

Ensign



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Questions, p. 16**

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"Gratitude transcends whatever is happening around us. It surpasses disappointment, discouragement, and despair. It blooms just as beautifully in the icy landscape of winter as it does in the pleasant warmth of summer."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf,
Second Counselor in the
First Presidency, "Grateful in
Any Circumstances," *Ensign*,
May 2014, 75.

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A MAGAZINE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
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Family Home Evening Ideas

This issue contains articles and activities that could be used for family home evening. The following are some examples.



“The Reality of Christmas,” page 22:

After sharing with your family the arrow-head story that Bishop Stevenson tells at the beginning of the article, consider discussing ways that family members can recognize what is real and most important. How might you and your family bear witness of the Savior’s reality this Christmas? You may want to review the list of practical ideas given by President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) in the quotation near the end of the article. Invite family members to select one or more of these ideas to try during the Christmas season. You could conclude by watching the video “The Reason behind Christmas” (lds.org/go/reasonE1214) or some of the Christmas-related Bible videos at lds.org/bible-videos.

“Lessons from the Sacred Grove,”

page 66: You may want to begin by singing “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer” (*Hymns*, no.

26) or “On a Golden Springtime” (*Children’s Songbook*, 88). Consider summarizing for your family the four lessons that Elder Jensen says we can learn from the trees of the Sacred Grove. Then discuss ways these lessons have application in your family. If you live near a park or other area with trees, you could take your family to this location and ask them to identify trees that show qualities mentioned in the article (reaching for light, overcoming opposition, and so on). What additional spiritual lessons can your family draw from trees and other objects found in nature? (see Isaiah 2:12–13; Luke 6:43–44; Jacob 5).

Family Preparedness

My husband and I decided to simulate an emergency in which our family would be without electricity and water. I planned ahead by getting food that could be grilled, filling our water cooler, and ensuring we had flashlights and candles. The afternoon of our “emergency,” without telling our children, we turned off the water and the electricity. Alarmed at first, our children adapted as we used our grill to cook dinner and to heat water for washing dishes. They even enjoyed using flashlights and candles for homework and getting ready for bed. Later, after our children realized it had been a planned emergency, we discussed what we had learned and the difference that being prepared can make.

Elaine Fort, Arizona, USA

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DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

We welcome donated submissions showing the gospel of Jesus Christ at work in your life. Please submit articles through ensign.lds.org. Authors whose work is selected for publication will be notified.



**By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf**

Second Counselor in
the First Presidency

FILL THE WORLD WITH CHRIST'S LOVE

When we think of Christmas, we often think of giving and of receiving gifts. Gifts can be part of a cherished tradition, but they can also detract from the simple dignity of the season and distract us from celebrating the birth of our Savior in a meaningful way.

I know from personal experience that the most memorable Christmases can be those that are the most humble. The presents of my childhood were certainly modest by today's standards. Sometimes I received a mended shirt or a pair of gloves or socks. I remember one special Christmas when my brother gave me a wooden knife he had carved.

It doesn't take expensive gifts to make Christmas meaningful. I am reminded of a story told by Elder Glen L. Rudd, who served as a member of the Seventy from 1987 to 1992. One day before Christmas a number of years ago, while he was managing a bishops' storehouse, he learned from an ecclesiastical leader about a needy family that had recently moved to the city. When he went to visit their small apartment, he discovered a young single mother with four children under age 10.

The family's needs were so great that the mother could not buy treats or presents for her children that Christmas—she couldn't even afford a tree. Brother Rudd talked with the family and learned that the three little girls would love a doll or a stuffed animal. When he asked the six-year-old son what he wanted, the hungry little boy replied, "I would like a bowl of oatmeal."

Brother Rudd promised the little boy oatmeal and maybe something else. Then he went to the bishops' storehouse and gathered food and other supplies to meet the immediate needs of the family.

That very morning a generous Latter-day Saint had given him 50 dollars "for someone in need." Using that donation, Brother Rudd bundled up three of his own children and went Christmas shopping—his children selecting toys for the needy children.

After loading up the car with food, clothing, gifts, a Christmas tree, and some ornaments, the Rudds drove to the family's apartment. There they helped the mother and her children set up the tree. Then they placed presents under it and presented the little boy with a large package of oatmeal.

The mother wept, the children rejoiced, and they all sang a Christmas song. That night as the Rudd family gathered for dinner, they gave thanks that they could bring some Christmas cheer to another family and help a little boy receive a bowl of oatmeal.¹

Christ and the Spirit of Giving

Think of the simple yet dignified way our Heavenly Father chose to honor the birth of His Son. On that holy night, angels appeared not to the rich but to shepherds. The Christ child was born not in a mansion but in a manger. He was wrapped not in silk but in swaddling clothes.



The simplicity of that first Christmas foreshadowed the life of the Savior. Though He had created the earth, walked in realms of majesty and glory, and stood at the right hand of the Father, He came to earth as a helpless child. His life was a model of modest nobility, and He walked among the poor, the sick, the downcast, and the heavy laden.

Though He was a king, He cared neither for the honors nor the riches of men. His life, His words, and His daily activities were monuments of simple yet profound dignity.

Jesus the Christ, who knew perfectly how to give, set for us the pattern for giving. To those whose hearts are heavy with loneliness and

sorrow, He brings compassion and comfort. To those whose bodies and minds are afflicted with illness and suffering, He brings love and healing.

To those whose souls are burdened with sin, He offers hope, forgiveness, and redemption.

If the Savior were among us today, we would find Him where He always was—ministering to the meek, the downcast, the humble, the distressed, and the poor in spirit. During this Christmas season and always, may we give to Him by loving as He loves. May we remember the humble dignity of His birth, gifts, and life. And may we, through simple acts of kindness, charity, and compassion, fill the world with the light of His love and healing power. ■

NOTE

1. See Glen L. Rudd, *Pure Religion: The Story of Church Welfare since 1930* (1995), 352–53; see also Glen L. Rudd, “A Bowl of Oatmeal,” *Church News*, Dec. 2, 2006, 16.

TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

President Uchtdorf teaches that we should follow the Savior’s pattern of giving. Consider asking the people you visit to take turns naming a gift the Savior has given to them, and discuss how they can use that gift to serve others. For example, if a member was blessed with musical training, he or she could go caroling to some of the neighbors. You could offer to kneel in prayer with those you visit, asking for inspiration about which gifts to share, how to share them, and with whom. Follow up on any inspiration you receive.

For ideas on teaching this message to youth and children, see page 6.

YOUTH

Learn from Others' Experience

President Uchtdorf speaks from personal experience when he teaches that “the most memorable Christmases can be those that are the most humble.” We can learn so much from the older generation; many adults have lived through times of war, unemployment, sickness, or other trials. Ask the older members of your ward or branch to tell you about their most meaningful Christmas. You could write down their stories. Try to learn from their example by focusing this Christmas more on giving sincere service and remembering the Savior.

CHILDREN

Gifts from Jesus Christ

Some people use a Christmas tree to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Sometimes people place gifts for others under the tree. What gifts has the Savior given to you? Read each scripture below and color in the gift. You can give gifts back to Jesus by finding ways to help others.



Prayerfully study this material and seek to know what to share. How will understanding the life and roles of the Savior increase your faith in Him and bless those you watch over through visiting teaching? For more information, go to reliefsociety.lds.org.

The Divine Mission of Jesus Christ: Prince of Peace

This is part of a series of Visiting Teaching Messages featuring aspects of the mission of the Savior.

The Savior is the source of true peace,” said Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “Even with the trials of life, because of the Savior’s Atonement and His grace, righteous living will be rewarded with personal peace.”¹ Understanding that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace can help us find inner peace and increase our faith in Him.

Jesus Christ said: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Bearing testimony of that truth, Linda S. Reeves, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, said: “The Lord has been merciful to me and has helped make



my burdens light. He has helped me to feel great peace.”²

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “The ideal place for . . . peace is within the walls of our own homes, where we have done all we can to make the Lord Jesus Christ the centerpiece.”³

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; 1 Nephi 13:37; Doctrine and Covenants 59:23

NOTES

1. Quentin L. Cook, “Personal Peace: The Reward of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 35.
2. Linda S. Reeves, “Claim the Blessings of Your Covenants,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 120.
3. Richard G. Scott, “For Peace at Home,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 29.

Faith, Family, Relief



From the Scriptures

Isaiah prophesied of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). In the Americas, Samuel the Lamanite told of signs that would accompany Christ’s birth five years later (see Helaman 14:3, 5). As the prophesied day approached, unbelievers threatened to execute all the Christians if these signs did not occur. The prophet Nephi “cried mightily unto the Lord all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying: . . . On the morrow come I into the world” (3 Nephi 1:12–13). The signs appeared, and with the birth of Christ, “the people began again to have peace in the land” (verse 23).

In Bethlehem, Mary “brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7).

Consider This

In what ways does the Savior bring peace to your life?

TITHING HELPS BUILD UP THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We believe in giving one-tenth of our income to the Lord to help build up His kingdom. The law of tithing requires that we sacrifice some of our material goods in order to enjoy greater spiritual blessings.

The principle of tithing has been practiced since the gospel was first taught on earth. Abraham, for example, paid tithes to the high priest Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:18–20). The Lord commanded Moses to teach the people about tithing (see Leviticus 27:30–34). Later, when the Savior visited the Nephites, He gave them the law of tithing (see 3 Nephi 24). And in our day, He restored this

commandment through the Prophet Joseph Smith (see D&C 119).

To fulfill this commandment, we give one-tenth of our income to the Lord through local priesthood leaders. The funds are transmitted to Church headquarters, where a council comprising the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric determines how the sacred funds will be used (see D&C 120).

Tithing allows the Church to build and maintain temples and meetinghouses, to support seminaries and institutes, to provide materials for Church members, and to sustain missionary, temple, and family history work.

We believe in paying tithing willingly, “for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Paying tithing is a way we can help build up the kingdom of God on earth and show gratitude to Heavenly Father for blessing us with everything we have. Yet paying tithing brings more blessings into our lives. As Malachi taught: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). Spiritual and temporal blessings can come to all who pay an honest tithe, even if the amount is small. ■

For more information, see Genesis 28:20–22; Malachi 3:8–11; and chapter 12 in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow (2012).

BLESSINGS OF PAYING TITHING



“Tithing develops and tests our faith. By sacrificing to the Lord what we may think we need or want for ourselves, we learn to rely

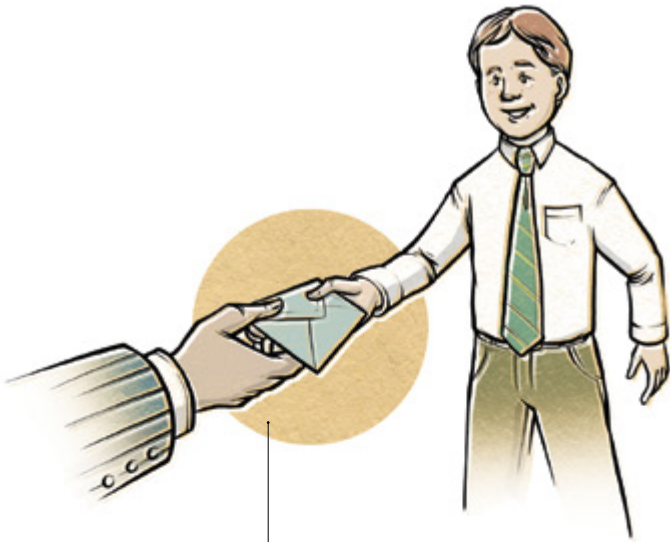
on Him. Our faith in Him makes it possible to keep temple covenants and receive eternal temple blessings. . . .

“Tithing also teaches us to control our desires and passions for the things of this world. Payment of tithing encourages us to be honest in our dealings with our fellowmen. We learn to trust that what we have been given, through the blessings of the Lord and our own diligent efforts, is sufficient for our needs. . . .

“To those who faithfully and honestly live the law of tithing, the Lord

promises an abundance of blessings. Some of these blessings are temporal, just as tithes are temporal. But like the outward physical ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, the commandment to pay tithing requires temporal sacrifice, which ultimately yields great spiritual blessings.”

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Tithing: A Test of Faith with Eternal Blessings,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 27.



Tithing and other donations are given to the Lord through a member of your bishopric or branch presidency.

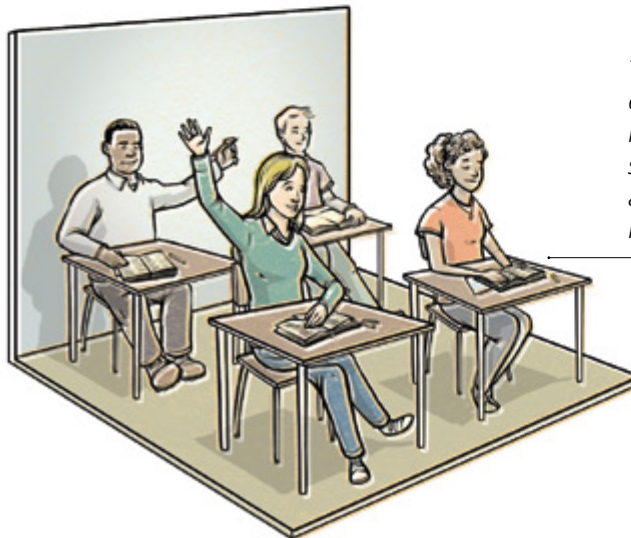


Tithing pays for the cost of building and maintaining temples and meetinghouses.



Tithing pays for the translation and publication of scriptures and lesson materials.

Tithing funds are transmitted from wards and branches to Church headquarters, where a council that includes the First Presidency decides how these sacred funds will be used.



Tithing helps pay for educating young members in Church schools, seminaries, and institutes of religion.

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

By Lindsay Alder

His heart beats still. Not as well as it did before the heart attack. But it beats still.



My heart feels warm tonight. Broken, bruised, torn, certainly. But beautifully warm. I feel intense gratitude—gratitude so deep and encompassing that it seems a new hole has opened in my soul to make room, gratitude so filling and so personal that it won't stop coursing down my cheeks in silent tears. My husband is breathing. I can hear it, deep and soft.

Just a couple of hours ago, I climbed into his hospital bed, ignoring the gentle kicks from our soon-to-arrive baby,

and found a spot among all the wires hooked to his chest where I could rest my head. Listening to his heartbeat in my ear was an experience that will be burned into my memory forever.

His heart beats still. Not as well as it did before the heart attack. But it beats still.

The warm lights from the Christmas strands strung across the room make me feel cozy tonight in more than one way. Their soft glow creates a comforting atmosphere, but the real

coziness comes from knowing that true friends were willing to drop their own Christmas Eve plans to come decorate when Brian moved from the intensive care unit. The three-foot (1 m) Christmas tree stands in the window as a symbol of their love.

How can I thank our friends? Will they ever know how much I needed them and how grateful I am? While my thoughts were turned to nothing but my husband, they were loving my children, scrubbing my house, restocking my fridge, doing my laundry, wrapping our Christmas presents, and bringing love to me through hugs, dinners, gift cards, cash, phone calls, texts, emails, messages, bags of cinnamon-scented pine cones, and a suitcase full of decorations. They cried with me and prayed and fasted. And in doing all of this, they gave me the most precious gift they could have given: their time. How I love them all!

I think I will sleep well tonight, for I am wrapped in a seemingly endless field of gratitude for all of them.

But mostly I feel gratitude to the Lord for my husband's life—his deep breathing, his heart pumping blood, his living body and soul. His life is my Christmas miracle. ■

The author lives in North Carolina, USA.

MALACHI

"[Jesus] commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi" (3 Nephi 24:1).

My name means “my messenger,” and as such I relayed the “burden of the word of the Lord to Israel.”¹ In my day, about 450 years before Christ’s birth,² many of the Jews became discouraged and had stopped living righteously.³ The Lord rebuked them through my teachings.

Jewish priests from the tribe of Levi were normally dedicated to providing ordinances, but the Levites were corrupt in my time. They were ungrateful, refused to honor God, and offered polluted bread and imperfect animal sacrifices.⁴ They had broken the priesthood covenant God had made with Levi.

The people—not only the priests—were corrupt as well. They were marrying outside of the covenant, divorcing the wives of their youth, and refusing to pay their tithes and offerings.⁵

But even as the Lord spoke against these evil practices, He was willing

to forgive because He loved His people: “Return unto me, and I will return unto you.”⁶ One way to return unto the Lord was to bring “all the tithes into the storehouse.”⁷

The people complained, “It is vain to serve God: . . . they that work wickedness are set up [prosperous],”⁸ but I taught that the names of those who “feared the Lord . . . and that thought upon his name” were written in a “book of remembrance.”⁹

I also prophesied that at the Lord’s Second Coming, the wicked “shall be

stubble” but unto those who fear His name “shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”¹⁰

I prophesied that before the Second Coming, the prophet Elijah would come to restore the priesthood keys that would “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.”¹¹

Through my teachings, we see that the Lord remembers His people and keeps His promises to His faithful children. He wants us to have faith in these promises and, through repentance, return unto Him.¹² ■



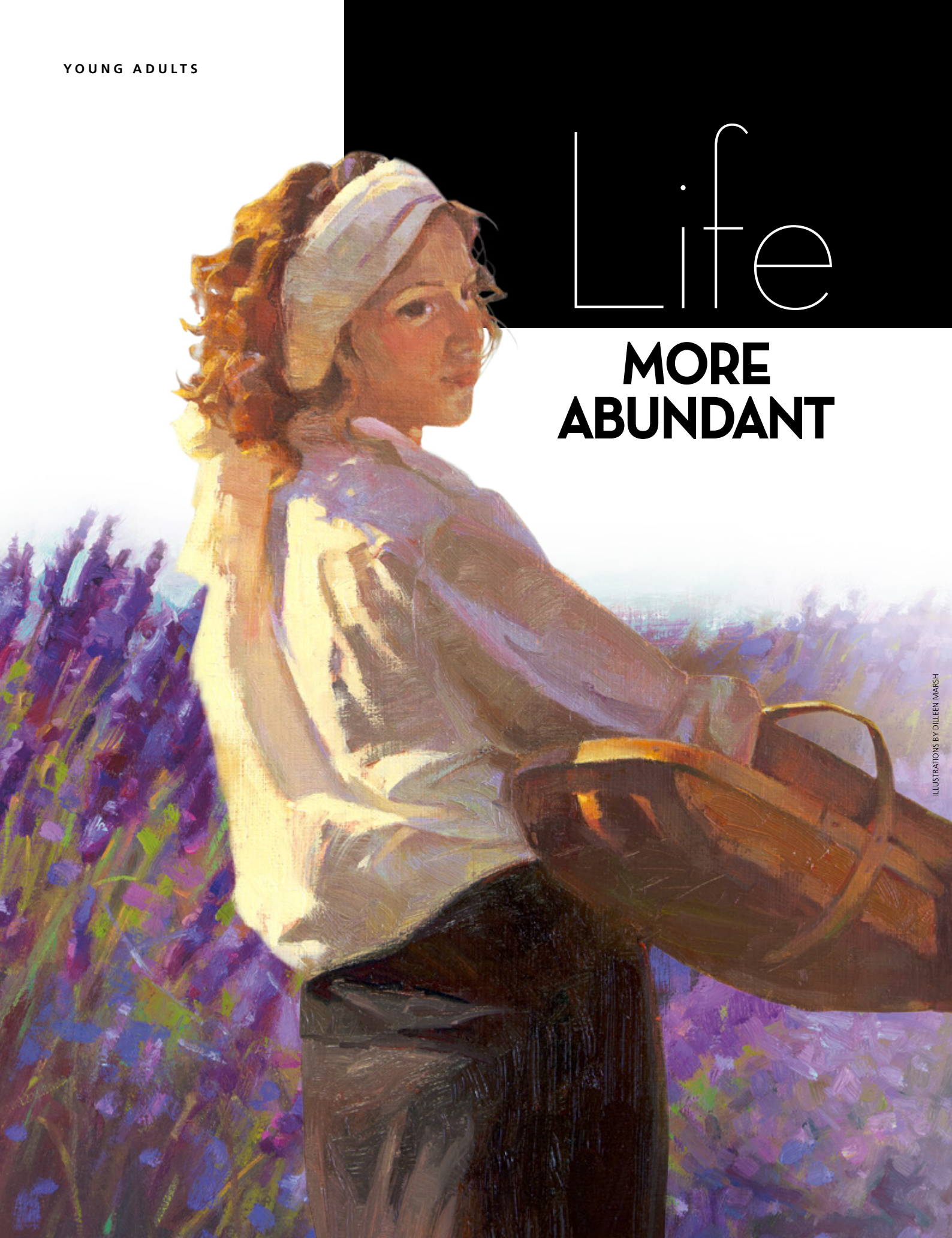
NOTES

1. Malachi 1:1.
2. See Bible Dictionary, “Malachi,” 728.
3. See *Old Testament Seminary Student Study Guide* (2002), 193.
4. See Malachi 1:2, 6–14; see also *Old Testament Instructor’s Guide, Religion 301–2* (1994), 109–10.
5. See Malachi 2:11, 14–16; 3:8.
6. Malachi 3:7.
7. Malachi 3:10; see also LeGrand Richards, “The Second Coming of Christ,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 75.
8. Malachi 3:14–15.
9. Malachi 3:16.
10. Malachi 4:1–2.
11. Malachi 4:6; see also Doctrine and Covenants 110.
12. See *Old Testament Teacher Resource Manual* (2003), 215.

