Ian was 16 years old, we were able to secure a place for him at a progressive college for the blind that

catered to all of Ian's disabilities. The college was a seven-hour journey from home. Although we had been working toward Ian's independence, it was extremely difficult to hand his care over to someone else.

My fears were calmed when members of Ian's new ward in Harrogate, England, proved to be true examples of the gospel in action. Each Sunday a different member of Ian's ward invites him to their home. As a result, he feels like a cherished part of many families. The opportunity to socialize and develop friendships has aided him in achieving his goals. This tradition has continued every Sunday for the past 21 years, and it has brought great comfort and joy to Ian and to his father and me. Words are inadequate to express our thanks for the ward members' selfless service.

Ian has come so far since his original prognosis, and the members of his ward have greatly contributed to his progress. He is now living on his own with limited help from caregivers. He takes care of his own household chores and offers valuable service to others with disabilities. After completing a specialized training program, Ian now works as an office assistant at a college for the blind as well as at an organization for the elderly. He also helps an elderly friend with her shopping once a week and participates in temple work. Ian is a valuable contributor to his community and has proved to be a great inspiration to those who know him.

Frances A. Lewis, England



Embracing Joshua

When Joshua was born with Down syndrome, he not only became our special family member but he was also embraced by our entire ward.

I realized how true that was one day when I was at the church building and Joshua—who was a young child at the time—wandered off. When I noticed he was missing, I asked myself out loud, “Where has Joshua gone?” A passing Scout heard me and hurried down the hallway to the Scout room to alert everyone else: “Joshua is missing!” Within moments, Scouts swarmed the whole building, and Joshua was found participating in the Primary girls’ Achievement Day activity. In accommodating Joshua’s needs, ward members were willing to be their “brother’s keeper” (Genesis 4:9).

When Joshua was preparing for baptism,² one of our home teachers, Brother Nye, brought colored papers representing the steps we must take to return to Heavenly Father. Brother Nye set them on the floor and had Joshua step from paper to paper as he described each step. Later, when Joshua was preparing to receive the priesthood, Brother Nye made blocks that fit together. They represented the offices of the priesthood. Brother

Nye’s creativity with these and other object lessons has helped Joshua understand many gospel concepts.

Our family has found that gospel learning is enhanced when we embrace everyone—including those with disabilities—as part of the ward family. We are thankful for the way all of our ward families over the years have embraced our son.

Sharlynn Traver, Idaho, USA

Joshua

From the time Joshua was very young, our ward members have loved and cared for him.



Kristine

In stretching myself in the Lord's service, my communication skills and confidence have improved dramatically. I have learned that the gifts of the Spirit are real.



Fulfilling the Dream to Serve

I've faced many challenges in overcoming disabilities, the most troublesome of which are a hearing loss and a speech difficulty. I was always terrified to be part of a group because I could not hear or speak well. Because of my hearing loss, I could understand only parts of group conversations, and I often felt confused when I tried to piece the parts together. But the Lord has helped me, and my family and many friends from my young single adult ward have been tremendous advocates.

Participating in classes and activities in the young single adult program has pushed me out of my comfort zone. As I have been included and encouraged, I have gradually become more comfortable interacting with others. Preparing talks for sacrament meeting has helped me with my speech problem and built my confidence. Over time, my communication skills have improved dramatically.

In December 2005 one of my life dreams came true when I was called as a Church service missionary for the deaf in the Connecticut Hartford Mission. One of my

assignments was to sign for sacrament meetings. This was a challenge because I had to listen so intently. When I interpreted a sacrament meeting for the first time, I was shocked that I could do it. I learned that the gifts of the Spirit are real.

The gospel is designed to help us become stronger people no matter what our circumstances are. I know the Lord loves all of His children and blesses us as we have faith in Jesus Christ and work hard to achieve our dreams.

Kristine Haswell, Connecticut, USA ■

The Disability Resources section of the LDS.org Web site offers helpful information—such as leader and teacher resources, family resources, material references, and frequently asked questions—about many different kinds of disabilities. The section can be found at disabilities.lds.org.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 6:311.
2. Church policy provides that priesthood leaders and parents should prayerfully consider the individual's wishes and degree of understanding before priesthood ordinances are performed for a person with a mental disability.

To learn more about helping ward members with disabilities, visit disabilities.lds.org.

Not Enough Time?

*I didn't think
I had time
for institute.
But the Spirit
prompted me
to make time.*

By Hong Ook Son

In late December 2008 I sat in the celestial room of the Seoul Korea Temple, thinking about the new year ahead. I had been married in this same temple some two months earlier, and lately my days and weeks had seemed packed full with work, my Church calling, and my newly established family. I had been going to institute classes regularly, but now I considered that perhaps I would stop attending.

As I prayed for direction for the new year, I felt a distinct impression to continue attending institute. I also felt prompted to increase my temple attendance. As I left the temple that day, I was filled with a sense of peace and gratitude for the new direction the Lord had given me. I felt strongly that if I would follow the direction I had received, I would be blessed.

Beginning in January I began serving as a temple worker in the Seoul Temple. This required that twice a week I travel about an hour to the temple to fill my shift. In addition, twice a week my wife also made an hour-long trip, one for serving as a temple worker and the other one for attending a Book of Mormon institute class with me.

As I took on these additional commitments, it soon became clear that I would have to cut down my work by several hours each week. Since I work in sales, I am paid according to how many clients I maintain. I realized that by cutting back my work hours, I might also face a substantial cut in pay. However, I remembered the impression I had received, and I knew that everything else would work out if I fully committed myself to following the Lord.

As I attended institute and the temple more regularly, many blessings began to flow into my life. I noticed some marked changes. I felt the Spirit closer and more often, and my testimony of the restored gospel grew. My wife and I received great benefit from serving in the temple and attending our institute class. And unexpectedly, I also received temporal blessings. Somehow, despite my reduced work hours, I was able to meet more clients than ever before. My income didn't decrease; instead, it almost doubled.

I know that these wonderful blessings came from the Lord. I am grateful that He gave me the comfort to know that when we “seek . . . first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, . . . all these things shall be added unto you” (3 Nephi 13:33). ■



By Elder
Tad R. Callister
Of the Seventy



FEAR NOT

From Mary and Joseph we learn that we need not fear; for every problem, there is a solution.

Mary and Joseph learned early in life that for every problem God has a solution. To Mary, the angel said: “Fear not. . . . For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:30, 37).

Sometimes young adults are confronted with a problem that seems like Mount Everest. They believe it is just too high and too tough to climb. Because they see no solution, they become discouraged—perhaps even negative and pessimistic—about their futures. But, like Mary and Joseph, you can learn that however unsolvable the problems of life may seem, God *always* has a solution.

When Mary learned of her divine calling to bear the Son of God, undoubtedly a flood of issues and concerns raced through her mind. After all, she was betrothed to Joseph—what would he think? The angel from heaven then counseled, “Fear not” (Luke 1:30). When Joseph learned of Mary’s pregnancy, he saw

no satisfactory solution other than to break the engagement. But again the angel counseled, “Fear not” (Matthew 1:20). It was the same heavenly direction that had previously been given to Zacharias (see Luke 1:13) and that would later be given to the shepherds: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10).

There is much fear in the world today—of getting married, having children, making commitments, standing for the right, confronting peer pressure. There are fears of economic conditions and natural disasters. But the Lord’s counsel for us today is similar to that given to Mary and Joseph: “Be of good cheer, and *do not fear*, for I the Lord am with you” (D&C 68:6; emphasis added).

The angel’s counsel for Mary and Joseph to “fear not” was more than customized instruction for their individual problems. It was a universal salutation for all people because

Mary and Joseph would play a unique role in the Savior’s ministry, which ministry would make it possible to eliminate *all* fears of *all* people of *all* ages.

Because of the Savior’s birth, life, and Atonement, there are no unsolvable problems. There are temporary tragedies and difficulties, of course, but they need not be permanent or unconquerable. Can you imagine anyone having a problem God cannot solve? He always has a solution that will advance our eternal progress. That is both the reason for and essence of the Atonement. That is why Mormon said, “Ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ” (Moroni 7:41).

There is no question about the Atonement’s capacity to provide solutions for our problems. The scriptures are abundantly clear on this point. The real issues are these: Will we embrace those solutions? Will we choose the world’s answer or God’s answer? Will we repent or rationalize, seek God’s grace to overcome our weaknesses or “go it alone,” acknowledge God’s love in times of tragedy or spurn Him at every downturn in life?

The Atonement is the vehicle to solve life’s major problems. With the Atonement, God puts us in the driver’s seat of our divine destiny, provided we follow His will. Mary was a sterling



To Mary, the angel said: "Fear not. . . . For with God nothing shall be impossible."

example of this obedience. To the angel she said, "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). There was no rationalization, no delay, no grumbling—simply a humble submission to God's will. Joseph was of the same obedient mold. Even though the powers of reason may have indicated that Mary might have been unfaithful, he "did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife" (Matthew 1:24).

Mary and Joseph learned one of the most powerful lessons of life: if you believe in the Atonement and do God's will, you need not fear because there will *always*

be a solution to your problems.

The critics in the world have never learned this lesson. Admittedly, they are often bright and observant. They see the multitude and complexity of problems confronting us, but they frequently throw up their hands in despair because they see no solution. This is because they do not understand the Atonement. They can see the towering problem before them, but their vision is stunted. It is as though a wall blocks their view of the horizon; all they can see is the problem. As a result, they become skeptical and cynical and pessimistic. Their perspective is illustrated in diagram 1.

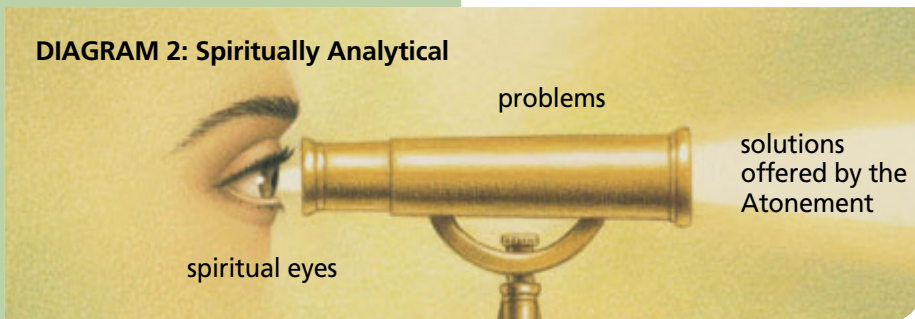
On the other hand, there are many others who are spiritually analytical without being critical. They too are bright and observant. They too see the complex and difficult problems of life, but they have a completely different vision. There is no wall blocking their sight. Rather, they have a telescopic lens to help them see not only the problems but beyond as well. In other words, they also see the solutions offered by the Atonement. Their perspective in life is shown in diagram 2.

Consequently, these people have few, if any, fears. They are positive and optimistic and upbeat about life because they absolutely know that for every problem there is a spiritual remedy. The Savior so declared, "Be

DIAGRAM 1: Critics



DIAGRAM 2: Spiritually Analytical



ACCORDING TO THY WORD, BY ELSPETH YOUNG, MAY NOT BE COPIED; ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE KROPP



He is the Savior because He really can save us from death and sin and weakness and the ordinary ailments of life.



of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Accordingly, there is no room for negativism in Christ’s Church. Negativism and cynicism stem from Satan. Cheerfulness and optimism stem from Christ.

All of the problems of the world seem to fall into four principal categories, each of which the Savior descended beneath and overcame, hence His mandate to “be of good cheer.”

- First, **death**. The scriptures declare, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).
- Second, **sin**. The angel told Joseph that Jesus would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).
- Third, **weakness**. The Savior taught Moroni that His “grace [the

enabling power of the Atonement] is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

- Fourth, **common ailments of life that may be unrelated to sin** (such as sickness, rejection, depression, loss of employment, and so forth). Isaiah prophesied that the Savior would “bind up the brokenhearted,” “comfort all that mourn,” and “give unto them beauty for ashes” (Isaiah 61:1–3; see also Alma 7:9–13).