YOUNG ADULTS

Life

**MORE
ABUNDANT**



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DILLEEN MARSH

As a young adult, I have often felt myself selling my life short, but the Lord has promised us an abundant life if we follow the counsel of His servants.

By Mindy Anne Leavitt

Church Magazines

I still remember the overpowering scent of lavender hanging thick in the air and the omnipresent sound of buzzing bees. My friend and I were standing in the middle of a secluded lavender field in the south of France—one of the most beautiful sights I’ve ever seen. As we stood there trying to take in the splendor of our surroundings, I couldn’t help but think of the Savior teaching that, unlike “the thief [who] cometh . . . to destroy,” He Himself came “that [we] might have life, and . . . have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Soaking in the atmosphere of that lovely place, I felt that, despite the trials I faced, my life was amazingly abundant.

To those who obey His commandments the Savior promises life in abundance—not in the monetary sense but rather the abundance of a full, happy life that comes from being able to recognize the good in this

world, see the Lord’s hand in our lives, and know His will for us. Yet I know from experience that as a young adult in the Church, it can be easy to postpone experiencing this abundance as you wait your life away. I have been guilty of selling my life short—underestimating what my life could be—by telling myself that because I didn’t yet have a degree or a husband or a house or children, my life was somehow inferior to the lives of people who did have those things. However, our potential for happiness is not limited by things beyond our own control.

By following the counsel from the prophets and apostles regarding four aspects of life, we can find the fulfillment and happiness of a more abundant life.

A Spiritual Life

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated that “the abundant life is a spiritual life.”¹ We all know the things we should be doing regularly: scripture study, prayer, church attendance, and temple worship. While doing these things is an important first step, going through the motions isn’t enough; developing a relationship with our Heavenly Father and allowing

the gospel to change us require more than a checklist state of mind.

The more we feast upon the words of Christ—the scriptures—and delve into developing our spirituality, the more we are able to see the goodness around us and recognize His role in our lives. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) pointed out that the scriptures are the “the words of life” (D&C 84:85) and that this is especially true of the Book of Mormon. He said, “When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance.”²

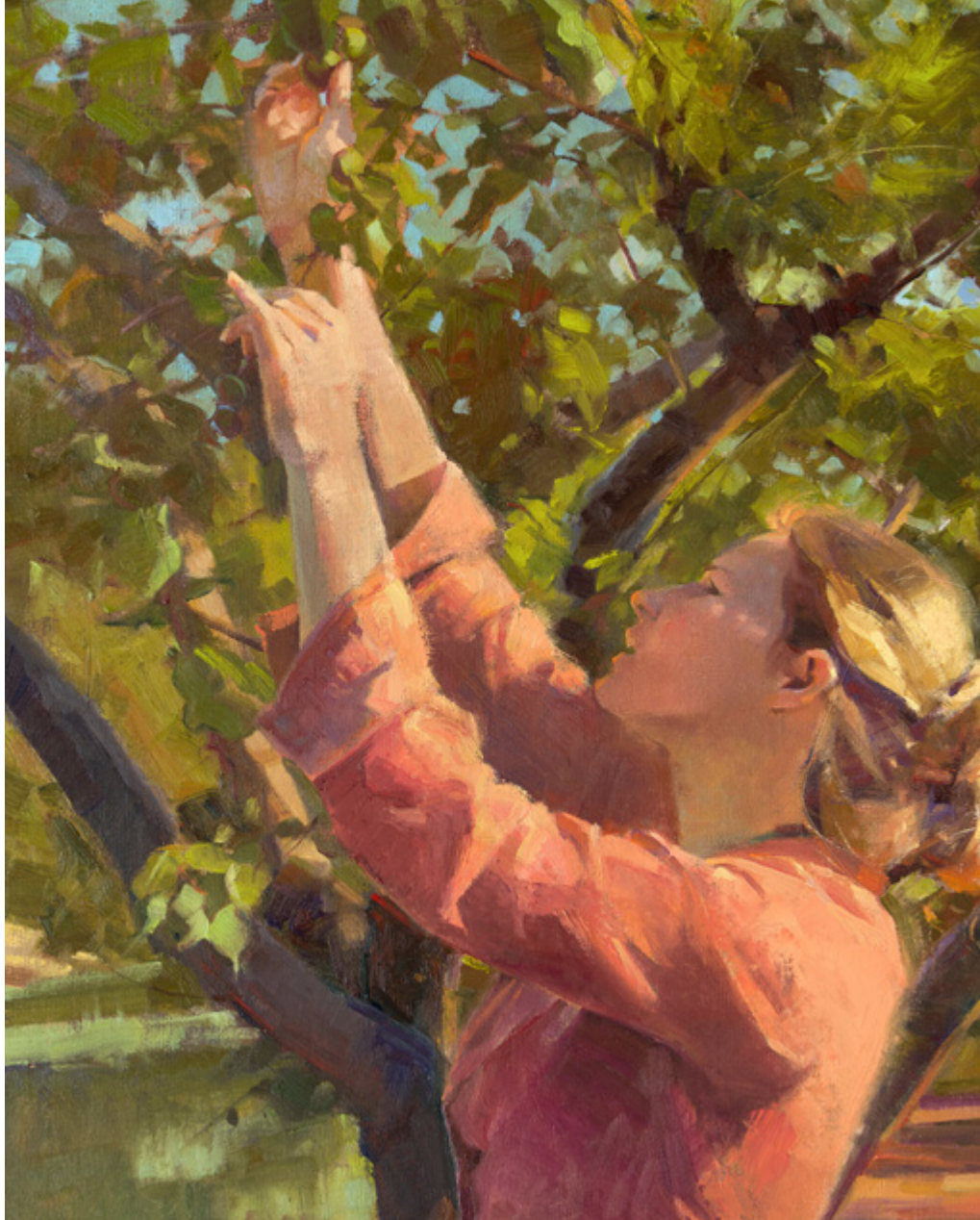
For me, “the words of life” came alive as I took institute and religion classes, studied the gospel in depth on my mission, made temple worship a priority, and turned to the scriptures for answers. As President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said, “The abundant life involves an endless search for knowledge, light, and truth.”³

A “Today” Life

During the transient period known as young adulthood, it’s easy to fall into the trap of saying, “One day, when [insert far-off, life-changing event] happens, I will be able to [insert life goal or aspiration].” We can

miss many opportunities by trying to nail down plans for an unknown future instead of enjoying the possibilities of the present. But just as the Lord told the Saints who were arriving in Ohio and were unsure of how long they would be there, we need to “act upon this land as for years, and this shall turn unto [us] for [our] good” (D&C 51:17).

We ought to take advantage of opportunities that come our way to travel, serve a mission, accept a calling, increase our education, learn a new skill, or develop a talent, because the Lord requires us to do all in our power now to cultivate an abundant life. Elder Wirthlin declared, “No matter our age, circumstances, or abilities, each one of us can create something remarkable of his life.”⁴ I have been able to create something remarkable of my own life through opportunities to travel around the world, learn a new language, serve the Lord and others, and explore different cultures. I have striven to follow the advice of Sister Kristen M. Oaks, wife of Elder Dallin H. Oaks, when she counseled young single adults to “depend on the Lord, enjoy every opportunity, and delight in the life you have.”⁵



A Loving Life

As a young adult, relationships seem to be on my mind a lot. While it is often difficult to not spend my time lamenting over relationships that I don't yet have—a spouse and children—I have found fulfillment by cultivating the relationships I already have, especially the eternal ones.

Instead of becoming lonely when I see friends getting married before me, I have become best friends with my siblings. To offset my longing to be a mother, I have taken advantage of time with my nieces and nephews.

It's easy to culture loneliness or self-pity as you would bacteria in an isolated dish, becoming bitter

The Lord would have us do all we can to cultivate an abundant life. He will help us make the most of our opportunities.

toward those who have relationships you long for, but Elder Wirthlin pointed out that “those who live abundant lives . . . fill their hearts with love.”⁶ At times it requires a great deal of effort, humility, and prayer for hearts to be filled with this love, but charity is a gift of the Spirit available to all who seek it (see Moroni 7:48).

Acquiring this love helps us find happiness and fulfillment in the midst of what might otherwise be a lonely period of life. Elder Wirthlin noted, “We are happiest when our lives are connected to others through unselfish love and service.”⁷ Service not only is an excellent way to develop worthwhile relationships but also has a way of enriching our own lives, allowing us to recognize our blessings and helping us see the goodness of the world. Because it is so easy as young adults to get caught up in our individual concerns, we need to take the time to lovingly consider others and their needs ahead of our own.

A Healthy Life

We have also been given guidelines concerning the care of our mortal bodies. The Word of Wisdom instructs us to not use tobacco or alcohol and to avoid excess. We are encouraged to eat grains, fruits and vegetables in their season, and, in moderation, meat. (See D&C 89.)

While difficult physical challenges may limit what some of us can do with and for our bodies, we can each receive divine guidance for our individual situations. I have found that as I’ve prayed to Heavenly Father about how to best take care of my body, I have received specific revelation regarding how to do so. When my body is in good shape, I am better able to appreciate the world around me because I have more energy and feel better about myself. Mastering my physical body gives me confidence in all other aspects of my life, which in turn helps me to live more abundantly. President Thomas S. Monson has observed that “God gave man life and with it the power to think and reason and decide and love. With such power given to you and to me, mastery of self becomes a necessity if we are to have the abundant life.”⁸

Promise of the Savior

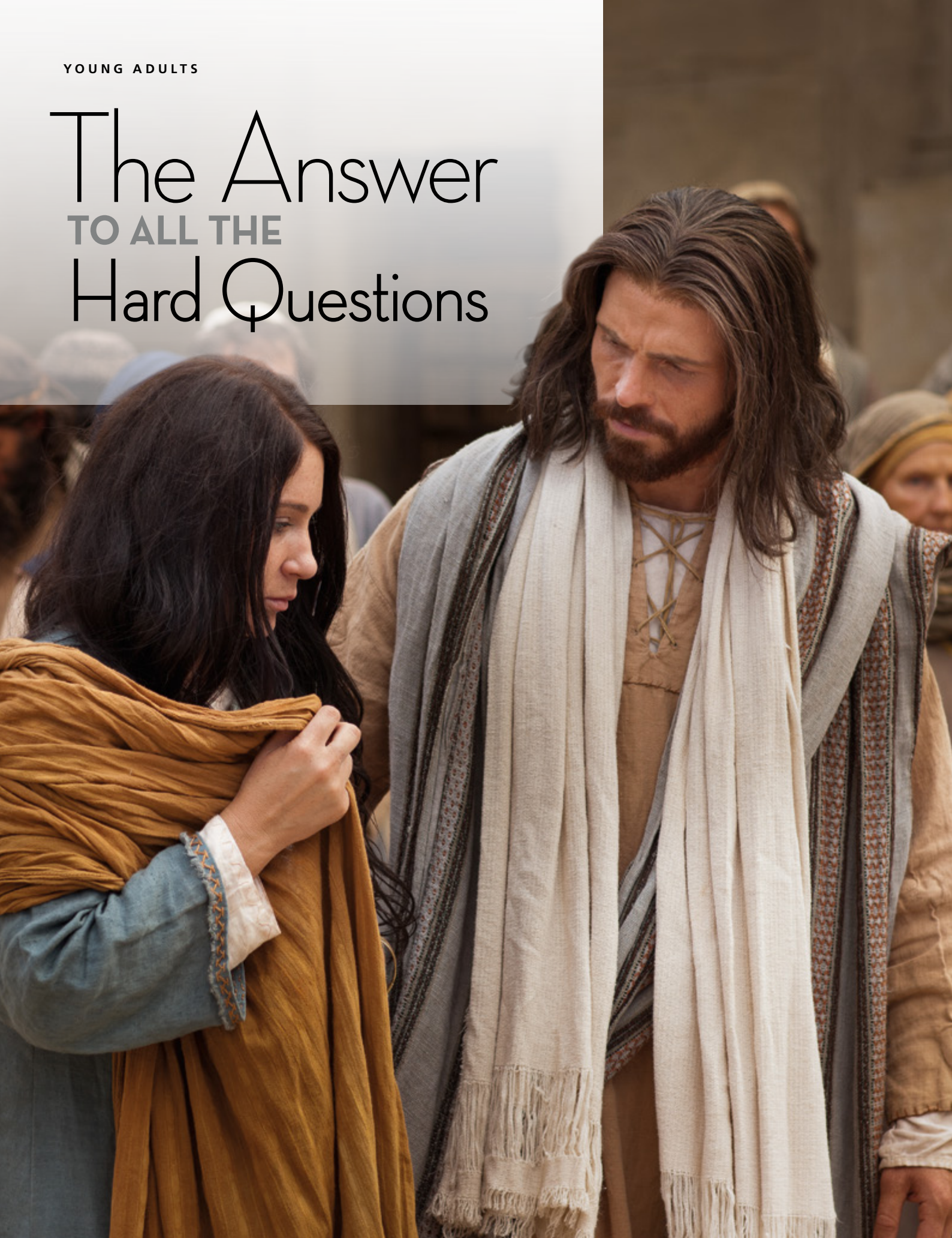
As I look back on that precious afternoon in the lavender field, I still recall feeling Heavenly Father’s love surround me. He certainly knew that my life hadn’t gone according to my plans, yet He still blessed me to be able to find an abundance in life that I didn’t think existed beyond what I thought I lacked. By cultivating my spirituality, taking advantage of every opportunity, improving my relationships with others, and striving to take care of my body, I am able to live my life abundantly. As I place my trust in the Lord, I know that I can rise above the thief, Satan, who seeks “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10) the fulfillment and happiness I strive for, and that I can enjoy the abundant life the Savior promises. ■

NOTES

1. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 100.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 7.
3. James E. Faust, “The Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 7.
4. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Abundant Life,” 101.
5. Kristen M. Oaks, “To the Singles of the Church” (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 11, 2011), lds.org/broadcasts/archive/ces-devotionals/2011/01.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Abundant Life,” 100.
7. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Abundant Life,” 100.
8. Thomas S. Monson, “In Quest of the Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1988, 5.

YOUNG ADULTS

The Answer TO ALL THE Hard Questions



When faced with hard questions, only one ultimately matters.

By R. Val Johnson
Church Magazines

The questions life sends our way are not always easy to answer. Some of the personal challenges we have—a child’s death, for example, the betrayal of a friend, or an unfortunate financial reversal—are often not easy to reconcile, and we need the compassionate support of those around us. Sometimes the most difficult struggle in these situations is to recognize that our Heavenly Father loves us and is not punishing us, though the reason for the trial, if there even is a reason, escapes us for now.

Some of the hardest questions come when what we believe is challenged by changing cultural fashions or by new information, sometimes misinformation, that critics of the Church confront us with. At such times, it may seem that our doctrinal or historical

foundations are not as solid as we thought. We may be tempted to question the truths we’ve taken for granted and the spiritual experiences that have formed our faith.

What do we do when doubt seeps into our hearts? Are there really answers to those hard questions?

Yes, there are. In fact, all the answers—all the right answers—depend on the answer to just one question: do I trust God above everyone else?

Simple but Not Easy

Is that approach too simple? too easy?

Perhaps. Truth isn’t always obvious, particularly when it has to compete with alternatives presented in attractive packages. Often we understand the truth only in part, while the whole remains yet to be learned. And in the learning, we face the uncomfortable prospect of abandoning imperfect but heretofore comforting understandings. But trusting that God has all the answers, that He loves us, and that He will answer all our questions—in His way, on His timetable—can simplify our searching. It may not always be easy, but simply trusting in God’s counsel can safely steer us through clouds of confusion.

During the October 2013 general conference of the Church, President

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, made this insightful observation:

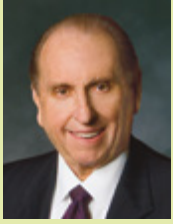
“It’s natural to have questions—the acorn of honest inquiry has often sprouted and matured into a great oak of understanding. There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith—even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty. Faith is to hope for things which are not seen but which are true.

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters—my dear friends—please, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith. We must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

Some Helpful Principles

So how do we go about honestly doubting our doubts? How do we anchor our faith on the solid rock of revelation and not on the sandy soil of shifting human understanding? It may help to keep in mind the following principles.