For every affliction the world throws at us, the Savior has a remedy of superior healing power. No wonder Mary exclaimed, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46–47). He is the Savior because He really can save us from death and sin and weakness and the ordinary ailments of life.

Our Heavenly Father wanted Mary and Joseph to commence the uncertain path of life *without fear*, knowing His Son was there with all His saving powers. He wants us to likewise learn this lesson early in life: “Fear not. . . . For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:30, 37). ■

Joining Voices, Uniting Hearts

By Melanie Massey Hoggan



In November of 2007 my husband received a job with U.S. Customs and Border Protection working on the Montana/Canada border. I spent the next four months saying good-bye to a life I had worked hard to build and that I dearly loved—my musical life as a violin teacher in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

Each autumn for 12 years I had helped my students prepare Christmas music. In December our performance group shared its music at homeless shelters, women's shelters, banquets, business lunches, and churches throughout the Salt Lake Valley. It was always my favorite time of year. During those years in Salt Lake we had many special

experiences sharing the sacred music of the season and bearing testimony of the birth of Jesus Christ in even the most secular settings.

In February 2008 our family moved to Shelby, Montana, USA, population 3,000. It is the last stop on the prairie before Canada. There we found ourselves surrounded by wonderful, hardy farmers whose families had homesteaded the area 100 years earlier. I earnestly wondered what my new life held in store and what my contribution could be. As fall came around again, my heart began aching for the students I had left behind and the





Christmas music that would continue in Salt Lake without me.

I know the power that music has to break down barriers. I have seen it happen over and over again and have watched even hardened men cry when hearing the sweet music of Christmas. I recall a performance at a women's shelter in Salt Lake where women from the streets came to have their babies. They were unrefined women, but when my students played "Away in a Manger" with beautiful harmony on their small instruments, the women cried as they held their newborns. I could hardly imagine Christmas without music, without reaching out, without making a difference.

During this time, I was prompted to organize a community concert where churches and individuals would come together and each present a piece of Christmas music. The price of admission would be a donation of food for the local food pantry.

Although I felt like this was a wonderful idea, it was also very intimidating. I had only lived in my new area for seven months, and everything was still very new and unfamiliar to me. Moving forward felt like stepping into the darkness, but in October 2008 I began making my first calls.

While some of those I approached were excited about the idea, others were skeptical. Initially, some of the town clergymen were dubious about something promoted by a Mormon because of our theological differences. I could understand this because my own mother was of another faith and opposed to my membership in

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I also knew that faith, love, and patience can overcome differences. Still, for a while, it seemed like I wasn't making any progress.

Then, after several dead-end calls on a particular Monday, I pushed back the doubt and made one more call. Someone had told me about a lady named Connie who loved to attend concerts. So I phoned Connie and explained my

idea.

With no hesitation, and with great enthusiasm, she encouraged me forward and said her church would love to participate. Then she gave me the names and numbers of others she thought would also be interested.

With renewed energy, I began calling more people in our community and received more recommendations. Within a few weeks there were more than 40 musicians who were excited to participate as well as several churches.

When the day of the concert arrived, I was very nervous. How would our final rehearsal go? Would anyone attend the concert? Would it work? Would it be too long or not long enough?

Fifteen minutes before the concert was scheduled to begin, I saw that the auditorium was full, that the 350 programs we had printed were already gone, and that there was still a line of people waiting to come in. My heart was pounding.

After the opening prayer, our branch was the first number on the program. There was a hush as the seven women of our branch choir walked out onto a poinsettia-filled stage. As the first strains of the song began, a peaceful spirit filled the auditorium and remained for the next two and a half hours.

Then all the musicians and performers made their way to the stage for the finale. Everyone in the audience stood together and sang "O Little

Town of Bethlehem” and “The First Noel.” We ended by singing “Silent Night,” while two children portraying Mary and Joseph made their way down the center aisle, up the stairs, and to the manger on the stage.

People talked about the concert for months afterward with a feeling of community pride. Everyone had known that their neighbors and friends had talents, but no one had ever seen those talents presented in one place at the same time. Many commented on how good it felt to have the different churches come together for an event, and others said it set the tone for the rest of the Christmas season. However, the most common sentiment was simply that it made people “feel good inside.”

Last December we held our second annual Community Christmas Concert and raised \$2,000 for the local ministerial association’s charitable work. The number of

participants and the amount of community and ecclesiastical involvement continued to grow. The concert seems to be on its way to becoming a tradition in our area—something everyone looks forward to. And still, the biggest reason people say they attend is because of the feeling that is present.

My testimony is that Heavenly Father wants our light and His light to shine. He will give us promptings. When we follow those promptings and have faith to move forward—even when it is uncomfortable—He will work His miracles through us. He is always preparing us for the next miracle. I realize now that my prior musical experiences and accomplishments had simply been preparation for that moment when everyone in our community sang “Silent Night” together.

How grateful I am for a loving Heavenly Father who sees the whole picture and knows where we fit in, where we can contribute, and how we can help bless others. ■





Three Generations of CHRISTMAS

A father, son, and grandson share tender Christmas experiences far from home and years apart.

Christmas on the Rhine

By Leslie Thomas Foy

It was the night before Christmas in Germany. Scarcely a month before, the armistice that terminated the first World War had been signed. As part of a U.S. Army unit assigned to keep watch on the Rhine river, I was stationed a little distance from the city of Koblenz.

The night was cool and crisp. Snow fell, seemingly sent to put the finishing touch on the first Christmas since the close of a brutal war that for four years had kept the world in turmoil.

After being separated for many years from those who had gone to serve their fatherlands, family members all over Europe were being reunited: sweethearts, mothers, fathers, sons, brothers, sisters, and daughters were once more to feast together. It was a time of great rejoicing.

But for me, a soldier stranded on the Rhine far away from loved ones, it was not so. Feeling dejected, I pulled my khaki overcoat about my throat and strode along a busy city street. My spirits lifted as I beheld the hurry and scurry of shoppers as they filed in and out of tiny shops lining the crooked avenues. I understood German, and every now and then I paused to listen

to conversations as shoppers and friends wished one another a Merry Christmas.

I leaned up against a shop front. Two German brothers who appeared to be around ages six and eight had their noses pressed tightly against a frosty window. There were clusters of trinkets, toys, and gingerbread cakes. The boys' restless feet tapped the frozen ground and their hands beat a cadence on their hips to warm themselves.

"Well! After all," said the older of the two to the younger, "it's all right to wish for Santa Claus to bring us some of those things, even though Mama says that he cannot come to our house this year. We're awfully poor, you know."

I leaned closer so as to not miss a single word. "I wish I had that and that," replied the younger boy. "I wish I had a gingerbread man, too."

Two German brothers pressed their noses against a frosty window. One said, "I wish I had a gingerbread man."



At this point, I engaged the little strangers in conversation and learned that their father had just returned from serving in the German army as a soldier at the German front. His pay had stopped, his job was gone, and there was no money in the house for presents. Their mother had made that clear so her four little children (the two boys and their two little sisters) would not be disappointed to awaken on Christmas morning and find that Santa Claus had passed them by.

Soon, they had to hurry home. It was quite a long way, so I offered to

accompany them. When we arrived, they pointed out their apartment, which was four flights up in an apartment complex so large it enclosed a solid block.

I made a resolution: Santa Claus would come to their home that year. With the location of the house and the number and ages of the children fixed firmly in my mind, I retraced my steps to the tiny shop where the two nose prints were still visible upon the glass.

The shopkeeper carefully wrapped the trinkets and the gingerbread men into four tiny bundles, which he folded into one larger bundle. After I paid him, he smiled at me as I opened the door and called out *gute Nacht!* (Good Night!)

Back at military quarters, I confided my secret to a friend, who agreed to accompany me to the family's home. That

night, two khaki-clad soldiers greeted a former enemy in his home. The children's mother wept tears of joy when she opened the package. In the adjoining room, the four children slumbered in their bed, dreaming of gingerbread men and trinkets in shop windows, expecting to awaken to empty stockings. Meanwhile, three soldiers, former enemies, kindled a friendship.

At midnight, two Yankee soldiers sauntered homeward, their hearts full of Christmas cheer. The bells in the great cathedral pealed forth, "Peace on earth and good will to men." In my heart echoed the words of the Master: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). I knew then it was truly greater to give than to receive.

The Christmas Man

By Leslie Tuttle Foy

As missionaries in Germany a few years after World War II, my companion and I sat on the edge of our beds one December evening opening Christmas cards sent by family and friends from home. In each we found a few dollars. Over and over in our minds, we thought of things that we would like to buy for ourselves with our gift money.

We used the cards to decorate the small Christmas tree we had purchased. Reading the cards had made us feel homesick; as Christmas neared, it seemed that everyone we spoke to turned us away, reminding us that Christmas was a family time, so we were not to bother them.

My companion sensed my discouragement. He tried to lift my spirits by asking me which Christmas had been my most memorable. I shared with him the account my father had written of when he and a friend, while stationed in Germany after World War I, had provided a surprise Christmas to four German children.

My companion and I thought that in like manner we might be able to use the

money we had received in our Christmas cards to provide a surprise Christmas to a poor family in our branch with three small children. Jobs were scarce and transportation expensive, and the family had been forced to get along on scant government welfare. They lived in a run-down cabin in the woods.

In some parts of Germany, the Christmas Man (*der Weihnachtsmann*), tall and slender, delivers the gifts on Christmas Eve. My companion was tall and slender, so we rented clothing to make him look like the Christmas Man.

We used the gift money we had received from our families and friends to buy toys, candy, clothing, and oranges (a hard-to-get treat in Germany) for the family.

We wore several layers of clothing to keep us warm on that cold Christmas Eve. The snow was deep, and we had to push our bikes through the snow in order to reach the family in the woods. My companion knocked on the door of the dark house. When the door slowly opened, my companion saw a room nearly bare of furniture. The family shared a mattress on the floor because there was no bed, and it helped them stay warm. Instantly the family was

We used our gift money to buy toys, candy, clothing, and oranges (a hard-to-get treat in Germany) for the family.



awake as they eagerly greeted the Christmas Man and received his gifts.

As we walked home, the only sound was the crunching made by our feet in the snow, each of us deep in thought. The surprise, gratitude, and love we felt from the family were well worth anything we had given up, and we realized that by forgetting ourselves and loving others, we had lost our homesickness and found the true love of God.

As we entered our room, our eyes fell on our little Christmas tree with its Christmas card ornaments. The exchange between the angel and Nephi came into my mind: “Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:21–22).

A String and a Tuna Fish Can

By Jeffrey W. Foy

As my first Christmas as a missionary in Ecuador approached, I was not sure what to expect. A few weeks earlier I had been transferred to what was up to that point the poorest area to which I had been assigned. Without even a single paved road, the frequent passing of buses would keep more dust and dirt in the air than what was on the ground, making it next to impossible to see the relatively few Christmas lights that had been hung.

Upon my arrival at my new area, I was greeted with a letter from home. It included a story from my father about how he and his missionary companion, while serving in a poor post-war section of Germany, had bought a bag of candy and walked the streets on Christmas morning passing it out to children. He described the children’s faces as he gave them what was probably one of the few gifts the children had received. For some, it was the first piece of candy they had ever had.

After I shared the story with my companion, we decided to set out and do the same. As we walked the streets and passed out candy, the children graciously accepted our gifts and ran to show their parents, whose thanks we felt as they nodded their approval. We found, as had my father and grandfather,

that the greatest joy at Christmas comes from serving others in whatever manner we can.

We approached a happy six-year-old boy playing in the dirt. To our amazement, he declined the piece of candy we offered him. When we asked him why, he told us he had already been given the best gift ever. We were curious and asked him to tell us what it was. He looked at us impatiently and said, “Can’t you see?” Our eyes searched for a shiny toy or new clothes—anything that seemed worthy of declining our piece of candy. But we saw nothing. We asked him again to tell us about his great gift.