PRINCIPLE 1: God Knows Infinitely More Than We Do. When faced with questions—whether



THE COURAGE TO STAND FOR PRINCIPLE

“It is impossible to stand upright when one plants his roots in the shifting sands of popular opinion and approval. . . . We will all face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us—all of us—have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Be Strong and of a Good Courage,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 68–69.

FIND ANSWERS

To expand your study of difficult questions, go to lds.org/topics and history.lds.org, among other supportive online resources.

personal, social, or doctrinal—we can rely on the fact that the Creator of the universe knows far more than we do. If He has addressed a topic (and sometimes He hasn’t), we can trust that His views are clearer than ours.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

PRINCIPLE 2: God Shares Some of His Knowledge. A corollary of principle 1 is that God shares with us as much of what He knows as we are ready to receive and He is ready to deliver. We just need to prepare ourselves to receive it, then seek it. The scriptures answer many questions. One of the great pleasures of this life is being taught by the Holy Ghost as He uses the scriptures to reveal “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30) in response to our diligent study.

Some questions, particularly of a historical nature, have reasonable explanations, and the more information honest scholarship reveals, the clearer our views become.

We are also blessed to have living prophets and apostles to teach us under the inspiration of heaven. We



need not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” We can trust that their collective guidance will help us “all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” (See Ephesians 4:11–15.)

PRINCIPLE 3: We Can Trust in God’s Love. God loves us far more than we can imagine. We are His children, and He wants us to return to His presence as mature, glorified beings capable of becoming like Him (see Moses 1:39). All the counsel He gives us is given with the deepest of love to bless us eternally. We can trust in that love completely.

“How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings” (Psalm 36:7).

PRINCIPLE 4: We Need to Seek Spiritual Affirmations. If so much of the world's wisdom seems contrary to God's, we should not be surprised. After all, by divine design, we live in a fallen world where we are cut off from the presence and mind of God. Such a condition can make understanding the things of God difficult, "for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. . . ."

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:11, 14).

If we are to understand the things of God, we can't depend on human wisdom alone to do the job. We need access to the Spirit of God "that we might know the things that are

freely given to us of God. . . . which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:12–13).

When we are baptized and confirmed members of Christ's Church, we are given the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that gift, we can learn from the Spirit and receive His comforting confirmations of truth. Receiving such spiritual affirmations dispels doubt more surely than the most convincing logic, and it is available to all who seek truth through sincere prayer, diligent study, and obedience to the Lord's commandments.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

PRINCIPLE 5: We May Need to Wait Upon the Lord. Sometimes we come up blank as we struggle to understand the trials and questions we

have. Despite our best efforts, understanding escapes us. The heavens seem closed. That's when our trust in God enables us to have the patience to wait upon Him. Not all questions will be answered immediately or even in this life. Not all trials will ease before body and spirit separate. But if we love God above all else, if we trust in His love for us, we will be able to endure in faith until that day dawns when the veil lifts and all becomes clear.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

"And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:5–7). ■

NOTE

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 23.



By Laurel Teuscher

Three months into my service as a missionary in Spain, I was assigned a new companion. I immediately felt a kinship with her, sensing that the Lord had put us together to accomplish great things. With Christmas only a few weeks away, people seemed more patient with my broken Spanish. Everyone wished us “Merry Christmas.” The holiday spirit added to my sense of optimism of what this transfer would bring.

During our second week together, my companion became ill. We tried to work, but her condition slowly worsened. We finally called our mission president, who gave us permission to stay in and rest. He counseled me to use the extra time to improve my Spanish.

A Christmas Miracle?

I suggested that my companion ask for a priesthood blessing and told her of a time when I had been healed from an illness. She agreed, and during our zone meeting the next day, she asked the elders for a blessing. We felt the Spirit strongly during the blessing. My companion was promised that she would be

M^{My Most} Miserable Favorite CHRISTMAS

Although our prayers weren't answered as we anticipated, my missionary companion and I learned a valuable lesson that Christmas.

“healed for Christmas,” now only a few days away. As we traveled home, we joyfully planned what we would do once she was better.

Sure enough, on Christmas Day my companion awoke without any

symptoms of illness. Our spirits were high as we went to the local meeting-house to spend the day celebrating our Savior's birth. We felt we had witnessed a miracle. That night, however, when we got off at the metro, I noticed my companion's pace grow progressively slower as we walked home. I felt sure that she was just tired after being out all day.

The next morning, Sunday, I awoke to find that my companion was as sick as she'd ever been. All of her symptoms had returned. We went to church but came home immediately afterward. She retreated to the bedroom, and I sat in the living room, wanting to comfort her but

overwhelmed by our situation. I tried to study but couldn't. Why had the blessing of healing been granted for only one day? Why weren't we able to go out and teach, especially when we knew that we could accomplish so much? And then the questions turned inward—could it be that I didn't have enough faith?

A Higher Purpose

At the end of the day, we talked about her healing and the return of her illness. She finally said, "Maybe there's a different purpose in my getting sick. I was healed for Christmas

as promised. Just because I got sick again doesn't mean that the Lord didn't grant the blessing."

I admitted that she was right. Perhaps there were other things we both needed to learn. I continued to spend my time studying Spanish and the scriptures, talking with her, and serving her. Our friendship grew and we laughed often. When she did feel well enough to leave the apartment, we walked slowly and had more time to share our testimonies with people on the street. Soon, she went home to recover and I was assigned a new companion.

Unforeseen Blessings

As I look back now, I remember that Christmas as my favorite. That Christmas season I grew closer to my Savior and found joy not only in His birth but also in His Atonement. My Savior's Christmas gift to me was a better understanding of His love and sacrifice for me.

Later, I came across a statement by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that seemed to capture exactly my sentiments about that Christmas on my mission: "You can't separate Bethlehem from Gethsemane or the hasty flight into Egypt from the slow journey to the summit of Calvary. It's of one piece. It is a single plan. It considers 'the fall and rising again of many in Israel' [Luke 2:34], but always in that order. Christmas is joyful not because it is a season or decade or lifetime without pain and privation, but precisely because life does hold those moments for us."¹ ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Shepherds, Why This Jubilee?* (2000), 68.







By Bishop
Gary E.
Stevenson
Presiding Bishop

Without the Savior's birth and Atonement, we would have no Intercessor, no Advocate with the Father, and no Mediator who makes it possible for us to return to the presence of our loving Heavenly Father and live together as eternal families.

THE Reality OF CHRISTMAS

When my father was a boy, he lived in a small town in central Utah near Utah Lake. In the days before the pioneers, Native Americans hunted and fished in the area. Certain locations around the lake became popular for those looking for arrowheads.

At a fathers-and-sons activity when my father was five years old, his ward went to Utah Lake to look for arrowheads. After the group had spent the day searching, my grandfather asked my father whether he had found any arrowheads.

"No, I didn't find any," my father replied. Then he reached into his pocket and said, "But I did find this nice rock that is shaped just like a Christmas tree."

My father had found an arrowhead after all, but he didn't know it. He held the real thing in his hand, but he didn't recognize it.

Recognizing the Redeemer

For many people today, their vision of what is real and most important—Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world—is blurred by things that are not real.

Recently I saw a television program on Jesus Christ that questioned whether He really was born of the Virgin Mary. Even great professors from esteemed institutions of learning speculated about whether this could be.

Responding to such doubters, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said: "The so-called scholars seek to convince us that the divine birth of Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament was not divine at all and that Mary was not a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception. They would have us believe that Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, was His physical father, and that therefore Jesus was human in all attributes and characteristics. They appear generous in their praise of Him when they say that He was a great moral philosopher, perhaps even the greatest. But the import of their effort is to repudiate the divine sonship of Jesus, for on that doctrine rests all other claims of Christianity."¹

I have skied on artificial snow, and I have decorated fake Christmas trees with fake icicles. Sometimes it can be difficult to grasp what is real, especially in a day



of virtual reality. So how do we know what is real? How do we obtain a testimony of the reality of Jesus Christ?

We gain a testimony of what is real as we read the word of God in the scriptures—both ancient and modern. We learn the reality of the Savior as we listen to and read the testimonies of living prophets and apostles. We find the truth as we pray “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4). We discover “the right way” as we “believe in Christ, and deny him not” and as we “bow down before him, and worship him with all [our] might, mind, and strength, and [our] whole soul” (2 Nephi 25:29).

Prophecies of Christ’s Birth

Scriptures abound that prophesy of the birth of Christ—the first Christmas. We may forget when we read these scriptural prophecies that they were indeed *prophecies*. They offer great detail about what was going to happen but had not yet happened.

Eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah said, “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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Six hundred years before the Savior was born, Nephi described a vision he

had of the mother of the Son of God:

“I looked and beheld the . . . city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. . . .

“And [the angel] said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God . . .

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

“And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 11:13, 18, 20–21).

One hundred twenty-four years before the birth of the Savior, King Benjamin said:

“Behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent . . . shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles . . .

“And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:5, 8).

Eighty-three years before the birth of Christ, Alma said, “And behold, [the Son of God] shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel” (Alma 7:10).

And only six years before the first Christmas, Samuel the Lamanite declared:

FINDING THE SAVIOR



“Sometimes the most precious and sacred things are right in front of us, in plain sight, but we cannot or

will not see them. . . .

“I promise that if we unclutter our lives a little bit and in sincerity and humility seek the pure and gentle Christ with our hearts, we will see Him, we will find Him—on Christmas and throughout the year.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “How to See the Christ in Christmas,” *New Era*, Dec. 2013, 48.

“And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness . . .

“And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld” (Helaman 14:3, 5).

The Jewish people anxiously anticipated this great event. They knew the Messiah would come, and they expected Him to come in glory, liberate



them temporally, establish an earthly kingdom, and rule as their King.

Who would know first of the Messiah's birth? Would it not be the Sanhedrin or others in positions of power and influence?

The Bible tells us that it was lowly shepherds sleeping on the ground to whom an angel declared the "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10) and that it was Wise Men from afar who saw "his star in the east, and [came] to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). The powerful and the influential, whose vision was blurred by the philosophies of this world, were not with the Savior at His birth or during His ministry. They had before them the real thing but did not know it or accept it.

Becoming More Christlike

President Benson said that one of the greatest things about Christmastime

is that it increases our sensitivity to things of God:

"It causes us to contemplate our relationship with our Father and the degree of devotion we have for God.

"It prompts us to be more tolerant and giving, more conscious of others, more generous and genuine, more filled with hope and charity and love—all Christlike attributes. No wonder the spirit of Christmas touches the hearts of people the world over. . . . For at least a time, increased attention and devotion are turned toward our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."²

This Christmas, as the spirit of the season permeates our hearts, let us do something that expresses our feelings in an outward way, showing that we understand that the babe born in Bethlehem is the real Redeemer. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) gave some practical advice that helps us do that:

"This Christmas, mend a quarrel. Seek out a forgotten friend. Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust. Write a letter. Give a soft answer. Encourage youth. Manifest your loyalty in word and deed. Keep a promise. Forgo a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Apologize. Try to understand. Examine your demands on others. Think first of someone else. Be kind. Be gentle. Laugh a little more. Express your gratitude. Welcome a stranger. Gladden the heart of a child. Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth. Speak your love and then speak it again."³

Without Christ, there would be no Christmas. Without Christ, there can be no fulness of joy. Without His birth and His Atonement, we would have no Intercessor, no Advocate with the Father, and no Mediator who makes it possible for us to return to the presence of our loving Heavenly Father and live together as eternal families.

I celebrate with you the beautiful and miraculous reality of the birth and mission of the Son of God, and I bear my testimony that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer—the promised Messiah. ■

NOTES

1. *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (1988), 128.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, in Larry C. Porter, "Remembering Christmas Past: Presidents of the Church Celebrate the Birth of the Son of Man and Remember His Servant Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies*, vol. 40, no 3. (2001), 108.
3. Howard W. Hunter, "The Gifts of Christmas," *Ensign*, Dec. 2002, 18–19.

A CHRISTMAS CHANGE OF HEART

*The freezing, humble home of the Han family
taught me the true meaning of Christmas.*

By Janice Porter Hayes

The frozen air attacked my missionary companion and me as we picked our way along the empty sidewalks of Seoul, Korea. We must have made quite the sight in our heavy coats, scarves, and clunky, plodding boots.

Sister Kelly raised a hand at a passing bus driver, waving as she croaked, “Merry Christmas!” into the frosty air.

I looked at her and laughed. “You’re a million miles from home, frozen, and homesick. And still you can say, ‘Merry Christmas?’ You’re crazy.”

She smiled. Dodging an icy patch that covered the sidewalk, she said, “Just wait until you meet the Han family. They’ll cheer you up.”

I shrugged, burying my face into the folds of my scarf. For the past month, biting winds had swept across Korea, freezing everything in their path. Sidewalks emptied as people stayed indoors. Because of the weather, our teaching appointments were canceled. And with the holidays around the corner, my homesickness grew.

The streets narrowed, then disappeared into muddy trails as we picked our way along. I was unused to the poverty that now surrounded us.

“We met the Han family in the marketplace,” Sister Kelly

said, leading me down a narrow alley. “I’ve only been to their house once, but I know it’s down this way somewhere.”

I couldn’t help comparing our current situation to what I knew back home. I could imagine my family gathered around an enormous Christmas tree, fireplace blazing, our kitchen table heaped with food. Just two months in the mission field, I could still smell the turkey in the oven and hear the squeals of my siblings as they opened their Christmas toys.

“The Han family is so open to the Spirit,” my companion continued. “It just flows from them! They’ve accepted the gospel and loved us as no other people I’ve ever met.” She glanced at me and smiled. “They’ll love you too, you’ll see.” Slipping an arm through mine, Sister Kelly dragged me around a corner, stopping where a cluster of huts seemed to shiver in the biting wind.

The air smelled of boiling rice and kimchi. We crept down the alley, slipping on mud and ice. “It’s over here,” my companion said, pulling me forward. We stopped before one of the huts. A dull light shone from inside, and the wind rattled the thin outside door.

“This is it?” I managed to say.





My companion nodded. She put out a mittened hand to knock on the door but shook her head as I started to remove my scarf. “Better keep it on,” she said, smiling as the door opened. “We’ll probably have to sit outside.”

“Outside?” I stopped as the door slid open, forcing myself to smile into the faces of the people who grinned at us from inside the hut.

Sister Kelly hugged Sister Han and their two children. They laughed together, Brother Han booming, “Merry Christmas!” in halting English.

Sister Han took my hand, smiling deep into my eyes. Her face glowed as she maneuvered us into their tiny one-room home. I smiled back, already feeling warmer.

Brother Han attempted to shut the door, but the small room would not hold all of us, so we sat in the doorway near their outdoor cooking pot. He loaded my shoulders with blankets.

I held my hands toward the small portable gas heater, their only piece of furniture. Sister Han handed me a bowl of oranges and a plateful of biscuits.

LIGHT

By Elin Roberts

*In the beginning,
God called for light,
And the stars were made
according to His word.
They are here tonight,
flecks of silver and gold—
And once again heaven’s
voice is heard.*

*But this is a new star—
Its light will never dim.
Others fill the sky tonight,
But this one leads to Him.*

The author lives in Texas, USA.

Stumbling over my Korean, I attempted to thank her for her offering. Suddenly, I wasn’t thinking of that loaded kitchen table anymore.

“You are sick for home?” Sister Han looked at me with concern. She studied me for a moment before whispering,

“We are glad you are here.”

I looked into her face, then into her husband’s. Their home was too small for a Christmas tree. They had no presents crowding the floor. There was no music, no turkey, no tinsel or bows. All their worldly possessions were crammed into the shelves that lined one wall of their home.

As I studied my surroundings, the pains of homesickness left me, replaced instead by visions of another humble place, a stable that was small and unadorned, where animals and shepherds felt at ease.

I took Sister Han’s hand, holding it close between my own. A spot had been cleared on their crowded shelves. In this spot was a miniature manger scene made of plastic; beside it sat a picture of the Savior. Gazing at the picture, I realized how comfortable He must be in these surroundings.

“I’m glad I’m here,” I whispered. “Merry Christmas.” ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

A Broken Sheep

AND A CONTRITE SPIRIT

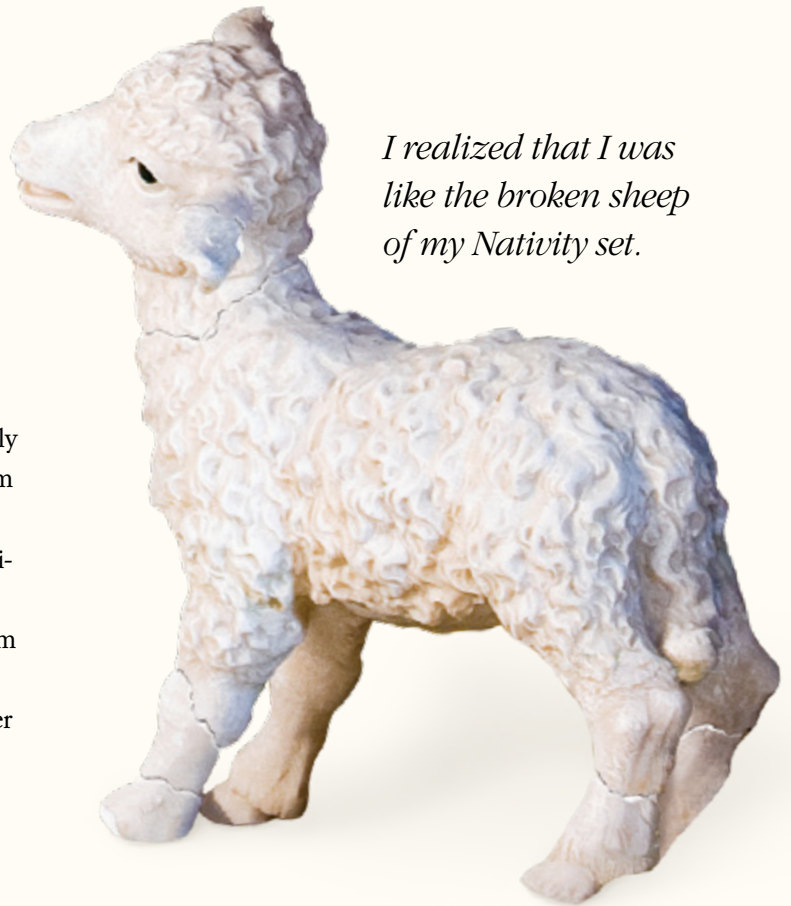
By Margaret McDowell Davis

The Christmas season began with the enjoyable busyness of shopping, baking, and decorating the house. I especially enjoyed placing my favorite Nativity set on prominent display on the fireplace mantel. Two days before Christmas, the house was abuzz with the gathering of children and grandchildren.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, I became concerned when I heard loud, accusing voices coming from the family room. I walked into the room to find a ceramic sheep from my favorite Nativity lying in pieces on the hearth. One of my grandsons had been admiring the Nativity, and he accidentally knocked the figure to the hearth. I could see his anguish as he apologized about the accident. I assured him that the sheep could be repaired.

Later, as I placed the mended sheep back with the other ceramic figures, the Spirit gently reminded me that I was very much like this sheep. I thought of the times when I had been broken through sin, sorrow, or suffering and needed to mend my spirit. I remembered how, during those times, the Good Shepherd took me up in His arms and carried me.

Prompted by this experience, I searched the scriptures for more about the Good Shepherd, and I rejoiced in the words of Isaiah: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11). I could not deny His love for me as I read that “he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture” (1 Nephi 22:25).



I realized that I was like the broken sheep of my Nativity set.

Ever since that Christmas Eve, the ceramic sheep has been a significant part of my observance of the Savior's birth. Each time I place the broken but mended sheep next to the Christ child in the manger, I feel greater love for the Savior and His Atonement. I recommit to “follow the voice of the good shepherd” (Alma 5:57). I remember that the Lord is my shepherd and that I too need to remain close to Him, for when I am broken, I know He is there to help me mend.

Sweet are the words, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

Stand as a Witness

A photograph of two men in conversation outdoors. The man on the left is seen in profile, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The man on the right is facing him, wearing a tan baseball cap and a dark polo shirt with thin white horizontal stripes. They are standing in a grassy field with a blurred background of trees and a cloudy sky.

In many different situations, we can stand as witnesses for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

By Stephanie Suzanne Robertson

Since the time of Joseph Smith, people have been curious about the Church and its teachings. In 1842, a Chicago newspaper editor named John Wentworth asked the Prophet Joseph Smith about the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints. Part of the Prophet's response is recorded in scripture as the Articles of Faith.¹

Today people continue to ask Church members to explain their beliefs. President Thomas S. Monson said, "We will have opportunities throughout our lives to share our beliefs, although we don't always know when we will be called upon to do so."²

Whether by being a friend or answering others' questions, members around the world are taking the opportunity to stand as witnesses of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

Being a Friend

Peter Vousden of Devon, England, had an opportunity to discuss the gospel because of his friendship with his neighbor Paul. One evening during their commute home on the train, Paul abruptly asked his friend, "Would you mind if we talked about doctrine?"

Brother Vousden says, "Paul was a devout Christian, a church attender, and an intelligent man. He knew I was LDS, but the request surprised me. I was delighted." Over the course of the discussion, the two men both bore their testimonies of Jesus Christ.

The next day, Brother Vousden took a Book of Mormon to Paul with

several passages marked. A little later Paul came hurrying up the pavement to Brother Vousden's house clutching the Book of Mormon. "This is what I believe!" he exclaimed.

"I thought he might be referring to the verses I had highlighted," Brother Vousden says, "but he had the front cover open and pointed to the part explaining the purpose as 'convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.'"

"This is what I believe," he repeated.

And although Paul declined Brother Vousden's invitation to learn more from full-time missionaries, their exchange about beliefs resulted in a more meaningful friendship.

"I attended the christening of Paul's son, and he attended the baptism of mine," Brother Vousden says. "He kept the Book of Mormon, which he knows is a book that testifies of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Answering Others' Questions

When Charles Nwachukwu of Delta, Nigeria, was getting a vaccination, two nurses who were not Latter-day Saints were discussing the Book of Mormon. One of the nurses knew Brother Nwachukwu was a Latter-day Saint and asked him to explain what he believed. "I told her that the Book of Mormon is another testimony of Jesus Christ, that it testifies of Christ's dealings with another tribe of the house of Israel, and that it supports the Bible's testimony that Jesus is the Redeemer of mankind," he says. "I bore my testimony that the Book of

Mormon has helped me solve my life challenges."

With her interest piqued, one of the nurses asked Brother Nwachukwu if she and her husband could come to his home for more clarification. He agreed. That evening he answered their questions and invited them to church. On Sunday, the couple came with their children and a visiting relative. Eventually, the nurse, her husband, and their children chose to be baptized.

Brother Nwachukwu says, "I had been looking for an opportunity to share my testimony with people who are desirous to know about the Church and its doctrines. I felt so fulfilled after bearing my testimony. We need to be prepared because we don't know who might ask about the gospel. Be bold and open your mouth. The Lord will fill it with His word."

Stand as a Witness

Since the early days of the Church, prophets and members alike have been standing as witnesses of the gospel. As that gospel continues to spread throughout the world, more of us will be able to share our testimonies. By doing so, we fulfill our covenant "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. The entire letter that Joseph Smith wrote in response to John Wentworth can be found in *History of the Church*, 4:535–41, or online at josephsmithpapers.org.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "Dare to Stand Alone," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 67.



**By Elder
L. Tom Perry**
Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

HELPING OTHERS FIND Faith in Christ

I challenge you to help God’s children return to their Christian faith and to the strong religious foundation that is so essential for peace of mind and real happiness.

Pope Benedict XVI, lamenting the weakening of Christian churches in Europe, Australia, and the United States, said, “There’s no longer evidence for a need of God, even less of Christ.” He added, “The so-called traditional churches look like they are dying.”¹

We have moved away from traditional worship. More people say they are spiritual rather than religious. If a teaching fits their lifestyle, they accept it and it becomes part of their faith. If it does not, they develop their own man-made faith. Faith and spirituality are now viewed as consumer products. Materialism has taken over and replaced God.

As Latter-day Saints, our voices must be heard in opposition to these dangerous trends designed to destroy the faith of mankind. The Book of Mormon warns us over and over about replacing our trust in God with things that do not last. Describing a time when many Nephites were drifting from their faith, Mormon states: “They grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to [the prophets’] words, to walk uprightly before God” (Alma 45:24).

The best-recorded fact in all history is the account of the birth and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth.





Sacrifices were instituted on the earth as a gospel ordinance, to be practiced and performed by the authority of the priesthood, typifying the coming sacrifice of the Son of Man, who would give His life for the sins of the world.

As you see the weakening of Christian faith in society, your own faith must become more firm and sure. Helaman declares: “Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure

foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

Nephi reminds us:

“We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins . . . [and] that life which is in Christ. . . .

“. . . For the right way is to believe in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26–28).

Do we have a foundation to support such a claim?

The Symbols of Christ's Sacrifice

The best-recorded fact in all history is the account of the birth and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth. His mission was prophesied from the days of our first parents. In the book of Moses we read:

“And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence.

“And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

“And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

“And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

“Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:4–8).

Thus, sacrifices were instituted on the earth as a gospel ordinance, to be practiced and performed by the authority of the priesthood, typifying the coming sacrifice of the Son of Man, who would give His life for the sins of the world.

The form of the ordinance was arranged to make specific the points of the Lord's sacrifice when He would come in the meridian of time. The later offering of the Passover, for instance, stipulated that a male lamb of the first year, without spot or blemish, be chosen as an offering. The blood was spilled and care was taken that no bones would be broken—all symbolic of the manner of the Savior's death.

It is amazing that the offering of sacrifice continued through all ages from Adam until the time of the Savior. Even though the children of Israel went through many periods of apostasy, the hope that the Only Begotten Son would atone for the sins of mankind and that His atoning blood would

make immortality possible remained in many hearts.

The offering of sacrifices generally ended as a practice after the Savior's Atonement. The sacrament was instituted to remind His followers that He had been to earth and had performed His earthly ministry. We read in Luke:

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

“Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19–20).

Once again I am amazed that this reminder, even through dark periods of apostasy, was practiced in many forms and in many ways throughout generations until the time of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, when priesthood power was restored to earth to perform this sacred, saving ordinance.

Through all periods of recorded history we find the constant reminder of the mission of our Savior. He came to earth as one who had a dual citizenship—one of God and one of man. This enabled Him to perform His great ennobling sacrifice for all of us through His Atonement. Could there be any stronger proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, than by studying and living His saving doctrines, which He has revealed throughout the dispensations of the world? He has given us His gospel to guide and direct us during our earthly sojourn.

The Gospel Is the Solution

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) said:

“The responsibility of showing to the world that the gospel of Jesus Christ will solve its problems rests upon the men who make the claim. . . . I believe, too, that every *world problem may be solved by obedience to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

“The solution of the great world problems is here in the Church of Jesus Christ. Ample provision is made not only for the needs of individuals, but also for the nation and groups of nations. . . . I grant that we may seem to

be arrogating to ourselves superior wisdom, but we are not. It is simply the application of God's plan to the world problems. You who hold the priesthood have greater responsibility today, now that you live in this creative moment in the world's history, than ever the Church has had before. I repeat it. If we make the claim to hold the truth, it is obligatory upon every Latter-day Saint so to live, that when the people of the world come, in answer to the call, to test the fruit of the tree, they will find it wholesome and good."²

The great message we carry to the world is that the gospel of our Lord and Savior has been restored to the earth. His Church is again on the earth with the power and glory of the holy priesthood.

To those so ordained is given power to act for Him as His agents to bring the doctrines, ordinances, principles, and powers to bind on earth as will be done in the heavens. This is the Savior's Church. He directs the affairs of His Church through His chosen prophets. His prophets in turn teach the gospel to others and testify of Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer. This day and age is the dispensation of the fulness of times, which has been spoken of by the prophets from the beginning of time. It is the time of fulfillment of all that has been spoken of by the Lord's prophets and recorded in the holy scriptures. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a new church but the restored Church to the world in this day and age.

You are the generation the Lord has saved for this day. You came out of the waters of baptism with a covenant and a promise to the Lord to represent Him in helping people throw off their worldly ways and return to the blessings promised us if we would follow Him and live His gospel. You can help your Heavenly Father's children return to their Christian foundation, develop faith in Him, and return to His ways.

What You Can Do

You may ask, "What can I do?" Some months ago our stake president, speaking in sacrament meeting,

suggested four things we could do to bring others back to their Christian faith:

1. Pray daily.

President Thomas S. Monson has said: "To those within the sound of my voice who are struggling with challenges and difficulties large and small, prayer is the provider of spiritual strength. . . . Prayer is the means by which we approach our Father in Heaven, who loves us. Speak to Him in prayer and then listen for the answer. Miracles are wrought through prayer. . . . Remember to pray fervently."³

Hold your daily prayers and help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to get on their knees and pray to God.

2. Study the scriptures daily.

Could there be any stronger witness of Jesus Christ than the testimonies we find in the Book of Mormon? Of its 239 chapters, 233 mention the Savior.⁴ Isn't that amazing?

Be certain you have daily scripture study. Then help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to also study the scriptures daily.

3. Remain worthy to attend the temple.

Some of you have been to the temple; others have not. It is well to understand what is required to obtain a temple recommend. We understand clearly the process by which we go to a judge in Israel and confirm to him our worthiness to hold a temple recommend and then live by the standards required to keep that recommend.

Live in such a way that your righteous example will demonstrate how to be worthy of temple blessings.

4. Give daily acts of service.

Remember the words of King Benjamin: "And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). The Lord literally answers our prayers through the service we give to others.



Be an example of Christlike service, and help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to serve others.

Rise to a New Sense of Commitment

I know that God lives. I know that we are all His children and that He loves us. I know that He sent His Son to the world to be the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. I know that those who embrace His gospel and follow Him will enjoy eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God. I know that the Savior directed the Restoration of the gospel on earth through the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I know that the only lasting joy and happiness we will ever find during our mortal experience will come by following Jesus Christ, obeying His law, and keeping His commandments.

I challenge you to rise to a new sense of commitment. I challenge you to help God's children return to their Christian faith and to the strong religious foundation that is so essential for peace of mind and real happiness in this period of mortal probation.

May God bless you with the courage, boldness, enthusiasm, and desire to restore faith in the gospel of our Lord and Savior. ■
From a Church Educational System fireside address, "We Were the Greatest Generation," delivered at Brigham Young University on March 6, 2011. For the full address, go to cesdevotionals.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Pope Benedict XVI, in Noelle Knox, "Religion Takes a Back Seat in Western Europe," *USA Today*, Aug. 10, 2005; usatoday.com/news/world/2005-08-10-europe-religion-cover_x.htm.
2. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 5; emphasis in original.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "Be Your Best Self," *Ensign*, May 2009, 68, 69.
4. See Robert J. Matthews, in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman and others (1988), 33.

Could there be any stronger witness of Jesus Christ than the testimonies we find in the Book of Mormon? Of its 239 chapters, 233 mention the Savior.



By **David L. Beck**
Young Men
General President

THE Savior AND THE Sacrament

What do you think about when you eat the bread and drink the water of the sacrament or when you prepare, bless, or pass the sacrament? Many of us ponder our covenants and how we are living. We think about our sins and pray for forgiveness and determine to do better.

These are important aspects of the ordinance of the sacrament. In addition, there is something else to ponder—something so profound and so specific that it is part of the sacramental prayer itself. It is remembering Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Those who eat the bread promise to “eat in remembrance of the body of [the] Son” and to “always remember him” (D&C 20:77). Similarly, those who drink the water promise to drink “in remembrance of the blood of [the] Son” and “that they do always remember him” (D&C 20:79).

The choice to remember the Savior and His Atonement and sacrifice is




fundamental to the ordinance. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “In the simple and beautiful language of the sacramental prayers . . . the principal word we hear seems to be *remember*. . . . What is stressed in both prayers is that all of this is done in remembrance of Christ. In so participating we witness that we will always remember him, that we may always have his Spirit to be with us.”¹

The Savior stressed these same points when He instituted the sacrament with His Apostles during the Passover in Jerusalem on the last night of His

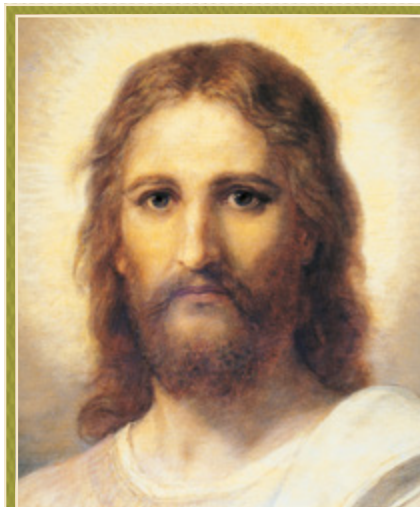
mortal ministry—the night He suffered for us in the Garden of Gethsemane before suffering again on the cross. For example, after giving them bread to eat, He said, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; see also Matthew 26:26–28).

During the Savior’s first day among the Nephites in the Americas, He also taught them the ordinance of the sacrament. Again, He instructed them to partake in remembrance of His body and blood and told them that as they did, “it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me” (3 Nephi 18:7). He then promised them, “If ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:7, 11).

What a marvelous blessing! In a world filled with challenges and turmoil and temptations constantly trying to lead us astray, what more important gift could we have? By having the Spirit with us, we can “know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). That will give us the power and wisdom to live the way the Lord would have us live, to make correct choices, to serve faithfully, and to become like Him.



As you partake of the sacrament, you renew your covenant to always remember the Savior.



REMEMBERING THE SAVIOR

To help you and your family remember the Savior, consider studying the information on the sacrament under Gospel Topics on LDS.org. You might also want to watch and discuss or contemplate the Bible video segment on the Last Supper at lds.org/go/sacramentE1214.

As you participate in the sacrament each week, what can you do to remember Him? What can you do to *always* remember Him—throughout the week and throughout your life?

May I invite you to ponder those questions and to make a commitment to always remember the Savior. You’ll be amazed at how it will change your life. ■

NOTE

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “This Do in Remembrance of Me,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 68.

Angels

WE HAVE HEARD

*What role
do angels
play in our
lives today?*



By David A. Edwards
Church Magazines

At Christmastime, angels are everywhere—from artwork and songs to ornaments, wrapping paper, and many other cultural artifacts, from the sacred to the profane, the classy to the kitschy. (For the top of the Christmas tree, I’m a star person, myself.) Angels are “trending” during this (seemingly ever-lengthening) season of the year, mostly because heavenly messengers figure prominently in the Christmas story but also because angels seem to be one of the few religious images you might find in otherwise secular celebrations. It would be hard to imagine Christmas without them.

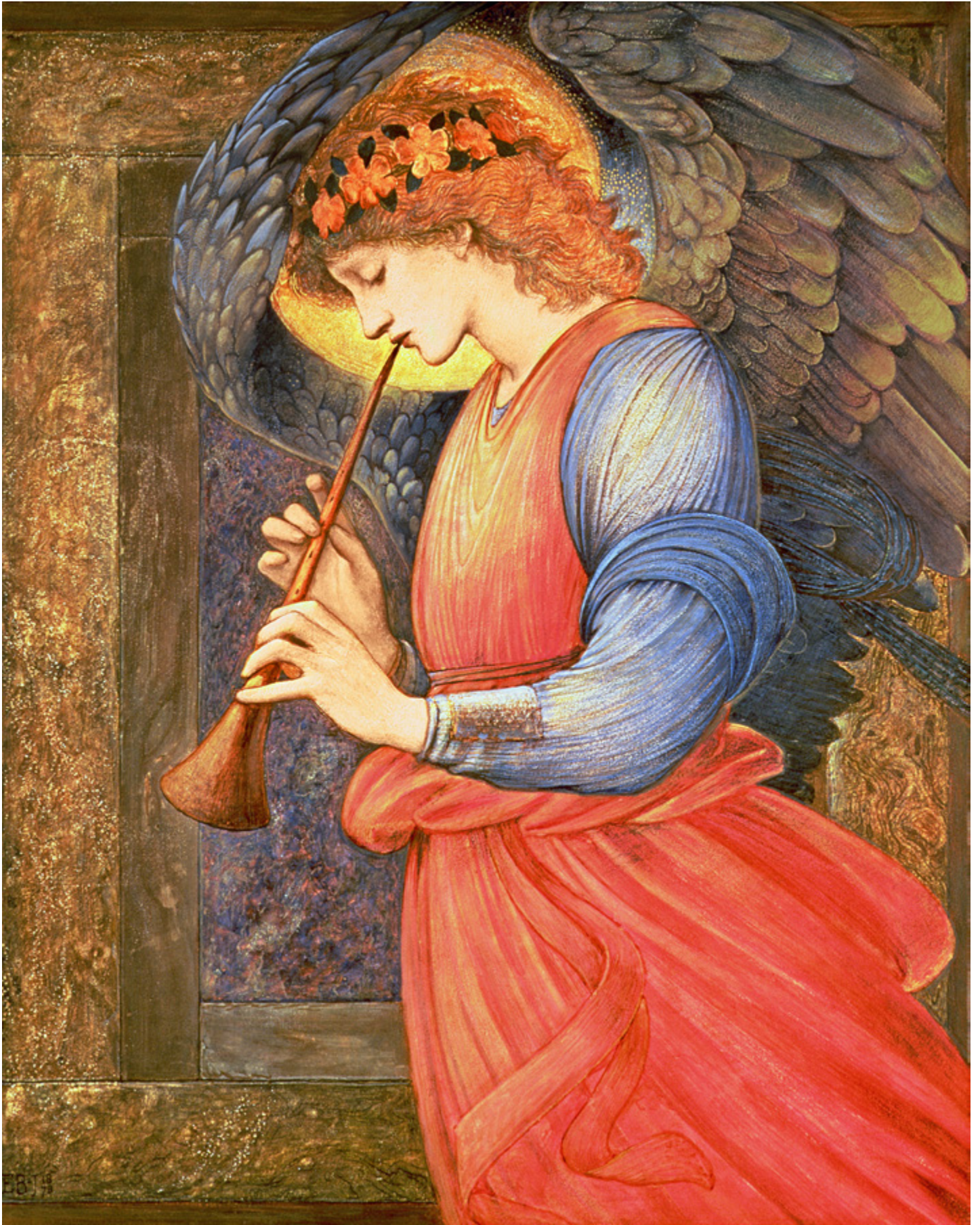
But what do angels really mean to most people, and what should they mean?