He stopped playing, looked up at us, and with the biggest smile I have ever seen, showed us a piece of string. He told us how much he loved his parents for teaching him to be good enough for Santa Claus to leave him the string. He told us his father had helped him put a hole in an empty

tuna fish can so the boy could tie it to his string, turning it into a “dump truck” that he had used all morning to haul rocks across the neighborhood.

“Thanks for the candy,” he said, “but I have too much work to do. I have to haul these rocks before it gets too dark to see.”

On Christmases since that day, I have seen children show off the gifts they have received for Christmas. But I have yet to see evidence of happiness that compares to that of the boy whose joy lay in a simple piece of string tied to a tuna fish can, a gift from his father, who served him as best he could. ■

A boy and his dad made a “dump truck” from a string and empty can. The excited boy hauled rocks all day.



Glad Tidings of Great Joy

There are still things we can learn about this most familiar of all scriptural stories.

By Eric D. Huntsman

Associate Professor of Ancient Scripture,
Brigham Young University

As we approach the Christmas season, the familiar picture of the stable scene returns to our hearts like an old friend. However, the scene we often depict in our Christmas crèches is a composite of two different biblical accounts, those of Matthew and Luke, which are often blended with as many elements arising from tradition and imagination as from scripture.

The narratives of Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2 provide two different, but complementary, views of the Christmas story. Both accounts testify of the same basic truths: the coming of Jesus Christ into the world was long-prophesied, His mother was a pure and chosen vessel, His conception was divine, and His birth was miraculous.

However, the great significance of the Lord's coming lies in what he would accomplish at the *end* of His mortal life. Book of Mormon prophecies confirm these vital truths, strengthening our testimony of *who* Jesus was and helping us realize that glad tidings of great joy had as much to do with *what* He came to do.

MARY AND THE ANGEL, BY CARL HEINRICH BLOCH

Matthew's Account

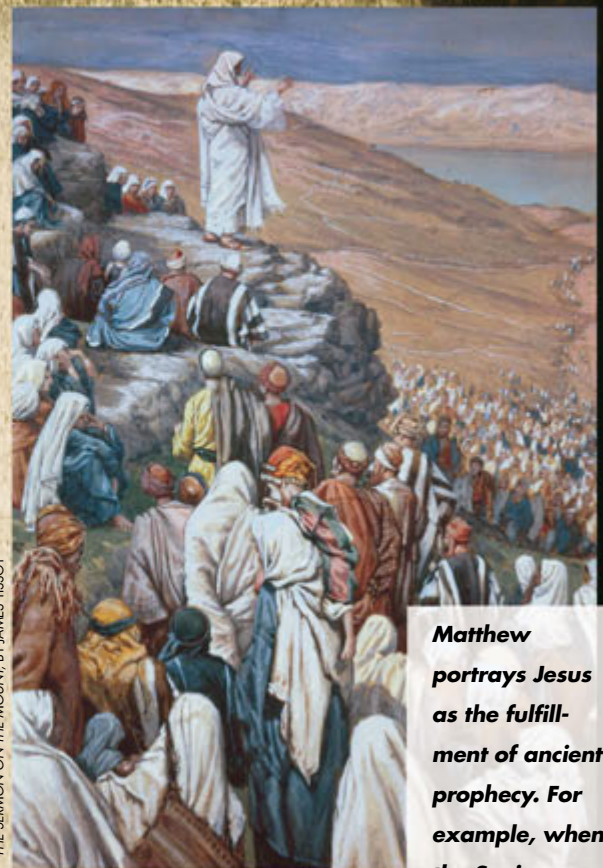
The infancy narrative of Matthew answers the question of who Jesus was by first focusing on Jesus as the promised Messiah of the line of David (see 2 Samuel 7:12–16; Psalms 89:4, 132:11; Isaiah 9:7, 11:1; and Jeremiah 23:5–6). Beginning with and descending from Abraham, Jesus's genealogy is broken into three sections: Abraham to David, David to the exile in Babylon, and from the exile to Joseph and thence to Jesus (Matthew 1:1–16). David thus plays a pivotal role in this succession of ancestors. The fact that Matthew uses 14 generations for each of these divisions stresses Jesus's Davidic heritage because 14 is the numerical equivalent of David's name in Hebrew, the original language of the text.¹

Mary also seems to have been of the House of David, which provides an important genealogical tie for the Savior.² By carefully noting that her child was “of the Holy Ghost” and by quoting Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin would conceive, Matthew establishes Mary's purity and the divine nature of her child's conception (Matthew 1:18, 23), points that Luke and the Book of Mormon also emphasize.

However, because kingship descended through the male line, this legal genealogy needed to be traced through Joseph to have the requisite

authority. Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, but by accepting Mary's son and giving Jesus a name, he legally claimed the child, thereby making Jesus an heir of the royal line. Moreover Matthew emphasizes Joseph's important role as Jesus's foster father. Joseph's actions of protecting his young family echo those of Joseph in Genesis. Joseph the carpenter also receives revelations through dreams and takes his family into Egypt to save them.

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses prophesied that God would raise up a prophet “like unto me” that Israel should hearken to in all things. In his gospel Matthew portrays Jesus as this new Moses, as is seen later in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), but also as one greater than Moses. There, Jesus ascends a hill where He gives a “new” law just as Moses had ascended Mount Sinai to receive the old law. This association of Jesus and Moses helps explain why Matthew preserved the sad story of Herod's slaughter of children “from two years and under” in Bethlehem (2:16–18) when other historical and scriptural sources do not. Just as Pharaoh had killed all the Hebrew baby boys by drowning them in the Nile, thereby almost killing the deliverer, Moses (Exodus 1:15–2:10), Herod tried to kill the promised Savior, the



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. BY JAMES TISSOT

Matthew portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. For example, when the Savior gave the Sermon on the Mount, He filled a role as a new Moses.

true King of the Jews.

The visit of the Magi, or “Wise Men,” supports Matthew's testimony that Jesus was the promised king, who came not only for his own people but for *all* the peoples of the earth. Although the Magi who came seeking Jesus might have been connected with the House of Israel, the wise men have traditionally been connected with the *magi*, or astrologers and wise men of Babylonia and Persia. While these wise men were certainly moved by the Spirit of God, if they were Gentiles, then their arrival to recognize and worship the newborn King of the Jews at least partially fulfills the

The visit of the Magi supports Matthew's testimony that Jesus came for all the peoples of the earth.

prophecy of Isaiah 60:3: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Another example of how all peoples—not just ethnic Israel—were part of the Christmas story may be found in the inclusion of four women in the genealogy, each of whom also seems to have been from outside of Israel.

The arrival of the Magi during the last year of the reign of Herod the Great (ruled 37–4 B.C.) helps date the birth of Jesus, but the Magi's arrival in Bethlehem was considerably after Jesus's birth. They found Mary and the baby Jesus established in a house, not the temporary accommodations of a stable or cave. Herod's edict that all children two years and younger be slain also suggests that months, if not years, had passed.

But Jesus was more than just the promised king of David's line or a new prophet in the guise of Moses. Throughout his gospel, Matthew commonly connects prophecies from Jewish scriptures with the life of Jesus, showing who He truly was. Accordingly, in the first of five quotations from the Hebrew scriptures in his infancy narrative (Matthew 1:23; 2:6, 15, 18, and 23), Matthew sees the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. The promised babe is, in very fact, *Immanuel*, or "God with us."

Although Matthew's account focuses especially on who the Babe of Bethlehem was, the name that an angel directed Joseph to give Mary's son emphasizes what He came to do. The name *Yehoshua*, which through the Greek came into English as

"Jesus," means "Jehovah is salvation," explaining the command "Thou shalt call him JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Luke's Story

Luke's account gives more background, careful comparisons and contrasts, poetic expressions, and fully developed characters than Matthew's. Luke also includes historical details not preserved elsewhere. But above all else, in addition to making clear who Jesus was, Luke gives added testimony as to what He had come to do.

Luke's story begins with the promise of a child to the elderly Zacharias and Elisabeth, a story that provides a contrast to the promised advent of Jesus. Both conceptions are miraculous: John is born to a barren mother past



THE JOURNEY OF THE MAGI, BY JAMES TISSOT

the age of childbearing and Jesus is explicitly the Son of God and of a virgin. Although John's birth is relatively quiet, aside from his father, Zacharias, regaining his voice. Jesus's birth is accompanied by glorious manifestations and angelic proclamations.

Luke is generally assumed to have been a "Greek writing for Greeks." He is nonetheless familiar with Jewish history and scripture and successfully connects his story with Old Testament scripture. For instance, Luke's characters are portrayed as righteous Israelites: three pairs—Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary, and Simeon and Anna—parallel Old Testament characters such as Abraham, Sarah, Hannah, Isaiah, and Huldah.

Also, while Luke does not explicitly quote Old Testament scripture in the same way Matthew does, he includes four poetic expressions that take the form of songs of praise or "canticles." These are known by their traditional names as the Magnificat (Mary, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," 1:46–55), the Benedictus (Zacharias, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," 1:68–79), the Gloria in Excelsis (the angels, "Glory to God in the Highest," 2:14), and the Nunc Demittis (Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace," 2:29–32, emphasis added). These songs reflect

the sentiments of those who sang them, yet they also invoke greater meaning by reflecting Old Testament passages.

One of the most beautiful vignettes in Luke's narrative is his account of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, known traditionally as the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38). Containing details that could only have come from Mary herself, this is a tribute to the young girl's purity, and special mission, and the reality that her child would indeed be the Son of God:

"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 . . .

"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 1:31–32, 35).

This touching account is a testament to Mary's faithful willingness to do whatever God asked: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

Mary's visit to Elisabeth likewise contains powerful testimony, both of the identity of Mary's unborn babe and of her own mission and faithfulness. When Elisabeth hears Mary's greeting, the Holy Ghost causes her own baby to leap in her



MARY'S VISIT TO ELIZABETH, BY CARL HENRICH BLOCH

When Elisabeth's baby leaped in her womb when she heard Mary's greeting, Elisabeth declared Mary to be "the mother of my Lord"

womb, and she declares Mary to be "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). Mary replies with an inspired expression preserved by Luke in a well-known canticle:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
"And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. . . .

"For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name" (Luke 1:46–47, 49). Mary's song goes on to describe the mercy and grace that the Lord will accomplish through her son, all of which is in accordance with the promises that God had made to Abraham and the other patriarchs (see



THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE BY JAMES TISSOT

At Jesus's presentation at the temple, Simeon gave thanks for the light and salvation the Savior had brought to Israel and Gentiles alike. Anna the prophetess gave thanks for the redemption of Israel.

Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6; Abraham 2:9–11).

Whereas Matthew's account dates the birth of Jesus with a reference to the final days of King Herod, thereby putting Jesus's birth in a Jewish context, Luke connects it with events in the larger Roman world. He does this by mentioning a census, perhaps an enrollment done in preparation for taxation, during the governorship of Cyrenius.

But Luke also uses the enrollment to explain how Mary, the virgin from Nazareth, ended up giving birth in Bethlehem, the City of David. Joseph, being "of the house and lineage of David"

(Luke 2:4), took his wife to Bethlehem to be taxed. It was while there that she gave birth to the baby Jesus.

Joseph may actually have been a native of Bethlehem or had relatives living there. He and his little family stayed in a home in Bethlehem until fleeing to Egypt to avoid Herod's slaughter. It also seems that Joseph intended to return to Bethlehem with his family, but instead retired to Nazareth after learning that Herod's son, Archelaus, ruled in nearby Jerusalem (see Matthew 2:19–23).

The possibility of Joseph's kin living in Bethlehem may, in fact, explain the meaning of the word "inn" (Greek *katalyma*) in Luke 2:7. Traditional pictures of the Nativity portray the young couple arriving in a strange town, where they cannot find accommodations "because there was no room in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

But the word "inn" (Greek *katalyma*) can also mean "guest room." This is how Luke uses it in 22:11, referring to the upper room where Jesus and His disciples hold their last supper. Instead of the traditional idea of an inn, complete with a gruff innkeeper shouting "No room!" to the couple, Joseph might have been staying in his own family home or the home of a relative. However, because there were so many relatives visiting for the tax season, he may not

have been able to find a private room where his wife could give birth.

Accordingly, the manger into which Joseph and Mary put the newborn Jesus may have been in the animal quarters of a family home, rather than in the stable of an inn or the animal pen of a caravan camp, perhaps to afford them privacy at this special time. Although a manger presupposes the presence of domestic animals, the oxen and donkeys of our Christmas Nativity scenes are actually suggested by Isaiah 1:3: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." The Greek translation of this passage and Luke 2:16 use the same Greek word, *phatnē*, for "crib" and "manger." This cross reference emphasizes the fact that Jehovah's creatures knew and accepted Him whereas His people did not always do the same: while the donkey recognized "his master's crib, Israel my people doth not consider [understand]."

The two final canticles in Luke emphasize the extraordinary significance of the birth of Jesus. The song of the heavenly host celebrates the peace that Jesus will bring, and the prophecy of Simeon, given when Jesus is presented in the temple, emphasizes that the child came to bring salvation and light to Israelites and Gentiles alike.

Truths from the Book of Mormon

In addition to the accounts in Matthew and Luke, we are blessed to have prophecies in the Book of Mormon that confirm the most important facts about the coming of Jesus and also focus our minds more clearly on who Jesus is and how and why He came into the world.

For instance, 1 Nephi 11:16–21 teaches that Mary was a precious virgin from Nazareth. Caught away by the Spirit, she divinely conceived and later returned as a virgin now holding a child whom the angel identified as the Lamb of God, the Son of the Eternal Father. Not only does this passage confirm the message of Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation, it also teaches in more detail the doctrine of the condescension: that God literally became the Father of the mortal Jesus and that the divine Jehovah became the Babe of Bethlehem. Mary's role, and the fact that Jesus would be born near Jerusalem, the scene of His later atoning sacrifice, are also confirmed by Alma 7:10–13.

This emphasis on the divine identity and work of Jesus is also found in Mosiah 3:5–11, where Jesus Christ is called “the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (v. 8). But this glorious fact is also framed by prophecies concerning His healing ministry, His suffering for us, His Crucifixion, and His Resurrection. Indeed, prophecies of Jesus in the Book of Mormon focus more on His saving work than they do on His promised nativity.

As a result, as we commemorate and celebrate the birth of our Lord, we should also focus on what Jesus did at the *end* of His mortal life and ministry. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) wrote:

“This is the wondrous and true story of Christmas. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of



Judea is preface. The three-year ministry of the Master is prologue. The magnificent substance of the story is His sacrifice, the totally selfless act of dying in pain on the cross of Calvary to atone for the sins of all of us. . . .

“There would be no Christmas if there had not been Easter. The babe Jesus of Bethlehem would be but another baby without the redeeming Christ of Gethsemane and Calvary, and the triumphant fact of the Resurrection.”³

During this joyous season when we celebrate the miraculous birth of our Savior, reading these familiar stories can help us better understand the circumstances and significance of our Lord's birth. But as we read them with Book of Mormon prophecies in mind, and as we consider them in the light of a modern prophet's admonition, we will strengthen our testimony of the vital truth of what Jesus, the promised Son of God, came to do: suffer, die, and rise again that we might all have eternal life. ■

NOTES

1. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (1993), 69–70, 74–81.
2. While it is not clear that Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23–38) is that of Jesus through Mary, the fact that Joseph and Mary were apparently relatives supports the fact that Jesus was a literal, as well as adoptive, descendant of David. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 85–86, 89.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2000, 5.

Christmas

OF THE SEVENTY

Members of the Seventy share how they celebrate the season and remember the Savior's birth.



How can we celebrate Christmas so it is meaningful to each member of the family? How can we keep the Savior at the center of Christmas? What traditions can help us remember Him and His birth?

Members of the Seventy from various countries and cultures share ways they have answered these questions for themselves and their loved ones. Here they share some meaningful Christmas memories, testimonies, and traditions. (Their native countries are listed in parentheses.)



Elder Marcos A. Aidukaitis (Brazil):

Christmas is a very special opportunity for my family and me to talk about some sacred things that we don't address in perhaps the same formal and specific way during other times of the year. It is an opportunity to show love to others and gratitude for things that have happened in our lives.



Elder David S. Baxter (Scotland): When our children were young, we would go carol singing on Christmas Eve, delivering gifts of Yule logs to less-active families in our ward.



We would light candles on Christmas Eve, read the Christmas story, have a special family meal, and then enjoy Christmas together.



Elder Gérald Caussé (France):

In our family we have decided that Christmas is not just about having fun together, but it is also about focusing on Christ and serving others. About 10 years ago we formed a choir of family members. We went to hospitals and retirement homes and sang Christmas songs. At first it was a small group. We had babies in our arms and in strollers. But now these babies have grown up, and they are seasoned choristers. We have a 44-person choir sharing not only traditional French carols but also Church hymns, and we find great

Traditions



success. After singing, the children go and distribute to the sick or elderly little presents we have prepared as a family. We try to have time with each person, talking about the true meaning of Christmas and also listening to him or her. Everyone always has a lot to share.

Our visits are special occasions to remember what we know about being a Christian and bearing the name of Christ. Christmas is a good reminder of how we need to behave during the whole year.



Elder Eduardo Gavarret (Uruguay):

Christmas is a special time in our lives. We are always filled with a warm feeling during that time. When the month of December arrives, we find that Christmas is a time of peace and being together with family. We have the tradition of writing letters to our friends, but we especially enjoy writing letters to the Savior and putting them on the Christmas tree as a gift we want to give Him.



Elder Carlos A. Godoy (Brazil):

As a family we write our testimonies in copies of the Book of Mormon and send them to friends and relatives as Christmas gifts. Because it's Christmas, gifts are always welcome. And it's a nice way to share the gospel and to remember that Christ is the most important part of the day.



Elder Christoffel Golden Jr. (South Africa):

On Christmas Eve we enjoy a sit-down dinner, after which we read Luke's account of the Savior's birth. On Christmas morning, dressed in our Sunday best, we attend a short Christmas meeting. At this meeting we also have a number of nonmembers and less-active members attend. Later we visit with friends and other family members at family gatherings and there strengthen our family ties in the true spirit of Christmas.



Elder Donald L. Hallstrom (USA): On Christmas Eve in years past we would gather to have a sweet and memorable period of testimony bearing. Each family member was given opportunity to express his or her feelings about the Savior and about our Father in Heaven. Those deep feelings of love would then turn us to one another, and expressions of love for family members would be most heartfelt. My father would then express his vision for the family and give powerful encouragement to each family member to remain true to the faith. Then in unity we would kneel together in a closing family prayer.



Elder Paul V. Johnson (USA): One of our traditions is that every year we attend a sing-in of Handel's *Messiah* as a family. We love that. We each have a score of the music, and it gives us a chance to sing the beautiful words, put to music by Handel, and recall the Savior's ministry.



Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi (Japan): Starting about 30 days before Christmas, my wife and I try to read the words of the prophets from the scriptures regarding the Savior's birth. If you read each day until December 25, you feel the Christmas spirit gradually build up, story by story, scripture by scripture. That's what we try to do in our family.

I always remember Nephi's reply to the angel's question about the meaning of the tree in his father's dream. Nephi said, "Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men" (1 Nephi 11:22). To me, Christmas is about the love of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.



Elder Erich W. Kopischke (Germany):

During this season, the whole house changes visibly. Boughs of fir trees are decorated, candle arches are placed in the windows, and strings of lights are hung. The children put Christmas decorations in their rooms, cookies and gingerbread are baked, and an aroma permeates the entire house—the scent of fir trees and cinnamon.



Christmas Eve is a favorite time for us to invite family and friends to our home. We light candles and start a fire in the fireplace. We have prepared special songbooks containing Christmas carols we like to sing. I bring out my accordion, and every person chooses a carol that we sing together. There is a special spirit that everyone enjoys.

Then we open presents. The little children go first. Everyone watches and shares the excitement as each present is unwrapped. After all the presents have been opened, the children quickly disappear with their treasures. The adults stay and chat. It's really like a special family home evening.

Sometimes we invite people over for Christmas Eve who might otherwise be lonely. These Christmases are particularly nice.



Elder Michael John U. Teh (Philippines):

Christmas for me means Christ and my family. It is an opportunity to recommit myself to do better in my relationship with our Heavenly Father and the Savior and in how I am as a husband and a father. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend

sacrament meeting throughout the year because it is a time for me to renew those covenants and remember Christmas. It can be like Christmas every week, a time when I recommit myself to remember the Savior.



Elder José A. Teixeira (Portugal):

The best way for our family to maintain and keep the spirit of Christmas, not only during the season but also throughout the year, is by reading the scriptures. As we read the scriptures as a family, we remind ourselves of the Savior and the true spirit of Christmas.

Christmas to my family and me really means Jesus Christ. It's a time of giving, a time of receiving, a time of reconnecting with our families, and a time to extend greater amounts of love to those around us.



Elder Francisco J. Viñas (Spain):

I want to share with you an experience we had during my service as mission president in 1989. While we served in the Argentina Salta Mission, a



few days before Christmas, we received instruction from the Missionary Department that the missionaries had to stay in their apartments until further notice because of the invasion of Panama by the United States.

On the morning of December 24th, we loaded the mission cars and divided the mission into two parts: the assistants went to the north part of the mission, and my eight-year-old son and I went to the south of the mission. The purpose was to visit each companionship in their apartment, deliver food, and share a Christmas message with them. This was a great experience for my son and me. Being in each apartment and sharing with the missionaries was a wonderful experience for both of us—one we always cherish as a great Christmas memory.

My wife and two daughters stayed in the mission home, and my son and I returned in the early morning of December 25th. That was the first time that we were not together as a family for Christmas Eve, but it was for us the most memorable of Christmases.



Elder Jorge F. Zeballos (Chile): When you have a testimony of Jesus Christ—that He lives, that He is our Savior, our Redeemer—the best way to manifest your love for Him is by being obedient to His commandments. So to me, the best way to remember Him, not only during the Christmas season but every day, is by being obedient to everything He has asked us to do.



Elder Claudio D. Zivic (Argentina): Christmas for me and for our family means celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. It means gathering as a family on Christmas Eve to have a home evening where everyone participates in presenting, reading, and singing of the special events of the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. This has always been the most important celebration in our home, and we try to keep the spirit of the season by living the gospel each day. ■



FREE TO Smile

After years of repression, Edit Kiss Kerbs learned from the missionaries to have faith in God. Her work at Deseret Industries helped her have faith in herself.

By Allie Schulte

Edit Kiss* sat in her family's apartment, staring out the window at the wide blue Hungarian sky. Suddenly, the eight-year-old was overcome with a feeling. "One day," she thought, "I will travel far from this place, and I will help people."

Nothing in her situation at the time made such a hope plausible. Travel to other countries was tightly controlled, as were many other things in those days—unless you were a member of the privileged class. Theoretically such a class didn't exist, but Edit saw how some children received preferential treatment from the teachers while her own hard work went unnoticed. Even within her extended family, an uncle with government influence dispensed jobs and other favors to relatives but treated her family as being beneath him.

Edit's parents were hard-working, charitable people

whose actions could often be described as Christian. Yet they did not believe in God, and religion was not discussed in their home. Edit, however, influenced by a grandmother and other relatives who did believe, also came to believe that there is a God. Still, she knew little about her relationship to Him and had many questions—questions that would become more urgent in her early adult years.

Finding the Answers

Edit was married and had a young daughter, Szilvia, when her mother died. Not long afterward, Edit's troubled marriage ended in divorce, leaving her to provide for herself and her young child. Despite the divorce and the financial challenges, it was the death of her mother that affected Edit most deeply.