Throughout the world, beliefs about angels cover a wide spectrum, from one extreme (regarding them as nice but purely figurative ideas) to another extreme (regarding them as major preoccupations and objects of quasi-worship). Because of the testimony of

WHY ARE ANGELS DEPICTED WITH WINGS?

Though we know through the Prophet Joseph Smith that “an angel of God never has wings” (*History of the Church*, 3:392), most depictions of them show them with wings, and some scriptures describe them as having wings. Why?

Wings represent “power, to move, to act” (D&C 77:4). Prophets who described angels as having wings (see, for instance, Isaiah 6:2) may have referred to wings in order to communicate these ideas figuratively.



A PATTERN OF WITNESSING



[Diagram based on Moroni 7:29–32]

scriptures, modern revelation, and a multitude of witnesses, Latter-day Saints declare that angels¹ are most definitely real, and we understand that their ministry points us to our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and can bring the Holy Ghost into our lives.

What Do Angels Do?

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has given us a succinct explanation of what angels do:

“From the beginning down through the dispensations, God has used angels as His emissaries in conveying love and concern for His children. . . .

“Usually such beings are *not* seen. Sometimes they are. But seen or unseen they are *always* near. Sometimes their assignments are very grand and have significance for the whole world. Sometimes the messages are more private. Occasionally the angelic purpose is to warn. But most often it is to comfort, to provide some form of merciful attention, guidance in difficult times. . . .

“. . . I testify that angels are *still* sent to help *us*, even as they were sent to help Adam and Eve, to help the prophets, and indeed to help the Savior of the world Himself. . . . Such ministrations will be to the righteous until the end of time.”²

Warning, comforting, providing merciful attention and guidance—these are the things angels bring to the world, as well as to the one.

The big, global messages follow a pattern of witnessing that Heavenly Father uses in order to reveal Himself and the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, and angels play an integral role in that pattern. As the prophet Mormon explained, from the beginning of



the world, the Lord “sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ. . . . Wherefore, . . . men began to exercise faith in Christ” (Moroni 7:22, 25).

And it’s still happening. “Angels [have not] ceased to minister unto the children of men.

“. . . They . . . [show] themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

“And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, *by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord*, that they may bear testimony of him.

“And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way *that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts*, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men” (Moroni 7:29–32; emphasis added).

So here we see the pattern and its purpose: God sends angels to His chosen servants, who bear testimony so that the rest of mankind can have faith in Christ, repent, and receive the Holy Ghost.

The fact that God sends angels is a sign of His love for His children and His commitment to helping us return to Him and receive eternal life (see Moroni 7:36–37). This is possible only if we have the opportunity to hear God’s word so that we can develop faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 10:17), repent, and have the gift of the Holy Ghost. Interestingly, when the resurrected John the Baptist restored the Aaronic Priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, he spoke of “the gospel of repentance, and of baptism,” along with “the keys of the ministering of angels” (D&C 13:1).

What Does the Aaronic Priesthood Have to Do with the Ministering of Angels?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave one explanation of the connection between the Aaronic Priesthood and the ministering of angels: “In general, the blessings of spiritual companionship and communication are only available to those who are clean. . . . Through the Aaronic Priesthood ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, we are cleansed of our sins and promised that if we keep our covenants we will always have His Spirit to be with us. I believe that promise not only refers to the Holy Ghost but also to the ministering of angels, for ‘angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ’ (2 Nephi 32:3). So it is that those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood open the door for all Church members who worthily partake of the sacrament to enjoy the companionship of the Spirit of the Lord and the ministering of angels.”³

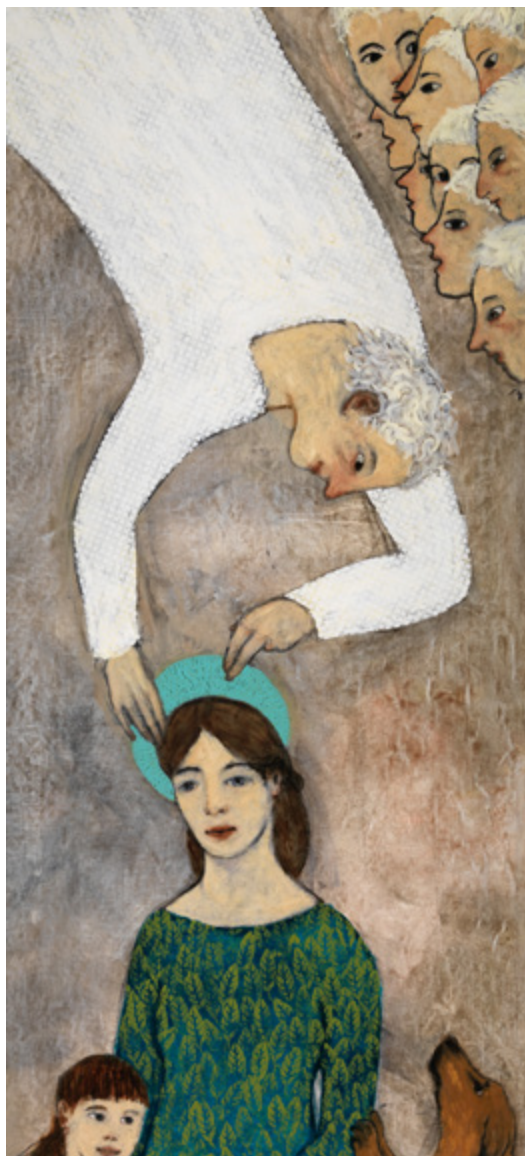
So, we see that the ministry of angels to all of mankind through universal messages to “chosen vessels” can, through preaching

and through ordinances, eventually lead to angels’ ministering to individuals.

How Do Angels Minister to Us Individually?

Now, I haven’t ever seen an angel, and I don’t expect I ever will. But I’ve come to believe that their influence in our lives is constant and profound.

Because “angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 32:3), it’s possible that when we perceive the voice of the Spirit in our lives, it may be the result of angelic ministrations. Of course, the Holy Ghost can and does speak directly to us and can dwell



AGENTS TO INSTRUCT, DIRECT, AND GUIDE

“The Lord is not everywhere in person; but he has his agents speaking and acting for him. His angels, his messengers, his apostles and servants are appointed and authorized to act in his name. And his servants are authorized to counsel and dictate in the greatest and what might be deemed the most trifling matters, to instruct, direct and guide his Saints.”

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young (1997), 42.



A MISSION TO VISIT RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

“Our fathers and mothers, brothers, sisters and friends who have passed away from this earth, having been faithful, and worthy to enjoy these rights and privileges, may have a mission given them to visit their relatives and friends upon the earth again, bringing from the divine Presence messages of love, of warning, or reproof and instruction, to those whom they had learned to love in the flesh.”

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918), *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 436.

in our hearts (see D&C 8:2), but it seems that angels always deliver their messages through the medium of the Spirit, whether they are unseen and speaking in a “still small voice” or standing before our eyes and speaking with a “voice of thunder” (1 Nephi 17:45). In fact, even the actual beholding of angels is a *spiritual* gift (see Moroni 10:14).

Also, it’s clear from the scriptures that the important thing about the ministering of angels isn’t really that we *see* or *hear* them with our natural senses but that we *heed* their messages as we humbly receive them in the intended way—with hearts that are softened so that we can “feel [their] words” through the Spirit (1 Nephi 17:45), by which God can reveal things “to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all.”⁴

Why Don’t We Hear Much about Angelic Ministrations Today?

So, if angels are real and always near us, why don’t we talk about them more often or hear more stories of people’s experiences with them? Wouldn’t such stories serve to strengthen everyone’s faith? I believe the answer to these questions is tied to a principle taught by President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“I have come to believe . . . that it is not wise to continually talk of unusual spiritual experiences. They are to be guarded with care and shared only when the Spirit itself prompts you to use them to the blessing of others. I am ever mindful of Alma’s words:

“It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his



word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.’ (Alma 12:9.) . . .

“We are, I believe, to keep these things and ponder them in our hearts, as Luke said Mary did of the supernal events that surrounded the birth of Jesus. (See Luke 2:19.)”⁵

Although a person’s spiritual experiences and communications may seem significant and potentially inspiring or helpful to others, it’s rare that that person will be prompted by the Spirit to share them, lest he or she cast “pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6). In fact, if people are always sharing details of such experiences, they actually cast doubt on the reliability of their stories, since their loose lips make it seem unlikely that the Lord would entrust them with such sacred things.

What Do Angels Mean to Us?

So how should we talk of angels’ influence in our lives? We would do well to take our cue from prophets and apostles, who have been reminding us for thousands of years

Angels in the Bible and Jewish Tradition

Ancient Jewish traditions regarding angels may seem strange or fragmentary to us, but they do communicate some basic ideas about how these beings were understood to function. The Restoration helps us understand them even better.

The Old Testament frequently uses the Hebrew word *malach*, which refers generally to a “messenger,” whether mortal or from the celestial realm. Heavenly messengers who bring word from God are often called “the angel [*malach*] of the Lord”

(Genesis 22:11; Exodus 3:2). In addition, the words *cherubim* and *seraphim* appear in the Old Testament and are associated with different orders, kinds, or functions of angels.

Biblical and Jewish literature maintains that there are innumerable angels that make up the hosts of heaven (see Job 25:3; Psalm 68:17; 2 Kings 6:16–17) and suggests that these hosts were organized in some fashion. Many Jewish texts depict the archangel Michael (who is mentioned in Daniel 10:13, 21 and 12:1) at the head of this organization.

Though little has been revealed about such things, the Restoration does confirm and expand on the

basic idea that angels function within a structure or order of heaven. The Lord even revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the archangel Michael is Adam and stands at the head of a heavenly organization (see D&C 27:11; 78:16; 107:53–56).

The Restoration gives clarity to Latter-day Saints’ understanding of the Old Testament references to angels, as well as the role of angels in God’s dealings with His children.

Information contributed by David J. Larsen, PhD, part-time instructor in ancient scripture, Brigham Young University.

that God’s heavenly host is all around us to help us—that “they that be with us are more than they that be with [our enemies]” (2 Kings 6:16) and that “angels [will be] round about you, to bear you up” when you serve God (D&C 84:88).

That is to say, we can bear a strong witness of the effect of the ministry of angels—of the guiding, guarding, warning, and lifting they do for us—without revealing specific stories of such heavenly help, unless prompted by the Spirit to do so.

Remember what Mormon taught: angelic ministrations are proof of God’s love and of the fact that He hasn’t given up on us yet, and they’re proof that there is still faith on the earth (see Moroni 7:36–37). Their purpose is to help us increase our faith so that we might have the power of the Holy Ghost in our lives, which will lead us to eternal life.

So when you see some little winged Christmas figurine with a halo and trumpet, try to see beyond the object, whether beautiful or tacky, to what the presence of such beings signifies for all of Heavenly Father’s children—and for you individually. ■



NOTES

1. The Prophet Joseph Smith distinguished between “angels, who are resurrected personages,” and “the spirits of just men made perfect, . . . who are not resurrected” (D&C 129:1, 3). The term *angel* is used here to refer to any heavenly messenger “who [does] belong or [has] belonged to [this earth]” (D&C 130:5), whether resurrected, disembodied, or unembodied (see Bible Dictionary, “Angels”).
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Ministry of Angels,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 29, 30.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 39.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 475. President John Taylor (1808–87) taught, “The action of the angels, or messengers of God, upon our minds, so that the heart can conceive things past, present, and to come, and revelations from the eternal world, is, among a majority of mankind, a greater mystery than all the secrets of philosophy, literature, superstition, and bigotry, put together” (*The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham [1943], 31).
5. Boyd K. Packer, “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1983, 53.



THE CHURCH IN Sweden

GROWTH, EMIGRATION, AND STRENGTH

The Church in Sweden has weathered emigration of faithful members, unfavorable media reports, and an increasingly secular environment, but the Lord is hastening His work in this choice land.

By Inger Höglund

In 1849, President Brigham Young called a small number of men to travel to various parts of the world to preach the gospel. A former Swedish sailor, John Forsgren, who had joined the Church in Massachusetts, USA, and traveled to the Salt Lake Valley, asked President Young to be sent to Sweden as a missionary. He was called to serve and arrived in Sweden in June 1850.

Elder Forsgren first visited his younger siblings in Gävle. His brother Peter was ill, and doctors said he was beyond help. Elder Forsgren explained the purpose of his mission to his siblings, then anointed and blessed Peter, who was restored to full health. On July 19, 1850, Elder Forsgren baptized his brother, who became the first convert in Sweden.

Elder Forsgren's sister, Erika, had an interesting experience that prepared her and Peter to receive the gospel. A few months before her brother's arrival, she was attending church, as was her custom. During the singing of a hymn, she saw a person stand before her and say, "On the fifth

day of July a man will come to you with three books and all those that believe in the things written in those books shall be saved." When her brother arrived with the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants, she believed his testimony without question.¹

Unfortunately, Elder Forsgren had to leave the country after just three months. Within a few years other missionaries were sent to Sweden. They found the people in Skönabäck, in the province of Skåne, receptive to the gospel. So many were converted that the first branch was organized there in 1853 with 36 members. One of the first leaders in Skåne was Carl Capson, called as the branch president in Lund. Around 100 members attended the first Church conference in Carl's barn, which was held at night to avoid persecution.²

Women of Faith

Women who received the gospel became pillars of strength in Sweden. One example is Britta Olsdotter



Members in Västerås met in this home in the 1950s.

would say to herself, “God should not have to wait.” She would sing a song, say a prayer, give a little talk, and then finish with another song and prayer.

When she had occasion to travel to Stockholm by train, Sister Munter would pass out tracts about the Church. Her legacy of faith continues: several of her descendants have returned to Sweden as missionaries.³

Missionaries also visited Smedjebacken, in the province of Dalarna. Among others, a Jansson family became members of the Church in 1886. A descendant of that family was Reid Johnson, a missionary who arrived in Sweden after the Second World War. He returned several times after his

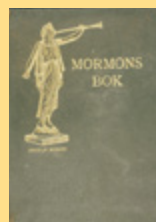
TIME LINE

1850: First missionary, John Forsgren, arrives in Sweden; first converts, Peter and Erika Forsgren, baptized



1853: First branch, Skönabäck Branch, established with 36 members

1854: Stockholm Branch established



◀ 1878: Book of Mormon translated and printed in Swedish

▶ 1904: Known by its address, Svartensgatan 3, the first Church building purchased in Sweden (shown here in 1946)

Persson, the first person to embrace the gospel in Vingåker. In 1877, to help support her family, she traveled to Stockholm to sell her weaving. There she met the missionaries and realized that they were teaching the truth and was baptized, at age 50.

Her conversion and valiant labor to promote the Lord’s work eventually led to more baptisms, and a branch was established in Vingåker. Her descendants are still active in the Church. Sister Persson’s great-great-granddaughter Laila Krylborn remarked, “It is wonderful to see what has happened in our children’s and grandchildren’s generations. Now our families have several priesthood holders and missionaries.”

Another pioneer woman was Lovisa Munter of Uppsala. She became a member in 1886 and was faithful until her death at 91 years of age. On many Sundays she went to the meeting hall, turned on the light, and waited for other members to come. Often no one came. At 11:00 a.m. she

mission—as mission president, regional representative, and temple president. The Jansson family also produced the wife of a prophet, Sister Frances Monson.

Overcoming Persecution

For decades, persecution of Church members was severe. Many missionaries landed in prison, including Mikael Jonsson, a native Swede. He was arrested in 1852 and was brought in chains 480 miles (770 km) to Malmö, where he was thrown in the castle prison, exhausted from hunger and privation. He was visited by a priest, who found that Elder Jonsson was an intelligent man with some education. The priest declared that he was willing to help him and even promised him further education—on the condition that he join the Lutheran faith and deny “Mormonism.” Elder Jonsson would not deny his faith, so he was deported.⁴

Another faithful missionary was Carl A. Carlquist, born near Vänersborg in 1857. At age 17, he felt a strong desire

to preach the gospel and was called to distribute Church tracts around Jönköping. He was poor, so members of his branch, seven widows and their children, obtained a suit coat and boots for him. Carl didn't own an overcoat when the winter season came, but he was allowed to borrow one a few hours every day from some of the members when they didn't need theirs.⁵

Carl later emigrated to Utah and married Hulda Östergren, a Swedish immigrant. He returned to Sweden two more times on missions, including as mission president of the Scandinavian Mission. Much of his last mission was spent correcting false reports published about the Church

leaders encouraged this emigration to strengthen the Church there. The results of that emigration can be seen today: about half of Utah's inhabitants have Scandinavian roots.

However, in 1910, President Joseph F. Smith visited Stockholm and encouraged members to stay and build up the Church in Sweden.

The Church after World War II

When the Second World War erupted, all American missionaries had to return home. Local Swedish men were then asked to serve as missionaries. C. Fritz Johansson, who had joined the Church in 1931, was called as the new



► 1905:
Sweden
Mission
organized



1914: Swedish
parliament mem-
bers vote against
a proposal to expel
"Mormon agents"
from the country

1926: Church
receives legal
permission to
perform burials
of its members

1952: New law guar-
antees freedom for all
non-state churches;
the Church receives
legal permission to
perform marriages
for its members

by Reverend P. E. Åslev, a pastor who had lived in Salt Lake City and was hired to promote anti-Mormon sentiment in Sweden. For instance, in 1912, Åslev wrote an article in the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* in which he claimed that Brother Carlquist was a polygamist.⁶ Carl's efforts included meeting with King Gustaf V and refuting Åslev's claims in public meetings.⁷

To help combat Åslev's claims, a local member, Einar Johansson, offered to speak for the Church. He initiated legal proceedings since Åslev had also said that the Church mission office "was a white-slavery business," a libelous claim.⁸ Brother Johansson came to mean much as a leader for the Church in Sweden, including as a branch president in Stockholm.⁹

Despite persecution in this era, many became converted to the gospel. The most successful year to date was 1862, when 640 persons were baptized and confirmed. Most of the converts, however, soon traveled to Utah. At the time,

mission president. One year before the war, he sold his grocery store business and became a missionary with his wife and three children. When the war was over, President Johansson and seven missionaries from Sweden were called to reopen missionary work in Finland, which had stopped because of the war.