"I was taught that there was nothing more after death, but I could not believe my mother was truly gone," Edit says.




As Edit learned English, she was offered a job as a cashier for Deseret Industries. She was nervous but her friends at work encouraged her to try. Eventually, she was promoted to a position in the Church's Welfare Services Department.

She searched unsuccessfully for answers until one day, on the street, she met two young men dressed in suits standing at a table stacked with blue books. Curious to see what the books were about, she allowed the missionaries to visit her.

“There was something different about them,” Edit recalls. “As they taught, I felt like a little girl when she hears a wonderful story.” When Edit heard about the plan

of salvation and the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, she found the answers to lifelong questions. The missionaries promised her that Heavenly Father would help her feel that these things were true as she read the Book of Mormon and prayed.

Edit doubted that she could receive such an answer. “In my mind, Father in Heaven was far away and had



more serious things to do than to answer me,” she says. “I felt like a nobody.” Yet that night Edit read the Book of Mormon until finally drifting off to sleep at 2:00 a.m. Two hours later, she was suddenly wide awake and filled with a feeling similar to the one she had felt as an eight-year-old at the window, years before.

“That was when I knew that Heavenly Father knows me and cares about me and that He can reach me, no matter how low I am,” she says. “I still had no idea what was in the Book of Mormon, but I knew it was true!”

Journey to that “Far” Place

Edit began to make changes in her life. She met with the missionaries regularly, began reading the Book of Mormon, and attended church with Szilvia. Three weeks later, Edit was baptized.

About five years later, Mitchell Kerbs, one of the missionaries who had taught Edit and who had later baptized Szilvia, returned to Hungary and visited their city. Edit and Mitchell had not corresponded during those years, Edit says. “I remembered him as a great missionary, but I thought surely he was already married.” Nevertheless, she continues, “He came, we talked, and the same night we knew we were going to be married.” Soon after, Edit and Mitchell were married, and less than a year later the family of three moved to the United States so that Mitchell could finish school there.

The Challenge of Freedom

Life in the United States was much different than Edit had expected. In the grocery store, the variety and affordability of goods was overwhelming, the employees helpful and trusting. She wasn’t constantly asked to show identification as she went about her daily business. Unaccustomed to so much freedom, Edit felt insecure and unsure of herself. “I had been repressed by a lack of choices,” she says, “and by people who always told me ‘you cannot do this or that.’”

The friendliness of complete strangers also unsettled Edit. She was used to being treated as a second-class

citizen. Now she found herself envying these people who smiled so easily, and she wished she knew what they knew—how to be happy.

In Hungary, Edit had learned six languages and worked in a bank. But she knew very little English, and so, needing to help with family finances, Edit found work in a factory. The job paid well enough, but the work environment was negative. Her boss demeaned her and mocked her broken English, and after five weeks, she felt forced to quit.

Finding Self-Worth

Fortunately, Edit had heard about the Deseret Industries vocational rehabilitation program, which could provide her with work and teach her skills to prepare her for future jobs. Despite initial fears of failure, Edit enrolled in the Deseret Industries program and began working in the sales department. The associates there cheered her on in her quest for self-confidence. In many ways, they reminded her of the missionaries who had taught her. “They treated me like a daughter of God,” Edit says. “They cared about me, they listened to me, and they always had time to help me. It is truly an inspired program.”

With the help of her Relief Society president, Edit also enrolled in English classes. As she studied and practiced the language with her husband, her English improved, and soon Edit was offered a job as a cashier for Deseret Industries. “I was nervous about speaking to people,” says Edit, but again her friends at work encouraged her to try. After some time, she moved from working as a cashier to customer service, and then to a position in the Church’s Welfare Services department.

“Because of my experience at Deseret Industries, my eyes were opened, and I could see beyond my childhood indoctrination,” Edit says. “I finally stepped out of the shadows because my feelings of self-worth did not depend upon social standing, money, or opinions of others. My self-worth depends upon the Lord, and knowing that has set me free to create my own happiness.” ■

**Pronounced eh-DEET KEESH. It is the Hungarian equivalent of her name.*

YOU WERE THE ANGELS

My heart jumped as I read the poster: “Handel’s *Messiah* performed by the Swansea Orchestra and Welsh Choir.”

I had been on my mission in Swansea, Wales, for six months and felt the longing that often comes to new missionaries during the Christmas

season. We had many family traditions during the holidays, but my favorite was going to hear Handel’s *Messiah*. My mother had played the organ for many such performances. I would sit, listen, and feel the music.

With permission from the mission president, I purchased tickets for the missionaries in our area. The night of the performance, our group bundled up against the cold and

walked to the concert hall. I silently prayed that we would all feel the sacredness of the inspiring music.

When we arrived, I realized that we were late and that the performance had already started. We weren’t going to be allowed inside until intermission! As I listened to the music through the

doors, I could not hold back the tears.

An usher must have noticed my desperation and decided to let us in. He told us to stand in the back until the intermission so that we didn’t interrupt the singing. He slowly opened the doors, and we all quietly stepped inside.

Walking into the hall was like walking into heaven. The feeling of

peace and joy overwhelmed me. It wasn’t long, however, before we noticed people turning their heads, pointing and staring at us. All of us had entered quietly and didn’t know what we had done to bring attention to ourselves. As soon as the intermission began, we found our seats.

When the oratorio resumed, the music filled my soul. I wept during the “Hallelujah Chorus” and when the soprano sang “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth.” The missionaries beside me also felt the power of the music and grabbed their handkerchiefs. The experience was something we would always remember. But it wasn’t until the performance had ended that the truly memorable moment came.

As we were leaving the building, people were still whispering and pointing, but no one said anything until we

Walking into the concert hall was like walking into heaven. It wasn’t long, however, before we noticed people turning their heads, pointing and staring at us.



I DEFENDED THE PROPHET JOSEPH

were outside. A man then approached us, saying, “It was you! It was you!”

We all waited for an explanation.

“During the first part of the performance, we felt a change in the room—a strong feeling that Christ was there,” the man said. “So we turned to see what had caused the change. When we looked to the back of the auditorium, we saw seven figures glowing as if they were angels. When you came into the room, you brought the Holy Ghost. You were there to represent Christ; you were the angels.”

As he spoke, I looked down at my missionary name tag and read the bold lettering under my name: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” How humbled I was at that moment to be a representative of the Messiah and to have silently testified of Him that night before thousands of people. ■
Heidi Windish Fernandez, Oregon, USA

In 1978 I had a memorable dream in which two people appeared to me. As I spoke with them in this dream, I felt an amazing sense of joy. The happy feeling persisted even after I woke up the next morning.

That very day two Latter-day Saint missionaries knocked on the door of our home and asked if they could share a message. Remembering my dream, I agreed and invited them in. My husband was reluctant, but he consented when I told him that I couldn’t bear to let them go away without talking to them.

Among other things, the missionaries taught me about prophets that day. I was familiar with the prophets of the Bible, such as Abraham and Moses, but the missionaries also taught me about a modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith. At the end of our lesson, the elders asked if they could return for more discussions. I said yes.

After additional discussions the missionaries invited me to be baptized. I liked what I had learned, but before being baptized, I wanted to gain a testimony of Joseph Smith. Of all the things the missionaries had taught me, his story was the most difficult for me to accept. But I knew that if I was sincere in seeking such a testimony, Heavenly Father would confirm the truth to me.

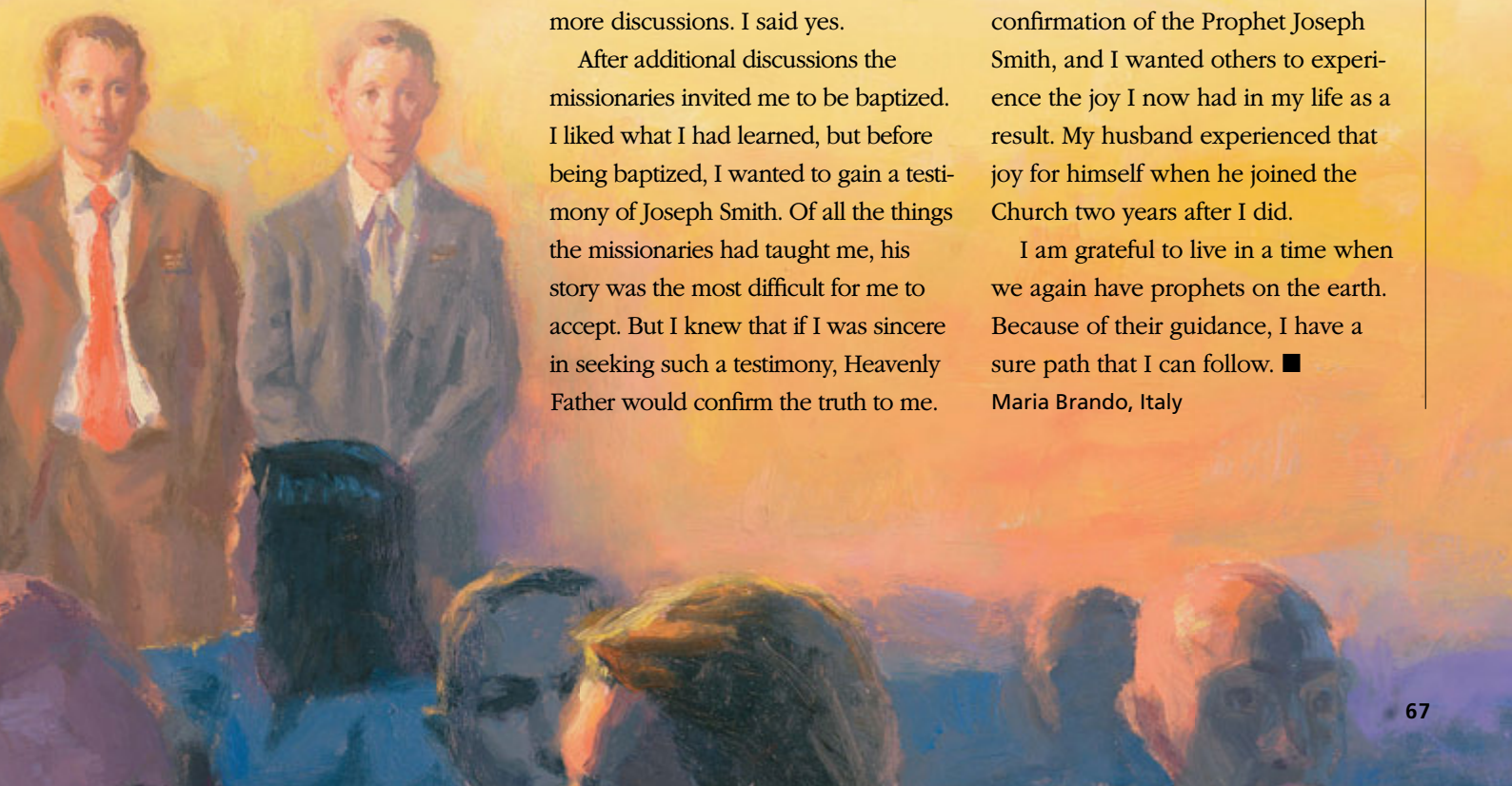
I went to see a member of the clergy in the church I had been raised in. I told him what the missionaries had taught me and expressed a great desire to meet with them again. Before I could say anything else though, he told me that Joseph Smith was crazy, that he was a visionary.

Suddenly, I heard a voice tell me, “Joseph Smith is a true prophet.” My heart started beating strongly within me, and even though I had not yet been baptized into the Church, I found myself defending the Prophet of the Restoration.

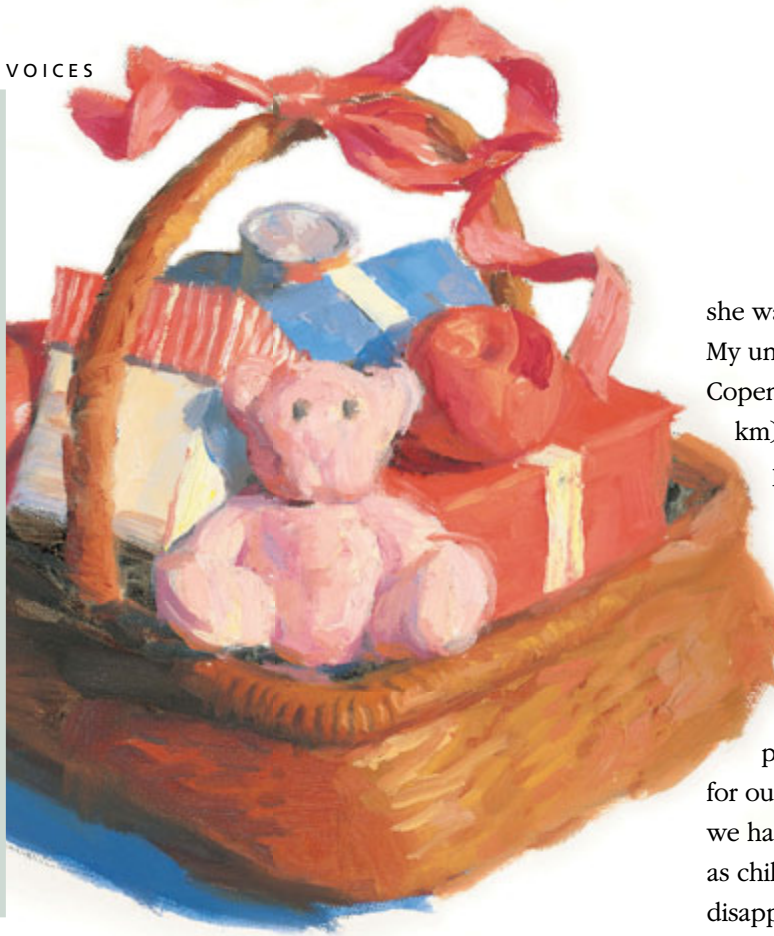
The feeling of confirmation grew even stronger as I left the clergyman’s office. I had received my answer and knew in which church I should raise my sons.

I was baptized a short time later, and I felt a great desire to share what I had found. I had received a spiritual confirmation of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and I wanted others to experience the joy I now had in my life as a result. My husband experienced that joy for himself when he joined the Church two years after I did.

I am grateful to live in a time when we again have prophets on the earth. Because of their guidance, I have a sure path that I can follow. ■
Maria Brando, Italy



On our porch we found a large basket containing food and other necessities as well as some toys. We were sure it had been delivered to the wrong house.



MY BEST CHRISTMAS

One December when I was a child, my mother became very ill. The medication she was taking made her extremely tired, and she slept about 18 hours a day.

Since my mother was single, my older sister and I tried to keep the household running as best we could, but we were young and inexperienced, and we weren't very successful. Several days into our mother's illness, we were looking for something to eat. As we searched through the kitchen, the doorbell rang.

A sister from our ward was on the porch, meal in hand. She hadn't known of our need, but there she was with dinner. She asked us how long our mother had been ill and

how we had been coping for so long on our own. We assured her that we were managing as best we could, but we were grateful for her kindness in sharing a meal with us.

When she left our home, this sister called the Relief Society president and informed her of our family's situation. The next day and for many days thereafter, members of the ward brought meals to our home. We were so grateful! What we didn't eat right away we froze, and because of our ward's kindness, our family had more than enough to eat for the next three months. But the kindness others showed didn't stop there.

Christmas was approaching, and Mom was slowly getting better, but

she was not back to her usual self. My uncle came to our home from Copenhagen, about 40 miles (65 km) away, to help with holiday preparations. He was generous in doing what he could, providing a Christmas tree and some food for our family's celebration. He also bought a few presents for my sister and me. We, in turn, had purchased a few modest gifts for our mother and uncle. We knew we had much to be grateful for, but as children we were still feeling a bit disappointed with how this Christmas was turning out.

On Christmas Eve, our doorbell rang. I looked out the window but couldn't see anyone. I concluded that it must be a prank, but my sister told me to open the door anyway. On our porch we found a large basket containing food and other necessities as well as some toys. We were sure it had been delivered to the wrong house. We went to the neighbors' house to ask if the basket should have gone to their home, but they were gone. Then we noticed that all of the gifts were labeled with our names. There were even items for my uncle. Someone had thought about *us*.

The anonymous generosity shown my family that year made what had been a dark and sad Christmas the best Christmas of my life. The kindness and love we felt from others continue to touch me today. ■

Morten Sønderskov, Denmark

WHO WILL BE THE PRESENT?

In 1982, the second Christmas after we were married, Cleto and I decided to establish family traditions. Because we were the first members of the Church in our families, our former Christmas celebrations—though they brought us happy memories—lacked genuine compassion and service. Moreover, our first baby, eight-month-old Diego, was reason enough to improve ourselves in this way.

We were quite busy with university studies, household chores, Church callings, and our crash course in first-time parenthood, but we still devoted ourselves to preparing for a special occasion. We used each family home evening in December to make decorations and to come to a better understanding of the symbols and colors we saw everywhere. We also planned

on preparing a simple dinner, and we thought up useful and inexpensive gifts. As we undertook a scripture study program, we realized that the true change in our manner of celebrating Christ's birth would involve choosing a gift for the Savior.

We wondered, "What do you give someone who has heaven and earth at His disposal?" The scriptures provide the answer, declaring that anything we do "unto one of the least of these" (Matthew 25:40) we do unto Him. Because Christmas is a season of friendship and a time of love, we wanted to invite a member of the Church to experience the warmth and sweet spirit we felt in our home.

We looked hard to find someone who needed some cheering up and whom helping could be our Christmas present to the Savior.

Each time we invited a ward or stake brother or sister to our home, we were happy to discover that the person was already involved in other activities. But Christmas Eve soon arrived, and we still had not found someone with whom to share our Christmas.

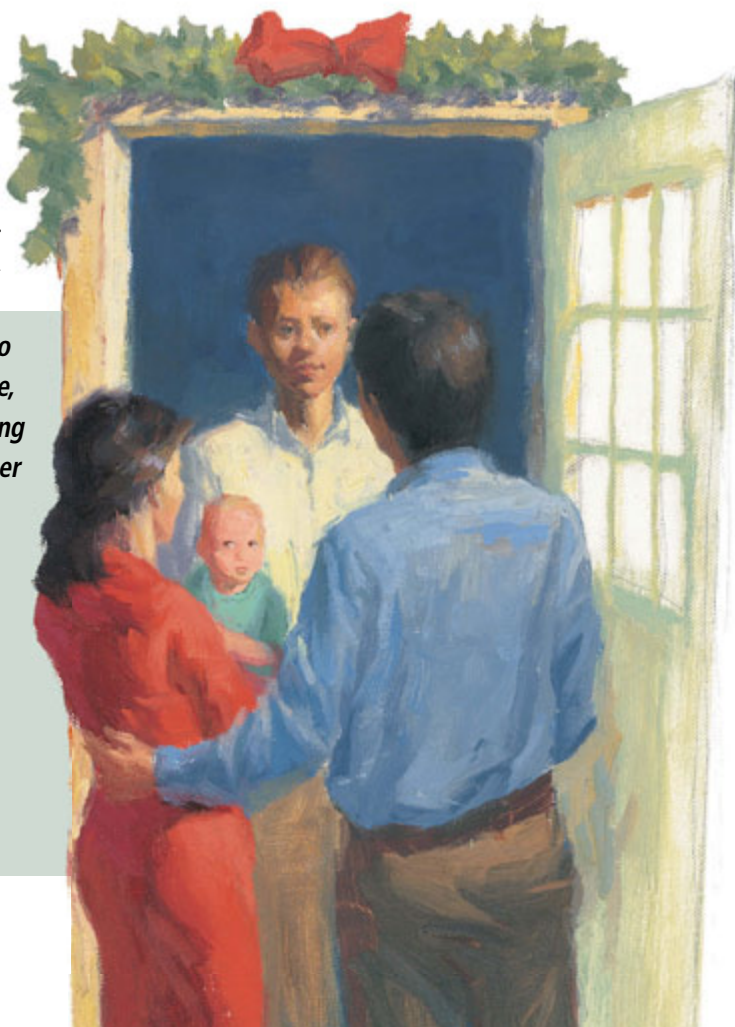
Resigned to our failure, we were getting ready for dinner when the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, I was elated to find a friend we had not seen for some time. Avelar had recently gone through the disappointment of an upsetting separation. He was sad and alone and had felt a strong desire to be with us.

We received Avelar with love, and he told us that he had found the environment he needed to be consoled in the midst of his trials. We told him of our preparations to serve and help someone in need so that he could recognize the Lord knew him and loved him.

For all of us, it was wonderful to realize that the Savior had sent us someone we could not find: our friend Avelar. We realized the overriding importance of relationships among Heavenly Father's sons and daughters. For that reason, on subsequent Christmases we and our three children always remember that the purpose of the season is to strengthen bonds of unity, love, and friendship. ■

Ana Márcia Agra de Oliveira,
Pernambuco, Brazil

Resigned to our failure, we were getting ready for dinner when the doorbell rang.



Small & Simple Things

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

IN THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

A Christmas Memory

By President Thomas S. Monson

At home in a hidden-away corner, I have a small black walking stick with an imitation silver handle. It once belonged to a distant relative. Why do I keep it for a period now spanning more than 70 years? There is a special reason. As a small boy I participated in a Christmas pageant in our ward. I was privileged to be one of the three Wise Men. With a bandanna about my head, Mother's piano bench cover

draped over my shoulder, and the black cane in my hand, I spoke my assigned lines: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). I vividly remember the feelings of my heart as the three of us "Wise Men" looked upward and saw a star, journeyed across the stage, found Mary with the young child Jesus, then fell down and worshipped Him and opened our treasures and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

I especially liked the fact that we did not return to the evil Herod to betray the baby Jesus but obeyed God and departed another way.

The years have flown by, but the Christmas cane continues to occupy a special place in my home; and in my heart is a commitment to Christ.

From "Treasured Gifts," *Liahona*, Dec. 2006, 3–4; *Ensign*, Dec. 2006, 5–6.



ON THE CALENDAR

December 5, 2010, is the date of the First Presidency Christmas Devotional. It features messages from the First Presidency and music from the Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square. Check with your local priesthood leader or at www.lds.org for information about broadcast times and locations. It can also be viewed online at www.broadcast.lds.org.



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The Power of Family Home Evening

My husband, Luiz Antonio, and I have a great testimony of the power of family home evening and its ability to make our families stronger in the gospel. It hasn't always been easy to make the attempt, but over time it has made all the difference for us and our four children.

One of the most special moments that took place at family home evening was when our son, Renan, was preparing to be baptized. Our two older daughters, Cynthia and Lilian, offered to teach the lessons for the month preceding his eighth birthday. My husband and I loved watching them teach the meaning and purpose of baptism—the same lessons we had taught them as they prepared for baptism. Four years later Renan followed the examples of his older sisters and taught lessons about baptism to his younger sister, Ellen.

Family home evening continued to bless us and our children through the challenges of their teenage years. It helped them maintain their testimonies and stay faithful in the gospel. Today our son is a returned missionary, and our daughters have married in the temple and have children of their own.

Our testimony is that family home evening is one of the best programs of the Church. We know that following prophetic direction to consistently hold family home evening has brought great blessings to our lives, and we know it can bring blessings to any who are willing to follow that direction. We acknowledge that it requires a lot of work and planning, but for us the blessings of eternity will be worth every minute of those efforts.