When American missionaries returned to Sweden in 1946, they held English classes as a part of their missionary work, and many of their students became members of the Church. The growth didn't last long, however, because many Swedish members emigrated to Utah. Fear of their former enemies, encouragement by the mission president, and the chance to receive their temple ordinances motivated 250 active members to leave Sweden between 1948 and 1950.

Such a family was Oskar and Albertina Andersson, who became members of the Church in 1915. After World War II, Oskar, Albertina, and seven of their children who had



married members made the heart-rending decision to sell all they owned and “travel to Zion.” From 1949 to 1950, 29 members of the Andersson family left Sweden. Oskar and Albertina left their home, three children, and four grandchildren, whom they would never see again. They arrived in a desert and a city where the people spoke a language they did not understand. But for these faithful members, being close to the temple was more important than anything else.

Members of the Andersson family have

The members felt boundless joy when a temple was built in Stockholm and dedicated in 1985. Berit Vennerholm, a member of the Västerhaninge Ward, describes the dedication as “a much-longed for and glorious experience. What I remember most was when we all waved with our white handkerchiefs and exclaimed, ‘Hosanna!’”

The choice of a temple lot shows the hand of the Lord in the process. After many discussions with several municipalities in the Stockholm area, two suitable lots were found.

THE CHURCH IN SWEDEN

Missions: 1
Stakes: 4
Districts: 1
Wards: 24
Branches: 16
Members: 9,463

1953: First member couple, Bengt-Arne Månhammar and Kerstin Skog, are married by the mission president Clarence F. Johnson



◀ *1955: First group of Swedish members travel to the temple in Bern, Switzerland*

1965: First meeting-house built by the Church dedicated in Gubbängen, Stockholm



since served as missionaries and Church leaders in all parts of the world, including as an Area President in Africa and a temple president in Sweden.

Yet other members of the Church decided to stay in Sweden and became leaders. Such a one is Bo Wennerlund, a young father who was baptized in 1949. He became an important Church leader in Sweden, serving as a mission president, regional representative, and temple president.



Temple Blessings in Sweden

Emigration largely ceased when a temple was dedicated in Switzerland in 1955. For 30 years the Swedish members made the several-day journey there by train, by bus, by car, and even by air—sometimes several times a year.



The Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed in the Stockholm Concert Hall in 1982.

A committee of local Church leaders suggested one of them, but the President of the Church decided that the other would be better. This decision has proven to be inspired, since the other lot later proved to be unsuitable for a temple.

Although the Church has struggled to receive positive attention in Swedish media, one time it did was in 1984, when the young brothers in the Herrey family won the largest singing contest in Europe. Their appearance on television and in newspapers gave the Church good publicity, and many young people joined the Church at this time.

In the late 1980s, another member who received good press coverage was the 35-year-old U.S. ambassador to

dispersing them from their native lands. There is a veritable hastening of work in our day in this choice land.”

The Church also grows among the members. Multi-stake conferences attract many young people from neighboring countries and contribute to the building of new families. The government’s generous child allowances and paid leave for new parents make it possible for couples to have fairly large families.

Today, most of the active young members serve missions all over the world. One returned missionary, David Halldén, the first missionary in Yekaterinburg, Russia, today has a wonderful family with six children. He relates

1975: First stake organized, in Stockholm, by then-Elder Thomas S. Monson



◀ 1985: Stockholm Temple dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley

1991: First members from Russia come to the Stockholm Temple; Russia and the Baltic states included in the temple district



◀ 1995: King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia hosted by President Thomas S. Monson on Stockholm Temple grounds

Sweden, Gregory Newell, who was often seen in various public events. He and his wife returned to Sweden in 2011 to preside over the Sweden Stockholm Mission until July 2014.

President Newell presided over a growing number of missionaries, from 84 to 205. Because apartments are scarce and expensive in Sweden, he describes it as “a miracle that the mission was able to find an additional 56 apartments for our newly arriving missionaries.”

Real Growth

In the post-war era, Sweden has become an increasingly secular country. There are, however, many immigrants who are seeking God. Every sixth Swede today was born out of the country. A majority of those who join the Church in Sweden are immigrants. President Newell described some recent converts: “Brothers and sisters from 28 different countries have been converted to the Church in Sweden. I have expressed my view that the Lord is gathering Israel by

how the gospel helps his family: “There are so many voices that can lead children astray. The gospel helps us to strengthen them and get their confidence.”

Despite the secular environment and some bad publicity, many faithful members and strong Church leaders live in Sweden. The members appreciate the help that Church teachings and activities give to families and individuals, and it is their great wish that many more would receive the joyful message of Jesus Christ and His Atonement. ■

The author lives in Sweden.

NOTES

1. See *Box Elder Lore of the Nineteenth Century* (1951), 58.
2. See Andrew Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (1979), 81.
3. See Inger Höglund and Caj-Aage Johansson, *Steg i tro* (2000), 122.
4. See Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 53.
5. See Myrtle McDonald, *No Regrets: The Life of Carl A. Carlquist* (1985), 19–21.
6. See McDonald, *No Regrets*, 219.
7. See Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 331.
8. In McDonald, *No Regrets*, 239.
9. See McDonald, *No Regrets*, 219.

Staying CONNECTED

By Karen Sandberg Woodson

Saying good-bye to my husband at the beginning of his Army Officers Basic Leadership Course was truly a trial of faith. It was the first time we would be apart from each other for more than a few days during our five years of marriage. When he left, I felt so empty and lonely that it was easy to start to doubt our decision for my husband to join the army. Still, as I returned home to care for our children, I remembered the strong feeling of peace I had received when praying about our decision for my husband to pursue a career in the military and that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28).

From modern-day prophets as well as in our training and work as behavioral health professionals, both my husband and I understood that families need to spend time together to strengthen their relationships. Our primary concern with military service was that frequent Temporary Duty (TDYs, or work assignments involving traveling), extended deployments, and other obligations would require my husband to be away from our family—anywhere from a few days to more than a year at a time. Still, we felt a strong desire to serve our country and trusted that God would teach us through our trials. Almost six years later, I am grateful for how the Spirit has taught us to keep our family,



Because my husband's military service sometimes requires him to be away from home, we've learned some valuable ways to keep our family connected.



and especially our marriage, connected. We have used the following methods—the same ones that have helped us previously—during a year-long deployment to Afghanistan and other separations due to military assignments.

Strengthen the Connection While Together

When we were preparing to move to our first duty station in Hawaii, USA, we began to discuss and pray about whether I would keep working part-time as a mental health therapist. During a Church meeting, the Spirit taught me that my top priority needed to be strengthening my relationship with my husband. I sensed that our first year or two in Hawaii would be a gift of time together to prepare us for future deployments. The impression also came with an increased desire to prioritize quality and quantity time with my family and to make necessary adjustments if work or anything else interfered with precious time when my husband was home. We tried to do this by developing traditions of connectivity, like playing games together, reading general conference talks, watching favorite shows together in the evening after the children were asleep, calling or texting each other during the day, and making family home evening and family dinners a priority. We also found that our relationship stayed stronger as we committed to having weekly dates and made time to pursue hobbies together.

Find Ways to Connect Daily When Apart

Many couples have to be away from each other for a season due to work commitments, military service, or even Church service. We



We are blessed to live in a time when we have phones, email, web cameras, traditional mail, and other resources to help us communicate during temporary separations.

are blessed to live in a time when we have phones, email, web cameras, traditional mail, and other resources to help us communicate during these temporary separations. My husband and I felt more connected as we were proactive and creative in reaching out to each other through these means, even when we were tired or busy. We also tried to replicate traditional ways we connected when together, such as reading the *Ensign* together over the phone, having family home evenings using a web camera, discussing important decisions using instant messaging for more privacy when my husband had to share his quarters, sending gifts and love notes to each other in the mail, empathizing with each other by email about challenges each of us was facing, and laughing together through text messaging about funny things our children said.

One of the hardest times of my husband's military service was when he was unable to have any contact with us for a few weeks. During one lonely and tearful day, I found myself looking at our wedding pictures and reading letters we had written to each other while we were engaged. Strong feelings of love and connection replaced loneliness and fear as I remembered that we were sealed

eternally. I decided I needed to find ways to feel connected to my husband daily to nurture my love and hope of being together again soon. I made time each day to write to my husband (even though I knew he would not be able to read my letters until much later), write in my own journal, or reread previous letters from him to help me remember how much I loved him and wanted to be with him forever. I learned that remembering is active, not passive, and spending time each day thinking about my husband benefited me and helped make our eventual reunion even sweeter.

Connect Spiritually

When we were both striving to live close to the Spirit, my husband and I found that we were able to feel spiritually connected to each other as well. I would pray and even fast to keep feeling close to my husband, to help us both feel comforted while apart, and to be able to reconnect quickly and comfortably when we were together again. I also found peace as I read the scriptures and modern-day revelation seeking for help on how to endure trials and maintain an eternal perspective—marriage is forever, and this time apart is only temporary! Moreover, I was able to develop

spiritually in new ways, as I had to rely on the Lord more while not being able to rely on my husband as much as I might otherwise have done.

Keep Children Connected

About a month before my husband left for one extended absence, he expressed his concerns about how our young children would understand and cope with his time away from our family. I was touched as he listed several ways he wanted to prepare them for this time apart. First we made a video recording of a family home evening lesson where my husband told our children about Captain Moroni and how their father would also be going away like Captain Moroni with his title of liberty to defend “our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (Alma 46:12). We also made other family videos of our children playing with their father and going to favorite places together—videos they enjoyed watching when they felt lonely for their daddy. Our son even developed a sticker chart for both him and his father so they could keep track of the days until we saw him again. A sacred moment was when my husband gave all of our children and myself priesthood blessings of comfort before his departure, including counsel about turning to the Lord when we felt lonely or sad.

The first few days were hardest for all of us. I appreciated my sister telling me it was all right to cry as a way to honor my feelings and love for my husband. Also I tried to stop what I was doing when our children became upset and cried about missing Daddy. I learned a valuable lesson from our four-year-old son during one tender moment as he cried about wanting his father home to wrestle him and put him to bed. After I held and listened to him for several minutes, he quickly cheered up and went back to his activity. I tried to follow his example of giving myself permission to feel the pain of separation and crying when I needed, and then choosing to cheer myself up and move on with my day after the feeling had been expressed. That method of experiencing the emotion in the moment and then moving forward blessed our entire family.

I am grateful for how the Lord prompted our family to prepare for—and then supported us during—the times my husband has been away from our home during his military service. I am especially grateful for the gospel perspective that these separations were “but a small moment” in Heavenly Father’s time, and that if we can “endure it well,” He will “exalt [us] on high” (D&C 121:7–8). As a result, our family has grown closer together, and we feel peaceful as we prepare for future deployments. ■

The author lives in Maryland, USA.



WHAT WE CARE ABOUT MOST

“Crisis or transition of any kind reminds us of what matters most. In the routine of life, we often take our families—our parents and children and siblings—for granted. But in times of danger and need and change, there is no question that what we care about most is our families! . . .

“In the Church, our belief in the overriding importance of families is rooted in restored doctrine. We know of the sanctity of families in both directions of our eternal existence. We know that before this life we lived with our Heavenly Father as part of His family, and we know that family relationships can endure beyond death. . . .

“Our family-centered perspective should make Latter-day Saints strive to be the best parents in the world. It

should give us enormous respect for our children, who truly are our spiritual siblings, and it should cause us to devote whatever time is necessary to strengthen our families. Indeed, nothing is more critically connected to happiness—both our own and that of our children—than how well we love and support one another within the family.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “What Matters Most Is What Lasts Longest,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 41–42.

THE LOST 500 YEARS: FROM MALACHI TO JOHN THE BAPTIST

The 500 years between the Old and New Testaments can teach us about the conditions in ancient Palestine before the coming of Jesus Christ and help us renew our commitment to follow the Savior.



By S. Kent Brown

Professor Emeritus of Ancient Scripture

and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University

When the prophet Malachi stepped off the earthly stage around 450 B.C., no genuine prophetic voice was heard again for about 500 years. We know this period as the intertestamental period—the gap between

dispensations in the Old and New Testaments. Without a prophet, people in the land began to divide into parties and groups, each claiming the right to interpret the scriptures and lead the people. The true understanding of Jehovah diminished among these groups. A long night of confusion followed, which ended when God sent a new prophet, John the Baptist, to begin a new dispensation. But even with John the Baptist and the Savior teaching the people, many were unable to



539 B.C.



THE GREEKS 332 B.C.

overcome the traditions and beliefs that had developed and intensified during the intertestamental period. As we understand these 500 years and the confusion that accompanied them, we can understand more about the Savior's ministry and renew our commitment to follow Him.

Exile and Bondage: The Price of Disobedience

Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah warned Jerusalem's citizens that if they continued breaking their covenants with the Lord, the city and their temple would be destroyed. This prophecy proved true when Babylon initially invaded Judah around 600 B.C., destroying its villages, towns, cities, and religious life.

Jerusalem finally fell in 587 B.C., and the exiled Jews were forced out of their destroyed homeland (see Psalm 137:1). A few people remained in and around Jerusalem—including the Samaritans, who eventually intermarried with non-Israelites (see Jeremiah 40:7, 11–12).

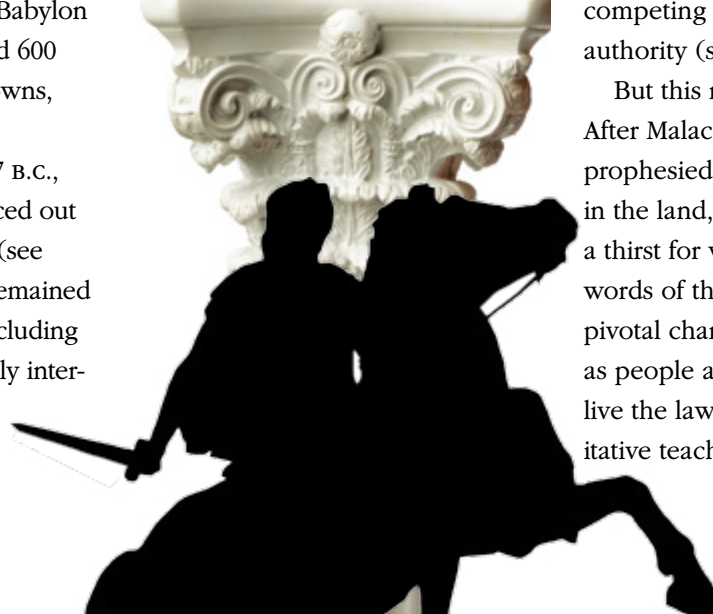
THE PROPHETS ISAIAH AND JEREMIAH WARNED THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH THAT THEY WOULD BE RULED BY FOREIGN NATIONS. THEIR PROPHECIES PROVED TRUE WHEN THE REGION WAS CONQUERED BY A SERIES OF KINGS FROM VARIOUS NATIONS: KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR OF BABYLON, CYRUS THE GREAT OF PERSIA, KING DARIUS OF PERSIA, AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT OF GREECE. WHEN ALEXANDER DIED, HIS TERRITORY WAS DIVIDED AMONG HIS GENERALS; PTOLEMY I TOOK CONTROL OF PALESTINE.

Later the exiles began to return to Palestine and to rebuild their homes and religious life (see Ezra 3). The temple in Jerusalem, finally rebuilt by 515 B.C., once again became the center of Jewish worship.

Because the Jews rejected the Samaritans' offer to help reconstruct the temple, the Samaritans built an alternate temple in the late fourth century on Mount Gerizim, some 40 miles (64 km) north of Jerusalem. Thus, the worship of and belief in Jehovah fragmented between the new temple at Mount Gerizim and the Jerusalem temple because they offered competing claims of priesthood authority (see John 4:20).

But this revival did not last long. After Malachi, as the prophet Amos had prophesied, the Lord sent a "famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). This pivotal change had major consequences as people attempted to understand and live the law without a prophet's authoritative teachings and interpretations.

LEFT: THE PROPHET ISAIAH FORETELLS CHRIST'S BIRTH. BY HARRY ANDERSON; RIGHT: JEWS IN EXILE—NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PALACE. BABYLON © BALAGE BALOUGH/ARTRESOURCE; IMAGE OF PLATES BY WAVEFREAKMEDIA LTD./THINKSTOCK; IMAGE OF CYRUS THE GREAT BY DORLING KINDERSLEY/THINKSTOCK; DARIUS I, BAS-RELIEF ON APADANA, PERSEPOLIS, BY GIANNI DAGLI ORTI/THE ART ARCHIVE AT ART RESOURCE; NY; IMAGE OF GREEK COLUMN BY OLMARVAR/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; IMAGE OF COIN WITH PORTRAIT OF SOTER PTOLEMAIOS I COURTESY OF BP&K, BERLIN/UAENZKABINETT, STAATLICHE MUSEEN, BERLIN/REINHARD SACZEWSKI/ART RESOURCE, NY



THE SELEUCIDS 198 B.C.

REVOLT 164 B.C.

INDEPENDENT JEWISH NATION 142 B.C.



The Conditions of Apostasy

As an effect of this apostasy, the people divided into groups with varied political, religious, and social agendas. They also differed in their beliefs and traditions about the Messiah. The religious groups tried to live the law of Moses as they understood it, but each group interpreted the scriptures from such varied perspectives that Jewish society became more and more divided. As a result, the true understanding of who the Savior would be became confused.

Once the voices of prophets fell silent, the priests and their fellow temple workers, the Levites, became the most important officials among the Jews and claimed for themselves the right to interpret scripture. However, the office of high priest became corrupted as it was bought and sold during this time.

Many Jews felt that the priests and Levites did not fulfill their responsibility to teach the law correctly (see Deuteronomy 33:10), so a new group evolved who sought to teach the law. Known as scribes, they modeled themselves on Ezra, who had helped his people feel an urgency to learn and to obey the law (see Ezra 7:25; Nehemiah 8:1–8).

PALESTINE CAME UNDER THE RULE OF THE SELEUCID EMPERORS, ONE OF WHOM WAS ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES. ANTIOCHUS FORCIBLY HELLENIZED JEWISH SOCIETY, SOMETIMES EXECUTING LARGE NUMBERS OF JEWS, FORBIDDING JEWISH RELIGIOUS RITES, AND DESECRATING THE TEMPLE. JUDAS MACCABEUS, LEADER OF THE ANTI-GREEK JEWS, LED A REVOLT AND REDEDICATED THE TEMPLE. THE PEOPLE CELEBRATED THE FIRST HANUKKAH.