Walkiria Santana Cairo, Brazil



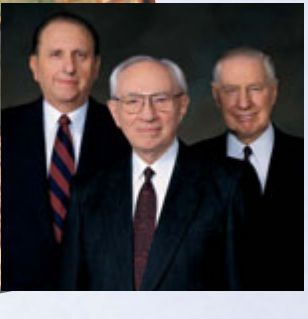
THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Many people are familiar with the Nativity story as told in Luke 1–2. But there are many other places in the scriptures that talk about the miraculous birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. Consider including these verses in your personal scripture study this month:

OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT	BOOK OF MORMON	DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS	PEARL OF GREAT PRICE
Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7	Matthew 1–2	1 Nephi 10:4–6; 11:13–21	D&C 76:41	Moses 5:57
Micah 5:2	John 1:1–14	Alma 7:9–13	D&C 93:1–4	
		Helaman 14:1–9		
		3 Nephi 1		

TIME FOR FAMILY HOME EVENING

For members of the Church, Monday night is synonymous with family home evening. But how did it all start? This time line tells the story.



1909

The Granite Utah Stake develops a formal family home evening program.

1915

President Joseph F. Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency call on parents in the Church to gather their children once each week for a "Home Evening."

1935

President David O. McKay reminds parents that "no other success can compensate for failure in the home."¹

1965

The first official family home evening manual is released; revised versions are released annually until 1984.

1970

The First Presidency designates Monday evening as the time for family home evening.

1985

The *Family Home Evening Resource Book* is introduced with broader source material and application.

1999

The First Presidency publishes a letter reminding members not to plan ward or stake activities on Monday nights or—where practical—not to have community activities on Monday nights.

NOTE

1. David O. McKay, quoted from J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* (1924), 42; in Conference Report, Apr. 1935, 116.



FAMILY HOME EVENING IDEAS FOR THOSE WHO ARE SINGLE OR WITHOUT CHILDREN

- Study the scriptures, Relief Society or priesthood manuals, or articles from Church magazines.
- Work on your family history.
- Invite members of your ward or branch to share family home evening with you.
- Write letters to family members who live far away or to missionaries serving from your ward or branch.
- Serve others. Consider taking a meal to someone in need, visiting residents in a nursing home, or volunteering for a community project.

FROM LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH OF GRANITE UTAH STAKE BUILDING COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY; JOSEPH F. SMITH, BY A. SALZBRENNER; PHOTOGRAPH BY BOYART STUDIOS; 1985 MANUAL COVER BY PHYLLIS LUCH; PHOTOGRAPH BY JED A. CLARK; SILHOUETTE BY BETH M. WHITAKER



Visual Aids Cutouts

Ready-made visual aids are a great help in teaching family home evening and Primary lessons. For years I have used sets 1–10 of the Visual Aids Cutouts, available at Church distribution centers. When I first bought the sets, I covered each visual with contact paper to make it more durable. You could also laminate them or simply cut them out and use them as they are. I added magnetic strips and self-adhesive Velcro to the back of each. Instead of Velcro you could attach flannel or sandpaper strips.

My son, who has special learning needs, loves to handle the pictures during family home evening and put them up on our flannel board. I've also used the cutouts in Primary sharing time, allowing the children to create lesson-related scenes on the magnetic chalkboard.

Note: If you do not live near an LDS distribution center, you

can place orders online at store.lds.org. U.S. and Canadian residents may also call the Salt Lake

Distribution Center at 1-800-537-5971.

Carrie Dalby Cox, Alabama, USA



ILLUSTRATION BY BETH WHITAKER

HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

“Three Stars,” page 16. After reading the story with your family, invite each person to ponder “three stars” in their lives that help them establish an “accurate navigation” and keep them “safe from the dangers” of the world. How can other people’s testimonies and witnesses help us establish an accurate assurance of gospel principles?

“Three Generations of Christmas,” page 48. After sharing the three stories, discuss with family members how each person was blessed by the example of service from the previous generation. Consider reading Matthew 25:40 and 1 Nephi 11:21–22. Then create a plan to serve others this Christmas season.

“Glad Tidings of Great Joy,” page 52. Consider reading the Christmas story from Luke 2 with your family as part of your family home evening. As you

read the story, share excerpts from the article that add insight to Jesus’ life. If appropriate, share your testimony of Jesus Christ.



News of the Church

International MTCs Play Important Role

By Breanna Olaveson

Church Magazines

Beginning in 1925, newly called missionaries spent time in a small “mission home” in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, before beginning their service.

In the 85 years since, the Church has established missionary training centers (MTCs) around the world. A missionary in training might be one of thousands in Provo, Utah, USA, or one of only a few dozen in Johannesburg, South Africa. But no matter which MTC they attend, missionaries come away ready to preach the gospel.

“At the MTCs, we do everything we can to prepare missionaries to accomplish their purpose, to ‘invite others to come unto Christ,’” said Kelly Mills, director of international MTCs in the Church’s Missionary Department.

In the early 1970s, the first MTC was established in Provo, Utah. In 1977, MTCs were established in São Paulo, Brazil; and Hamilton, New Zealand, to train local missionaries. The smaller, local MTCs proved efficient and helpful, and over the next 25 years the total of MTCs operating worldwide rose to 15, and are now found in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, England, Ghana, Guatemala, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, and the United States.

More Alike than Different

Regardless of variations in location, size, and language, MTCs across the world have more similarities than differences. The Provo Utah MTC can accommodate more than 3,000 missionaries at a time while the second largest MTC, located in Brazil, holds a maximum of just under 700.

However, MTCs outside of the United States provide a training experience that is very



The São Paulo, Brazil, MTC was one of the first international MTCs built and is the largest outside of the United States.

similar to what missionaries receive at the Provo MTC. When a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gives an address in the Provo MTC, for example, it is recorded, translated if necessary, and shown to missionaries at all the other MTCs.

That consistency among MTCs is important, because some missions receive missionaries from more than one training center. One-third of all missionaries receive their MTC training outside of the United States.

Local Missionaries

All MTCs outside of the United States exist primarily to train local missionaries. That is the sole function of the MTCs located in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Philippines, and New Zealand. Missionaries trained at these MTCs have been assigned to serve in their native language and do not receive language training. If a missionary’s assignment requires language training, he or she

is usually trained at the Provo MTC.

“The local MTCs provide the best environment for the local missionaries to learn the gospel from those of the same culture and language,” said Boyd Cardon, president of the Mexico MTC. “The local instructors in the local MTCs have a lot in common with the missionaries, and they become their mentors.”

Each MTC is located near a temple, and that proves beneficial for many missionaries. “Many missionaries in Africa would not be able to be endowed were it not for coming to this MTC,” said T. Dean Christensen, president of the South Africa MTC.

Full Training

In addition to their primary function of training local missionaries, MTCs in Argentina, Brazil, England, Ghana, and South Africa have been approved to provide “full training”—that is, all missionaries assigned to serve in these areas, including those from North America, receive their full MTC training experience at the MTC in the area.

The Argentina and Brazil MTCs provide language training for missionaries who need to learn Spanish and Portuguese, while the England, Ghana, and South Africa MTCs teach mostly in English. Missionaries assigned to the British Isles or Africa who require training in other languages attend the MTC in Provo.

During their stay, missionaries in some of the international MTCs are allowed to leave for short periods of time to practice the things they are learning and preach the gospel, which also helps them learn about the local culture. “They go to the post office, a small eatery, or other businesses,” said Donald L. Clark, president of the Brazil MTC. “This is a wonderful experience for them because they learn to talk to salesmen, deal with the local currency, and get a feel for what it’s like on the streets.”

Phased Training

The Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru, and Spain MTCs offer a variation on full training. Because of limited space in the MTC facility or the length of time required to acquire a visa, North American missionaries assigned to serve in these areas who do not already speak Spanish spend three weeks at the Provo MTC and the final six weeks of their MTC training at one of these international MTCs.

“The North Americans have been grateful for their three weeks of training at the Provo MTC,” said Douglas Steimle, president of the Guatemala MTC. “It gives them perspective that enhances their experience here. All arrive so excited to be in the country and feel like they have really begun to serve.”

North American missionaries who receive this phased training usually arrive at the international MTC having already made many adjustments to missionary work.

“By the time they get here their anxieties about being a missionary are usually behind them and they are eager to improve their Spanish-speaking skills and immerse themselves in the new culture as quickly as they can,” said Clifford L. Whetten, president of the Peru MTC.

Room to Grow

As the Church’s missionary efforts continue to evolve, MTCs change as needed. The New Zealand MTC recently moved from its previous location in Hamilton into a new, larger building in Auckland. Missionaries began receiving training in the new building on September 2, 2010.

The Philippines MTC will also be expanded to accommodate more missionaries. When the new facility opens in 2011, it will hold 140 missionaries at a time—60 more than it held before the addition, with room to expand further.

MTCs around the world vary in size and location, but they share a common goal: to

prepare missionaries for the great work ahead of them. “The MTC is a beautiful place to be,” said President Richard George of the Argentina

MTC. “But in the end, the missionaries are all eager to leave. That means the MTC has served its purpose.” ■

Future of FamilySearch.org Explained at Seminar

By David Packard

Church Magazines

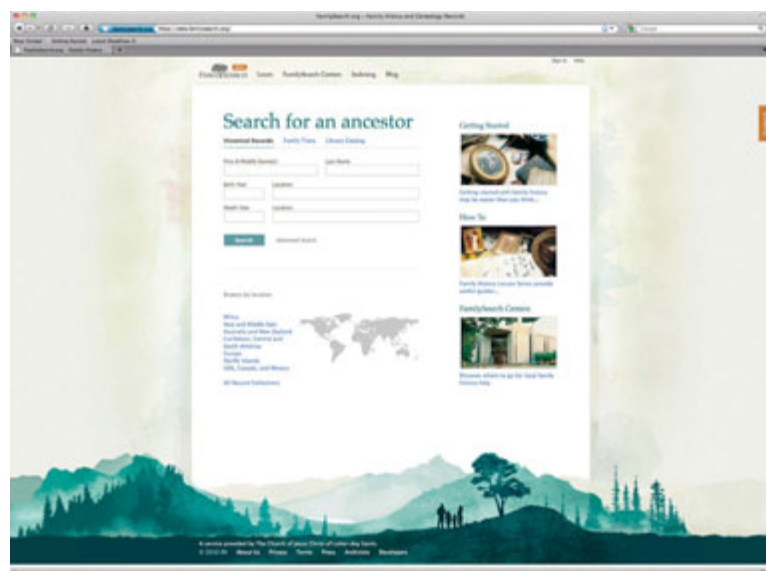
The future of the FamilySearch Family Tree application—often referred to as new .familysearch.org—will allow users to add sources, fix records, and communicate with fellow researchers, according to Ron Tanner, a product manager for FamilySearch.

Brother Tanner delivered the keynote address, “The Future of FamilySearch,” to about 300 participants attending a family history seminar at the Riverton FamilySearch Library in October 2010.

In his address, Brother Tanner focused on changes currently being made to the current Family Tree application and its transition from a “My Tree” system to a more open system in order to improve accuracy and reduce research duplication, which will make it easier to receive “help from millions to save billions.”

With regards to the future of the current

Beta.familysearch.org shown below, is being prepared as a replacement for FamilySearch.org.



FamilySearch.org, all of the site's existing features and data, such as the International Genealogical Index and other historical records; Record Search pilot; research wiki, forums, and indexing; a blog; and the Family Tree application are being consolidated into one site to replace all the others.

The beta version of the replacement Web site is available at beta.familysearch.org. Brother Tanner encouraged Internet users to visit the site and leave feedback so that changes can be made before the beta version replaces the current FamilySearch.org Web site, which is to happen before the end of the year.

The main goal of the Family Tree application is to reduce duplication in both research and temple ordinances. With these changes, Brother Tanner said the Family Tree feature hopes to create a collaborative, conclusion-based, online family tree system that allows anyone to make changes, explain why, and provide evidence for their conclusion.

The system will be closely monitored. Whenever any changes are made, an e-mail notification will be sent to those interested in that ancestor. A history of all changes will also be found on the particular ancestor's file as well as the ability to undo changes.