Alexander the Great conquered the region in 332 B.C. When he died, his kingdom was divided among his generals. In time, Palestine came under the influence of the Greek-speaking Seleucid emperors. In 167 B.C., the Seleucid rulers outlawed the Jewish faith, forbidding circumcision and desecrating the temple by offering swine on the altar. Many Jews resisted, led by a family known as the Maccabees or Hasmoneans. The revolt—called the Maccabean War—eventually brought freedom to the Jews and created a Jewish nation for the first time since the fall of Jerusalem. At the same time, another religious group formed known as the Hasideans, “the pious.” They showed their devotion to God by trying to live every aspect of the law of Moses as they understood it.

Other religious groups also emerged during the intertestamental period, each claiming the exclusive right to interpret the scriptures. The Pharisees were an independent religious group that came into being soon after the Maccabean War. They became very influential in Jewish society by introducing a narrow focus on food laws and on ritual purity, aspects that were rooted primarily in their

THE ROMANS 63 B.C.

oral traditions, not scripture. In their homes, they tried to behave as if they were living in the temple.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, whose origins remain unknown, rejected any appeal to oral tradition and held strictly to the five books of Moses, turning their backs on the writings of other prophets. This group consisted mostly of the elite in Jerusalem society. By the time Jesus was born, they had expanded their power by asserting control over the Jerusalem temple.

Each of these religious groups preserved traditions and doctrines that they believed were essential to lives of devotion. But because they lacked the guidance of a true prophet, they were left to their own interpretations.

Awaiting a New Dispensation

Regardless of their religious persuasion, righteous men and women still looked forward to the coming of the Messiah during the intertestamental period. Poets sang psalms, and the common people prayed, talked, and dreamed of His arrival—a Davidic King who was destined to save His people.

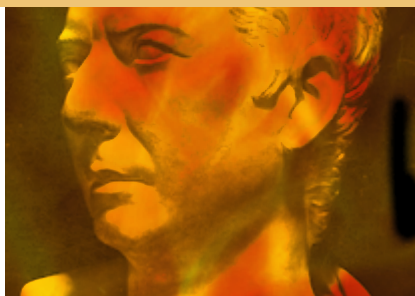
One group waiting for the Messiah was the Essenes, which formed during the Maccabean conflict. The

AFTER A SHORT PERIOD OF INDEPENDENCE, JERUSALEM FELL UNDER ROMAN RULE WHEN POMPEY THE GREAT INVADED THE CITY. THE ROMANS INSTALLED HEROD THE GREAT, A DESCENDANT OF ESAU, AS A CLIENT KING OVER JUDEA. HE REBUILT JERUSALEM AND EXPANDED THE TEMPLE AREA. CAESAR AUGUSTUS ENDED REPUBLICAN RULE IN ROME AND BECAME THE SECOND ROMAN EMPEROR AFTER JULIUS CAESAR.

Essenes believed that the temple priests in Jerusalem were corrupt and the temple was in need of serious reform. In their view, the coming of the Messiah was near. They believed He would join with them to throw off the oppressive yoke of Rome, whose rulers had conquered Palestine some 60 years before the birth of Jesus.

Like the Reformation that preceded the Restoration, the intertestamental period also witnessed events that prepared the world for the coming of Jesus Christ. This time had a remarkable production of religious literature, including the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and the beginning of the creation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Apocrypha. During this time the ideas about angels, resurrection, and the concepts of heaven and hell became developed and refined.

However, without a prophet to guide them, the Jews debated the meaning of the scriptures and about who the Messiah would be. While most people waited for a Davidic Messiah (one descended from King David), others championed a Messiah who was the son of Aaron—a priestly Messiah. Still others did not expect the Messiah to come.





DURING THE RULE OF CAESAR AUGUSTUS AND HEROD THE GREAT, THE SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM. HE WAS BORN KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (SEE ISAIAH 44:6).

So many expectations had built up among the different groups during the intertestamental period that the groups did not know how to recognize the true Messiah when He came to them. None of the groups—scribes, Pharisees, Essenes, or Sadducees—accepted John the Baptist as a prophet or Jesus as the Messiah. Some members of these groups became the primary adversaries of John and Jesus during their ministries (see Matthew 21:23–46).

The debates and arguments among the differing groups about the Messiah continued. The first prophet of the new dispensation, John the Baptist, announced the coming of the true Messiah and clarified the type of salvation He would provide. Indicating Jesus Christ, John said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Many Jews accepted John as he prepared the people for the coming of Christ.

When Jesus Christ began His ministry, He taught the people “as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29). He had many discussions with the religious leaders, clarifying the doctrines of marriage, resurrection, the Godhead, and His

role as the Savior. Since many of the religious leaders rejected Him (see Matthew 26:4), Jesus told them: “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” He added, “If God were your father, ye would love me” (John 8:19, 42).

Because they expected a Messiah so different from Jesus, they rejected Him. Thankfully, we live in an age when the truths of the gospel are built on the foundational teachings of prophets and apostles (see Ephesians 2:20). We do not have to choose among the spiritual crosswinds that arise without the guidance of prophets and apostles. As we follow our latter-day prophets and apostles, we will come to understand the true doctrine of the Savior Jesus Christ, as was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“For [I] saw him, even on the right hand of God; and [I] heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

“That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:23–24). ■



THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

WINDOW TO THE MODERN BIBLE

By **Donald W. Parry**

Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brigham Young University

In early 1947, three shepherds belonging to the Ta'amireh Bedouin were searching for a stray animal. One of them threw a rock into a cave and heard an earthen jar break. When they entered the cave, they saw it contained several large clay jars, some of which held scrolls.* In the ensuing years, Bedouin and archaeologists found several hundred scrolls in 11 caves on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

Many scholars believe that the Dead Sea Scrolls are the greatest archaeological discovery of the 20th century. The scrolls provide an ancient library of more than 900 texts, most of them written in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. About 225 of the scrolls contain the oldest copy of the Old Testament (except for the book of Esther), which is more than 1,000 years older than the copies used during the Middle Ages. Most of the scrolls date between 150 B.C. and A.D. 68, although some texts date as far back as the third century B.C.

In addition to traditional biblical texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls also include the Temple Scroll (describing a temple to be built in Jerusalem and the ideal covenant society), the War Scroll (describing the end-of-days conflict), and texts parallel to the Bible (such as the books of Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek,

and the testaments of Jacob, Judah, and Levi). Little is known about Enoch in the Bible, but in the scrolls, Enoch is a major character—a mighty prophet with special gifts.

Most of the scrolls are severely fragmented because of age and exposure to the elements, but scholars have been able to glean a wealth of information about the scribal practices. The scribes' careful and meticulous work indicates a high level of professionalism and competence as they copied and transmitted sacred texts from one generation to the next. Those of us who love and appreciate the holy scriptures owe a great debt to these scribes for their careful work.

When we consider the ancient methods of transmitting texts by hand, we realize that the Bible went through a remarkable process to make it into this century. The Dead Sea Scrolls stand as a witness that the Old Testament has been passed down through the centuries with a respectable degree of accuracy. For this, we must be grateful to prophets, scribes, copyists, and everyone who was responsible for the Bible's transmission from generation to generation. ■

**Accounts of how the scrolls were discovered vary because the shepherds relied on their memories to recount the story years later.*

NURTURING TESTIMONIES BY Nurturing Readers

By **Dawan Coombs**

Assistant Professor of English, Brigham Young University

My friend Rachel and I hadn't seen each other since spring semester, so when I walked into the institute of religion, she rushed over and began recounting the events of her summer. She spoke of work, vacation, and family, but amidst all her experiences, what caught my attention was her final whispered disclosure: "And I started reading the scriptures on my own. I only read a chapter every night, but I'm doing it."

I thought back to our conversation months earlier as we had discussed a Visiting Teaching Message about personal scripture study. When I concluded sharing the message, Rachel became withdrawn and silent, in contrast to her normally talkative, cheery self. As I wondered what was wrong, she told me, "I have actually never read the scriptures on my own. I really struggle with reading. I don't enjoy it, and it makes me feel dumb." Now, six months later, this knowledge of Rachel's past struggles helped me understand the significance of her new nightly reading practice.

As a former high school English teacher and now as a researcher of struggling readers, I spend significant amounts of time talking with children, adolescents, and adults who struggle with reading. I am struck by the

Struggles with reading can hinder members in their gospel study, but parents and teachers at church can help. Here are four ways.

far-reaching influence of this challenge in their lives, particularly when they share ways their struggles affect their experiences at church. Some recall feeling embarrassed in Primary as they read aloud while classmates giggled or rolled their eyes. Others recount acting out in youth Sunday School to avoid being called upon to read. Still others, like Rachel, lament missed opportunities to study the scriptures because they didn't understand unfamiliar vocabulary, language, and ideas.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are encouraged to seek words of wisdom out of the best books in all our studies (see D&C 88:118), to feast upon the word of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:20), and to search the scriptures to nurture our testimonies (see 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 1 Nephi 19:23). However, reading struggles inhibit spiritual growth when they prevent individuals from studying the gospel.

The good news is we can strengthen those who struggle. The following ideas represent a few ways to support individuals with reading challenges in our families and wards.

1. Establish strong support structures. Learning to read takes practice, which includes taking risks. At church it's essential to create a classroom environment where class members feel safe to attend and participate. Try not to put people on the spot, like randomly calling on people to read. If students repeatedly avoid volunteering, consider inviting them days in advance to participate in the upcoming lesson by reading particular verses. Advance notice gives students time to practice reading and to prepare for participation in class.

Teaching, No Greater Call explains: "When you discover that a class member has difficulty reading, be particularly careful about how you ask him or her to participate in a lesson. . . . Learn more about his or her ability and willingness to read. If a person is willing to read but needs time to prepare, you can help him or her prepare to read certain passages in upcoming lessons. . . . Discuss these possibilities with the person. Work together to find the best way for him or her to participate in class."¹

One Primary teacher noticed that 11-year-old Sam struggled to read out loud from the Book of Mormon. He stumbled over words and acted embarrassed by his mistakes. The following week, as his teacher prepared the lesson, she felt inspired to call and ask Sam if he would prepare to read two verses in the next lesson. Sam accepted the assignment, practiced, and successfully read in class that

week. His success motivated him to prepare in future weeks, ultimately initiating a pattern of preparation in which Sam studied the scriptures on his own and then told his teacher which verses he could read.

2. Use audiovisual resources. Introducing elements of scripture stories through videos or pictures before reading can help readers who struggle with comprehension. Then, as they begin reading, they can concentrate on understanding principles or themes instead of tracking characters and plot lines.



As a missionary, my companions and I sometimes taught individuals who enjoyed reading but felt challenged by the unfamiliar context and content of the scriptures. We often invited these families to supplement their scripture study with the illustrated Church publication *Book of Mormon Stories*.² Although this text didn't replace their study of the scriptures, it helped them become familiar with the characters and stories, ultimately helping them better comprehend the principles and doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon.

In addition, listening to audio recordings of scriptures or conference talks offers some readers focused support

as they follow along in the printed text. Listening to a fluent reader can increase a struggling reader's ability to comprehend unfamiliar texts and vocabulary. Church resources, such as LDS.org, offer scriptures and conference addresses as downloadable audio files that facilitate these kinds of reading experiences.

3. Distinguish between actions and identities.

Struggling with reading—or any other struggle, for that matter—does not define one's identity. Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Presidency of the Seventy explained that individuals sometimes confuse what they do (their actions) with who they are (their identity). As a result,

IMPROVING FAMILY SCRIPTURE STUDY

If you have a family member who struggles with reading, family scripture study offers opportunities for him or her to practice reading in a safe environment. Families that try to read a set number of verses or chapters each day might be frustrated if one family member reads slowly or struggles to sound out words. Instead, families can study the scriptures for a set amount of time and focus on reading meaningful passages, asking questions, and identifying principles. This approach alleviates pressure on those who read more slowly and leads to rich discussions that help all family members better understand the scriptures.



temporary failures can become labels that individuals use to define themselves.³ However, as children of God, with the potential to become like Him, we should not label ourselves that way.

In the case of readers who struggle, many perceive their reading difficulties as personal deficiencies that define their worth. When internalized, labels like “struggling reader” can be mistaken for identities that limit their vision of who they can become.

Logan, a 22-year-old university student, remembered struggling with reading in school and church. “If I wasn’t right up with everyone else, it was like, ‘Why am I reading so slow?’ and it became a self-label of ‘You’re a slow reader.’” However, he also recalled when, years later, his mission president gave him one of the first gospel books he read, outside the scriptures. Completing the book and turning the last page sparked “this huge sense of accomplishment.” This success challenged the labels he had internalized and helped him see himself as someone who could read successfully.

Helping our children and class members see their struggles as challenges to overcome rather than as limits that define them is essential to helping them understand their true potential as God’s children.

4. Seek the Lord’s help. Stan is a 27-year-old graduate student who now has read numerous books, but he struggled with reading throughout elementary and middle school. For years his mother came to his elementary school and tutored him individually. Before they started their work, they would read Ether 12:23–28, where Moroni talks about his weakness in writing and the Lord promises Moroni that His grace will be sufficient to make up for Moroni’s



weaknesses. Reading these scriptures helped Stan and his mother realize that his weaknesses with reading could become strengths and that as he humbled himself and asked Heavenly Father for help, the Lord would support his efforts. He explained, “If the Lord will do it for Moroni, He can do it for us when we ask for and seek His help.”

As family members and teachers, we too can pray for support as we work with individuals who struggle with reading. Prayer helps us seek guidance and inspiration to discern and respond to the unique needs of those in our stewardship. As we reach out in the spirit of love to “bear one another’s burdens” (Mosiah 18:8), we can extend support to our family, friends, and brothers and sisters in the gospel who struggle with reading. ■

NOTES

1. *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* (1999), 39.
2. Available in print (item no. 35666) or online at scripturestories.lds.org.
3. See Lynn G. Robbins, “What Manner of Men and Women Ought Ye to Be?” *Ensign*, May 2011, 104–5.



**Elder
Marlin K. Jensen**

Served as a member
of the Seventy from
1989 to 2012

LESSONS FROM THE Sacred GROVE

In 1993, four years after my call to the Seventy, my family and I were asked to serve in the New York Rochester Mission. That mission includes the town of Palmyra (where Joseph Smith and his family lived during much of the 1820s) and Fayette (where the Church was organized in April 1830).

It is picturesque country, characterized by rolling, wooded hills; clear lakes and streams; and warm, colorful people. It is also a place made sacred by what happened there.

In a grove of towering beeches, oaks, maples, and other trees located about a quarter mile west of the Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith family home near Palmyra, 14-year-old Joseph Smith saw in vision God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. This divine manifestation, in response to Joseph's prayer to know the truth concerning religion, began the Restoration of the gospel in this final dispensation. It also made that grove of trees a revered place in the history of the Church—a place we honor with the name Sacred Grove.

My family and I came to love that grove of trees and to feel of its sacredness. We went there often. Each month as new missionaries arrived and as those finishing their missions departed, we took them there.

As I have reverently walked through the Sacred Grove or sat in thought on the benches provided there, I have often reflected on the abundance of scriptural imagery involving trees, branches, roots, seeds, fruits, and forests. A careful observer can learn some significant lessons from the ecosystem that exists there. I wish to briefly share four of those lessons.¹

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROYCE BAIR

*I encourage
you to stand
always in your
minds and
hearts in the
Sacred Grove
and live true to
the truths that
God began to
reveal there.*



1. Trees always grow toward the light.

In the Sacred Grove, the trees growing on the edge of the original forest and lining many of the interior pathways have grown outward to escape the overshadowing foliage above them and then upward to absorb the greatest possible sunlight. Their crooked trunks and branches stand in stark contrast to neighboring trees that grow almost perfectly straight. Trees, like almost all living organisms, need light to survive and thrive. They will do all in their power to soak in as much sunlight as possible to promote photosynthesis—the process of converting light energy into chemical energy.

Light is an even more important catalyst in the spiritual realm than it is in nature. This is so because light is essential to our spiritual growth and the realization of our full potential as God’s sons and daughters.

Darkness is the opposite of light and represents the forces in the world that seek to separate us from God and to frustrate His divine plan for our lives. It is usually after dark or in dark places that the forces of evil exert their greatest influence. Breaches of the law of chastity, acts of stealing, violations of the Word of Wisdom, and other behaviors forbidden by our Heavenly Father usually occur under cover of darkness. Even when we choose to do wrong during broad daylight, we can’t help but have feelings of darkness.

Fortunately, the Spirit of Christ “giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.

“And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father” (D&C 84:46–47).

This passage beautifully describes the upward reach of God’s children, the natural God-given spiritual instinct we all have—if we don’t stifle it—to go toward the light and, in so doing, to go toward God and His Son and to become more like Them. Of Himself, Christ said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

I urge you to avoid the darkness of sin in all its vile forms and to fill your lives with Spirit, truth, and the light of our Savior, Jesus Christ. You can do this by seeking noble friends, inspiring music and art, knowledge out of the best books (especially the scriptures), moments of sincere prayer, quiet times in nature, wholesome activities and conversations, and a life centered on Christ and His teachings of love and service.



2. Trees require opposition to fulfill the measure of their creation.

Various schools of thought about forest management have been followed through the years in caring for the Sacred Grove. At one time a test plot was selected for a practice known as *release thinning*. Foresters identified what they felt were potentially the largest and healthiest young trees in the test plot, and then they cut and pruned out the less-promising trees and the competing undergrowth. The supposition was that by removing much of the competition for water, sunlight, and soil nutrients, the chosen trees would be *released* to grow and develop in extraordinary ways.

After some years it became obvious that just the opposite was occurring. Once freed from competition, the



Some trees in the Sacred Grove demonstrate that opposition can work to our benefit and that in our extremity there is often much to be gained.



chosen trees became complacent. Instead of stretching upward toward the light, they slowed their vertical growth, put out many lower limbs that eventually became useless when the canopy closed, and became fatter. None of the trees in the test plot compared in size or vitality to the trees that had to compete and overcome opposition in order to survive and thrive.

One of the key doctrines of the Book of Mormon is that there must be “an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). A world with opposites provides choices between good and evil so that agency can operate. Equally important, however, is the principle that opposition must exist for spiritual growth to occur. Understanding and embracing this principle is a key to accepting and being generally happy with life. It is also critical to experiencing needed personal growth and development.

Sooner or later, all of us will encounter opposition and adversity. Some of it will come simply as a result of being here in mortality in a fallen world. It may involve forces of nature, illness and disease, temptations, loneliness, or physical or mental imperfections. Sometimes opposition and hardship come because of our misguided choices. How grateful we should be to our Savior, whose Atonement provides a way for the mending of everything that is broken.