Through a discussions feature that was added in May 2010, family history researchers could discuss the differences found in research and come to a consensus. Similar updates to the site will take place quarterly. A notifications feature is being added by the end of 2010. Additional updates are planned throughout 2011.

Brother Tanner believes the changes will help fulfill the vision explained by Archibald Bennett, the former secretary of the Genealogical Society of Utah, set forth almost 63 years ago.

“A universal system of intelligent cooperation

will bring together on one record sheet every fact in existence regarding a particular family,” Brother Bennett said in a 1947 *Church News* issue. “This wealth of data will insure accuracy and banish error. Expensive and time-consuming duplications in research and repetitions in ordinances will be eliminated. No sooner will a new fact be uncovered in any part of the world by a researcher than

it will be communicated to the Archives center and be assigned to its proper place, on some family record.”

Watch for the Family Tree system updates by reading the “What’s New” document at new.familysearch.org. For more information about the replacement for www.familysearch.org, visit their beta version Web site at beta.familysearch.org. ■

New Temple Presidents Begin Service

Beginning November 1, 2010, 53 new temple presidents and their wives began serving in temples around the world. There are currently 134 temples in operation around the world with another 23 announced or under construction.

Aba Nigeria

Alexander A. and Theresa A. Odume*

Anchorage Alaska

Melvin R. and Sharon V. Perkins

Birmingham Alabama

Kent R. and Geniel R. Van Kampen

Campinas Brazil

George A. and Jeannette N. Oakes

Caracas Venezuela

Luis M. and Juana P. Petit

Chicago Illinois

Paul W. and Ann P. Castleton

Ciudad Juárez Mexico

Manuel and Elsa M. Araiz

Cochabamba Bolivia

Lee W. and Connie C. Crayk

Columbia River Washington

T. Dean and Patrice A. Moody

Columbus Ohio

Edward J. and Carol B. Brandt

Copenhagen Denmark

H. Hjort Nielsen and Ellen Haibrock

Curitiba Brazil

José M. and Aida C. Arias

Dallas Texas

Robert C. and Talmadge M. Packard

Detroit Michigan

Phillip G. and Margaret K. Pulsipher

Draper Utah

Russell E. and Christine C. Tueller*

Edmonton Alberta

Bryce D. and Kathryn Card

Fresno California

Paul B. and Judith H. Hansen

Guadalajara Mexico

Jaime F. and M. Teresa Herrera

Halifax Nova Scotia

Douglas M. and Carol Ann Robinson

Hamilton New Zealand

James and Frances M. Dunlop

Hong Kong China

John M. and Lydia C. Aki

Johannesburg South Africa

Kenneth S. and Muriel D. Armstrong

Kyiv Ukraine

B. John and Carol Galbraith*

Lima Peru

Robert W. and Kay Lees

London England

C. Raymond and Irene M. Lowry

Manhattan New York

W. Blair and Suzanne J. Garff

Medford Oregon

David J. and Pauline Davis

Melbourne Australia

Malcolm R. and Ruthje M. Mullis

Memphis Tennessee

T. Evan and Lou Anne W. Nebeker

Mérida Mexico

Zeniff and Elizabeth Mejia

Monterrey Mexico

C. Juan Antonio and Isabel S. Machuca

Nashville Tennessee

R. Lloyd and Judy R. Smith

Nauvoo Illinois

Spencer J. and Dorothea S. Condie

Nuku'alofa Tonga

Pita F. and Lani A. Hopoate

Orlando Florida

David T. and Lana W. Halversen

Panama City Panama

D. Chad and Elizabeth B. Richardson

Perth Australia

Geoffrey J. and Lesley M. Liddicoat

Portland Oregon

Myron G. and Geraldine T. Child

Provo Utah

Robert H. and Janet L. Daines

Raleigh North Carolina

J. Mitchel and Z. Sue Scott

Reno Nevada

Franklin B. and Joyce C. Wadsworth

Rexburg Idaho

Clair O. and Anne Thueson

Santiago Chile

Julio E. and Elena Otay

Santo Domingo Dominican Republic

Larry K. and Joann W. Bair

Seattle Washington

Donald E. and Jane H. Pugh

Seoul Korea

Song Pyung-Jong and Yang Gye-Young

Spokane Washington

Charles H. and Elizabeth M. Recht

St. George Utah

Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen

St. Paul Minnesota

C. Kent and Karen J. Hugh

Tampico Mexico

Barry R. and Risa L. Udall

Tuxtla Gutiérrez Mexico

Jorge D. and Irma Del Toro Arrebillaga

Twin Falls Idaho

Karl E. and Beverly C. Nelson

Winter Quarters Nebraska

Maury W. and Joan Schooff ■

** These couples began serving earlier in the year.*

IN THE **NEWS**Online Store
Makes Resources
Accessible

It's difficult for many of the 14 million members of the Church to travel to one of 130 retail stores to obtain Church materials. So Church Distribution Services is reversing the process. A new online store is now bringing materials to the members.

Store.lds.org makes it easy to order gospel study materials, music, garments, temple clothing, and other materials. Materials ship free of cost around the world.

Visitors to the site identify their country. As online stores specific to each country become available, they will show the available products in that country's primary language and with all prices listed in local currency.

The site replaces ldscatalog.com and launched initially in English, Spanish, and Russian. Other languages will be available in coming months,

including Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese, in that order.

New DVDs Available
for Study of D&C

A new set of four DVDs assists in the study of the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history.

The set contains interactive charts, quotations from latter-day prophets and apostles, paintings, and learning activities. It features videos such as *Legacy*, *Mountain of the Lord*, and *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*, which has been showing in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building since December 2005.

Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Visual Resources DVDs is available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. Order online at store.lds.org or by calling 1-800-537-5971. Check with local distribution centers for availability. ■

Call for **Articles**

Has your Christmas celebration ever not been as you wanted or not gone as you planned? Maybe you were sick, mourning a loss, in the military, away at school, or separated from family and friends. How did you celebrate the Savior and His birth in those circumstances? Please limit your experience to 500 words, label it "Christmas Celebrations," and send it to liahona@ldschurch.org. ■

WORLD BRIEFS**Church is Now Casting
for New Testament Video Project**

In an effort to attract participants from around the world for the LDS Motion Picture Studio's New Testament film project, the Church has created a Web site, casting.lds.org, where interested members of the Church may apply to participate as actors or extras in all Church film and video productions, including the New Testament project. Filming will begin in spring 2011 in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, and will continue through the summer.

Youth Resource Guides Help Teachers

New resource guides supplement the Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women lesson manuals, *Aaronic Priesthood Manual 3* and *Young Women Manual 3*, for 2011. The guides provide teachers with recent general conference references, discussion questions, additional scripture references, and activity ideas that tie into and refresh the existing lessons, making them more relevant to issues youth face today. The guides are available in 27 languages at Church distribution centers or online at resourceguides.lds.org.

**Online Learning Opportunities
Expand on FamilySearch**

Online learning on FamilySearch.org has been expanded recently and now includes 81 free lessons, enabling people anywhere in the world to access family history expertise any time. The topics range from basic research to training on specific record types from specific countries and can be beneficial to both beginners and experienced researchers. All of the classes can be accessed on familysearch.org by clicking on **Free Online Classes** on the home page. ■

In Other Church Magazines

THE NEW ERA

The First Christmas

What was going on in the Book of Mormon lands when Christ was born in Bethlehem? Review the exciting events, especially the amazing miracle of a day and a night and a day of light, that signaled the birth of the Savior. Check out the words and art in “Christmas in the New World” on page 24.

Christmas Singing

Teens in South Africa use music to celebrate the Christmas season. Read

more in “Sing Praise to Him” on page 16.

Avoiding Materialism

How do we handle materialism at this time of the year? Read five tips for tackling materialism in “Enough Stuff” on page 34.



THE FRIEND



Christmas Workshop

Find recipes and crafts you can create this Christmas season. These pages include directions on how to make Greek Christmas cookies, a candle jar, Christmas carrots, and a manger card. On page 26.

A Year on Temple Square

Learn more about the Church History Library as the Year on Temple Square series concludes with an article that follows a 10-year-old girl during her visit to the library. Then watch a video on friend.lds.org to learn more about the library. On page 6.



COMMENTS

Moving article

Your article on ministering to prisoners has moved me to tears. My husband has been in prison for 7 years and still has 5 years to go. As a member with an incarcerated spouse, I can't tell you how this touched me to know that we are not forgotten! It is a most difficult thing to keep a marriage alive during a lengthy incarceration but we are trying. I often feel very alone and like no one in my ward could possibly understand and do try to keep it very quiet. I just want to thank you for having this article. Maybe some members will have a less judgmental attitude towards people in my situation thanks to your sensitive approach of the subject. This was a true answer to many prayers. Thank you.

Name Withheld

Thank you for the unique cover of the May 2010 *Ensign*. Each morning at breakfast, as I begin my day with the usual challenges and frustrations, it is a special pleasure to have President and Sister Monson giving me a personal greeting of love.

Beverly Hart
Idaho, USA

Although I like the new format, some of the layouts make it a little difficult to quickly follow a story. For example, on page 76 of the July 2010 there is information from two stories on the same page. As you finish the “Church Makes Mission Changes” first column your eye naturally goes to the top of the second column which belongs to a different story. A little more definition between stories would be helpful. Perhaps the old “continued on page 28” format would be helpful. Thank you so much for the new design, family home evening suggestions and other helpful changes.

Renae Woods
Utah, USA

CHRISTMAS IN THE VINEYARD

By Larry Hiller
Church Magazines

In late December a chill mist shrouds the bare vines in the predawn darkness. The vineyard is silent except for one section, which is filled with voices and a bright, crackling bonfire. It is Christmas morning, and elsewhere in this valley, people are still warm in their beds or gathered around Christmas trees watching excited children. But not the small group in the vineyard. They have come to give a gift.

To understand the meaning of the gift, you must know that this vineyard in Madera, California, USA, is part of the Church's welfare production system. Each year it produces about 400,000 pounds (180,000 kg) of raisins. Half of the harvest goes to the shelves of bishops' storehouses. The rest is used for humanitarian response around the world. Wards and branches from eight stakes are assigned certain tasks to complete and rows of vines to care for.

One crucial task is pruning the vines. The tangle of the past season's growth must be cut out, leaving just the few canes that will grow to produce the next harvest. Without this dormant-season pruning, the vineyard becomes overgrown. Too many vines overwhelm the roots' ability to sustain them. Too little fruit is produced, and the harvest is greatly diminished.

Why do this work on Christmas day? Because many of the ward members are fieldworkers by trade, pruning vineyards and orchards for their



What motivates a group of Latter-day Saints to leave their homes on Christmas for a day of hard work? Their desire to serve Him whose birth we celebrate.

livelihood. Their work is intensive at this time of year, so this is the only day they have off in several weeks. It's Christmas—and they spend it here in the Church's vineyard. In fact, they have come here 8 of the past 15 Christmases. For these members of the Spanish-speaking Madera Third Ward, it is their gift to El Niño—to the Christ child.

One worker, Miguel Chavez, explains that it's a way of giving something back for all of the blessings they receive from the Lord: "We are giving something to needy families. Our small contribution becomes a great blessing to other people." Another ward member says simply, "This is the best work we can do because this is God's vineyard."

And so, on this particular Christmas day, once these members of the Madera Third Ward finish pruning, wrapping, and tying their assigned vines, they finish parts of two neighboring wards' rows. It is a gift fit for a King. ■



WORDS OF CHRIST

Laborers in the Vineyard, by J. Kirk Richards

Jesus Christ taught: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in

him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).



Like the shepherds of old,
we need to say in our hearts, ‘Let us
see this thing which is come to pass,’”
writes President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second
Counselor in the First Presidency. “We need
to desire it in our hearts. Let us see the
Holy One of Israel in the manger, in the
temple, on the mount, and on the cross.
Like the shepherds, let us glorify and praise
God for these tidings of great joy!”
See “Can We See the Christ?”
page 4.