I take great solace from the Lord’s words to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail at a time when Joseph’s burdens were nearly unbearable: “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

Some trees in the Sacred Grove demonstrate that opposition can work to our benefit

and that in our extremity there is often much to be gained. These trees have had to recover from various forms of opposition or adversity—a lightning strike, a powerful gust of wind, a heavy accumulation of snow or ice, the encroachment and abuse of careless humans, and sometimes the aggression of a neighboring tree. Out of these adverse circumstances have come some of the sturdiest and most visually interesting trees in the grove.

3. Trees grow best in forests, not in isolation.

In nature it’s unusual to see a tree standing alone. Trees almost always grow in groves, and over time groves may become forests. The Sacred Grove, however, is much more than just a group of trees. It is a complicated ecosystem that includes numerous species of flora and fauna.

There is an observable interconnectedness among all the different varieties of wildflowers, bushes, shrubs, trees, fungi, mosses, birds, rodents, rabbits, deer, and other creations found there. These species interact and rely on one another for food, shelter, and a synergistic and social environment where they can experience their cycle of life.

God’s plan for our lives contemplates a similar interconnectedness for us. We are to work out our salvation together, not in isolation. The Church builds meetinghouses, not hermitages.





From the beginning of the Restoration, the command has been for us to gather in communities, where we can learn to live in harmony and mutually support one another by honoring our baptismal covenants (see Mosiah 18:8–10). As God’s children, we can no more prosper in isolation than can a solitary tree. Healthy trees need an ecosystem; healthy people need each other.

Thankfully, there is in all of us a longing for sociality, companionship, and loyal friends. As members of God’s eternal family, we all yearn for the satisfaction and security that close and lasting relationships can provide. Although social networking sites undoubtedly provide a form of sociality, they are no substitute for the honest, open, face-to-face communication that must occur for authentic and lasting relationships to be established.

Certainly the earliest and best laboratory for learning to get along with others is the home. At home we learn the lessons of service, unselfishness, forgiveness, and patience that are essential to the formation of lasting relationships with others.

Happily, the inspired organization of the Church also provides settings where we can develop socially. In Church callings, meetings, classes, quorums, councils, activities, and a variety of other opportunities for association, we develop the attributes and social skills that help prepare us for the social order that will exist in heaven.

In speaking of this higher order, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy” (D&C 130:2).

4. Trees draw strength from the nutrients created by previous generations of trees.

There was a time when those in charge of caring for the Sacred Grove decided that the grove should be well groomed. Service projects were then organized to clear the grove of fallen trees and limbs, undergrowth, stumps, and dead leaves. Under this practice, it wasn’t long before the vitality of the grove began to diminish. Tree growth slowed, fewer new trees sprouted, some species of wildflowers and plants began to disappear, and the numbers of birds and other wildlife decreased.

Later, upon recommendation that the grove be left in as natural a state as possible, fallen trees and limbs were left to decompose and enrich the soil. Leaves were left lying where they fell. Visitors were asked to stay on marked pathways so that the grove would be less disturbed and the soil within the grove less compacted. Within just a few years, the grove began to regenerate and renew itself in a remarkable way. Today it flourishes in a nearly pristine state, with lush vegetation and abundant wildlife.

The lesson to be learned from this experience is dear to my heart. For seven years it was my privilege to serve as Church historian and recorder. Why do record keeping and the collection, preservation, and sharing of

A careful observer can learn some significant lessons from the ecosystem that exists in the Sacred Grove.

history enjoy such importance in the Church of Jesus Christ? Why is it critical for us to be mindful of and draw strength from past generations? (See D&C 21:1; 69:3, 8.)

I suggest that it is impossible to live fully in the present—much less to plan for our future destiny—without the foundation of the past. Understanding the relationship of the past to the present and to the future helps us more fully appreciate the Lord's



definition of truth as revealed to Joseph Smith: “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

The knowledge we have of our past because of the records that have been kept and of our future because of the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets provides us with the context that allows wise use of our agency.

It is important that we become familiar with our Church's history, especially with its founding stories. These stories—Joseph Smith's First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, angelic visitations by John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Elijah, Elias, and others—contain the foundational truths upon which the Restoration is based.

Regrettably, in this technological age, where information abounds—some of it critical of events and people in the Church's history—some Latter-day Saints become shaken in their faith and begin to question long-held beliefs. To such questioning individuals I extend love, understanding, and the assurance that if they will abide by gospel principles and prayerfully pursue their study of Church history—studying sufficiently to gain a more comprehensive rather than a fragmentary or incomplete knowledge—the Holy Ghost will confirm their faith in the essential events in Church history by speaking peace to their minds. In this way they can become settled in their convictions concerning the history of the restored Church.

Conclusion

When we were serving our mission near Palmyra, sometimes I would go into the Sacred Grove alone and stand in reverence next to my favorite “witness tree”—one of three living trees that were growing in the grove at the time of the First Vision. I used to imagine that if that tree could talk, it would tell me what it witnessed that spring day in 1820. But I really didn't need that tree to tell me—I already knew.

By virtue of spiritual experiences and feelings beginning in my youth and continuing to this very hour, I have come to know that God, our Father, lives. I know too that His Son, Jesus Christ, is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. I know that these two glorified Beings appeared to Joseph Smith.

These glorious truths have their beginning in the Sacred Grove. I encourage you to stand always in your minds and hearts in that sacred place and live true to the truths that God began to reveal there. ■

From a CES devotional address, “Stand in the Sacred Grove,” given in California, USA, on May 6, 2012. For the full address, visit cesdevotionals.lds.org.

NOTE

1. I am indebted to Robert Parrott, a forester and naturalist employed by the Church who lives in Palmyra, for bringing to my attention some of the insights about the Sacred Grove that I share.

DOES HE REMEMBER?



Tenderly ♩ = 84-104

Words and music by
Janice Kapp Perry

1. He looks be - yond Ma - ry to
(2. He) sees past the sta - ble to

heav - en a - far. Does He re - mem - ber He made the stars, And
king - doms be - yond. Does He re - mem - ber the an - gels' song, And

al - so the rain - bow and sun - shine and clouds? Does He re - mem - ber it
how He cre - a - ted the earth long a - go? Does He re - mem - ber it

1. now? 2. He now? He looks be - yond Jo - seph to

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heav - en a - bove. Does He re - mem - ber His Fa - ther's love, And

how He was chos - en as Sav - ior of all? Does He re - mem - ber it

now? _____ Son of the Fa - ther, Cre - a - tor of all,

Does He re - mem - ber it now? _____ *rit.*

SHARING THE GIFT



The greatest gift Heavenly Father offers us is eternal life—our life eternally joined with His, living the kind of life He lives (see D&C 14:7). But giving that gift required giving us His Only Begotten Son.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

And Jesus so loved the world that He suffered pain beyond our comprehension, allowed Himself to be crucified, and then rose from the dead to join His Father forever in glory. His sacrifice gifted to us the Resurrection unconditionally, as well as the possibility of eternal life if we accept the gift by giving Him our hearts and giving away our sins.

It’s Christmas, and at Christmas we celebrate these divine gifts by sharing gifts with one another: a scarf for Mom, gloves for Dad, a doll for Sister, a toy car for Brother. The gift is not what’s important. What is important is the giving, for the giving is really a gift of love.

Without doubt, the greatest gift of love we could give this holiday season—these holy days—is to share God’s gift with others. To help us do that, the Church launched a media initiative on November 28 titled “He Is the Gift.”

christmas.m

About this initiative, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “Christmas is a time of reflection on what we can become because of God’s sacred gift. As we *discover the gift*, we learn of the immeasurable love of God and our absolute need for a Savior. As we *embrace the gift*, we strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ and our desire to become more like Him. As we *share the gift*, we follow in the Master’s footsteps, who invited all to hear His message.”¹

The initiative includes a new Church website, christmas.mormon.org. Among the information on the website is a powerful video titled *He Is the Gift*. Also on the site is content helping visitors to:

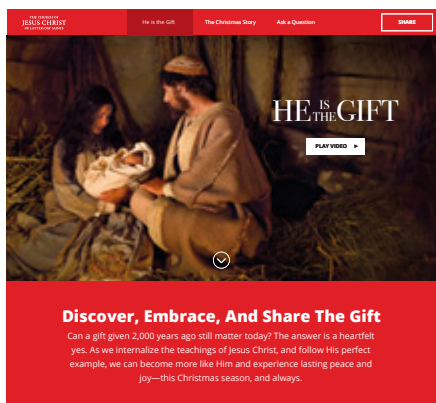
- Understand why the Savior is God’s greatest gift to mankind.
- Embrace that gift by following the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Read inspirational stories of modern-day followers of the Son of God.
- Share the video and website with others.

The hashtag #ShareTheGift can be used to send people to the website. The video and website are available in 20 languages.

To help members share the message of God’s love this Christmas, the “He Is the Gift” initiative includes images and messages on social media that members can share (including a YouTube campaign on December 7 in the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Brazil) and displays in most Church visitors’ centers to which members can invite interested friends. A major display will be

on view at Times Square in New York City, USA. Sharing our beliefs about Jesus Christ in these simple ways will likely result in natural invitations to meet with the missionaries.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles encourages every member to “visit christmas.mormon.org to find inspiring content to help *discover, embrace, and share the gift* of God’s love for us, made manifest in His Only Begotten Son. By using the hashtag #ShareTheGift, we can sweep the earth with timeless—and timely—messages of the Savior Jesus Christ.”² ■



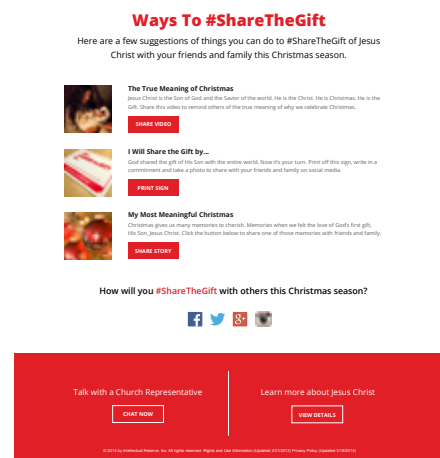
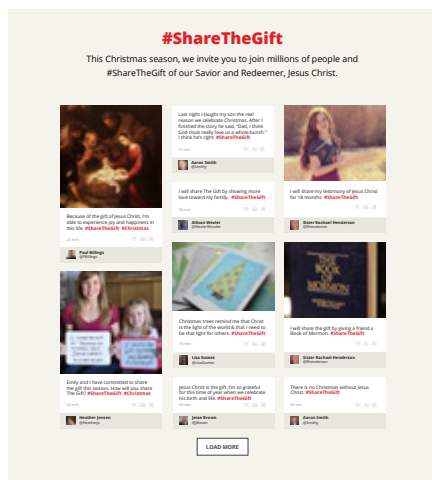
Discover Why The Gift Was Given
Learn more about God's greatest gift to mankind: His Only Begotten Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.



Learn How To Embrace The Gift
See how you can embracing peace and joy by following the teachings and example of Jesus Christ.



How The Gift Is Relevant Today
See stories of modern-day followers of Jesus Christ as they share what the gift means to them.



- NOTES**
1. Russell M. Nelson, in *He Is the Gift*, supplement to the *Ensign*, Dec. 2014.
 2. David A. Bednar, in *He Is the Gift*, supplement to the *Ensign*, Dec. 2014.



MOM'S CHRISTMAS QUILT

One of the most challenging experiences of my life happened shortly after the passing of our 10-year-old daughter from brain cancer. The saying “You can’t take it with you” came with clarity as we looked around her room one Saturday afternoon.

Clarissa was gone, but her room still held the identifiable remnants of her earthly stay. We now had the daunting task of deciding what to do with her personal belongings. I knew that parting with a single item would not

be easy, especially for my wife.

Dealing with the whirlwind of details associated with hospitals, chemotherapy, and radiation had left us little time to clean and organize.

Memories came as we packed up items she’d arranged on her headboard or bookshelf. They all held heartfelt meaning—from her favorite blanket, book, or necklace to her stuffed animals, schoolbooks, and football. My wife sobbed as we asked what to do with each item.

We gathered many of Clarissa’s books and took them to her elementary school for other children to enjoy. We gave her dresser to a neighbor. Some of her clothes went to cousins. Focusing on others helped make the difficult situation of parting with her things a little easier.

Several weeks later, as Christmas approached, my two teenage daughters asked their mother if they could use some of Clarissa’s clothes to make a special Christmas gift. They selected each article of clothing for its

I will always remember my wife’s expression when she opened her gift and saw what her daughters had made for her.



HE NEEDS MY SERVICE NOW

intrinsic family memory and carefully cut squares to represent precious moments in her life.

A few days before Christmas, they and their Young Women leader, who had helped them come up with the idea, showed me a quilt they were making. I looked in astonishment at each square of fabric, which represented an event in Clarissa's life: a square from her football uniform, a square from the shirt we bought her on a family trip, a square from the pajama pants she wore at the hospital. Each piece, so precious and beautiful, reminded me of our time with her. I told my daughters it was perfect. I knew their mother would love it.

That Christmas morning I saw a gift given from the heart. I will always remember my wife's expression when she opened her gift and saw what her daughters had made for her. Each night since then she has wrapped her Christmas quilt around her, recalling memories and dreaming of the day our family will be united again—thanks to the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. ■
Jed Packer, Utah, USA

I sit at the sewing machine and feed thread onto seams of flannel. Child-print patterns in soft colors decorate the tops, with coordinating colors forming the backs of the baby receiving blankets I'm sewing.

Our ward Relief Society assembles newborn kits for poverty and disaster areas. I'm an amateur seamstress, but I'm committed to participate. I enjoy choosing fabric for the project and cutting out blanket-sized squares.

I put right sides of the fabric together, sew around the edges, and leave an area open to turn the blanket right side out. Then I stitch along the edges, clip the corners, turn the blanket so that the colorful sides are on the outside, and stitch up the open area.

I sew along the top of the edges to reinforce the seams. I ease the fabric into place and take off at a brisk pace. As I rush to finish so I can resume household duties, a thought strikes me: "What if I were sewing this blanket for baby Jesus?"

With that thought, I slow down and take great care to straighten the seams. But even with care, the stitching doesn't run straight.

Next I sew a 10-inch (25 cm) square in the center to secure the front to the back. I make a heavy paper template, center it on the blanket, and lightly mark around it. I put the fabric in place, ease down the needle, and carefully sew.

When I'm done, I clip the threads and pull out the finished blanket. It

isn't square—it's a cross between a trapezoid and a parallelogram.

I set the blanket aside, pull out fresh flannel, and start again—taking greater pains for this gift worthy of Deity. But even with the extra effort, the results are only slightly better. Each blanket I sew is imperfect.

I feel that I can't take any of the blankets to the collection site, at least not this year. I'll keep practicing, and perhaps someday I can make a contribution.

Then another thought floats through my mind: "If you wait until your sewing is perfect, the Christ child will be in Egypt."

I understand. The opportunity for service would be gone. The Savior accepts our offerings when we use our best efforts, imperfect though they may be. I know that a newborn, wrapped in a soft, clean blanket, would not refuse to sleep because the corners aren't square.

As I contemplate whether my efforts will make a dent in worldwide needs, Christ's counsel comes to mind: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

So I continue sewing blankets, working to make them as attractive as I can. I know there is a need now, not some vague time in the future when I can sew them perfectly. ■

Jean Hedengren Moultrie,
Washington, USA



OUR BEST CHRISTMAS PRESENT EVER

It was Christmas Eve, and our family had gathered as we do every year to celebrate. The clock was about to strike midnight when Dad called us together, saying that he had something to show us.

With all the preparation and excitement that accompany Christmas Eve, my sisters, mother, and I had not noticed what Dad had prepared for the occasion. As soon as we were all comfortably gathered together, he began to show us some slides.

In his slide show, which featured a painting of the Savior, Christmas scenes, and carefully crafted words, Dad expressed his love for us. His presentation also reminded us of the

true meaning of Christmas and the happiness and gratitude we should feel for the Savior's birth. One slide of a colorful Christmas tree also featured the words, "This Christmas the love of Jesus Christ will bring me a new life."

The most special part of Dad's presentation followed when he used a slide of a painting of the Savior to give us some news. It wasn't just any news; it was the best news ever. Above the Savior appeared the words "I have decided to get baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Our father had finally decided to join the Church! Such a decision may be easy for some people, but it wasn't for our father. He had been studying

the gospel and learning about the Church for 25 years. Despite our best efforts and many missionary discussions, he still had not been baptized. We never understood why, but we knew he wasn't ready.

I admit there were times when I felt that my father would never be baptized. Deep inside, however, I never lost hope, and we all continued to pray for him. On Christmas Eve, the Lord answered our prayers.

When Dad made his announcement, at first all we could do was weep for joy. We felt a mixture of feelings—excitement, surprise, and above all else, an enormous happiness that is difficult to describe.

Dad's announcement didn't just change Christmas Eve—it changed life for our entire family. We still have progress to make as individuals and as a family, but I know moving ahead will be better now that we're together in the Church.

I am so grateful to the Lord for this blessing. In a few months we will be sealed as a family in the temple. Dad's announcement was definitely the best Christmas present ever. ■

Adriana Nava Navarro, Bolivia

The most special part of Dad's presentation occurred when he used a slide of a painting of the Savior to give us the best news ever.



CHRISTMAS UNDER CORRUGATED METAL

While I was stationed in Manila, Philippines, during World War II, I would often meet with a small group of other LDS servicemen to hold sacrament meeting. During one meeting I noticed a Filipino woman at the back of our bombed-out building peering through an opening that had once been a door. I wondered if our singing had attracted her. While our eyes were closed for the benediction, she quietly slipped away.

During one of her subsequent visits, we invited her to join us. Her name was Aniceta Fajardo, and she enthusiastically accepted our friendship. As she continued attending our meetings, she learned about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

With Christmas approaching, we decided to bless Aniceta and her family with some Christmas presents. We gathered canned milk, meat, and vegetables; a couple of blankets; and a medical kit, including penicillin to treat Aniceta's sick grandson.

On Christmas Eve we loaded up the gifts and went to Aniceta's home. She lived with her daughter and grandson under sheets of corrugated metal that leaned against a brick wall—a remnant of a building that had been blown apart. We wondered how they could survive with such little protection during the tropical rains so prevalent that time of year.

One of our men pulled a branch

from a mango tree and stuck it in the ground. We found bits of litter to decorate the branch.

Aniceta and her family looked on with delight and amazement. When they saw the gifts we had brought, their delight turned into tears of happiness and appreciation. They hadn't seen or eaten such food in a long time, and they wept so much that for a time they couldn't speak.

Because it was Christmas Eve, our thoughts turned to home and loved ones. I thought of the cablegram I had received just two days before, informing me that I had become a father. We shared our feelings, ending with our testimonies of the Savior and the restored gospel.

We assured this wonderful family of the Savior's love for them. They found

comfort in our words, and a feeling of peace warmed the night air. Then we bid our dear friends good-bye and wished them a merry Christmas.

Soon afterward I was transferred to a new area, and I never saw Aniceta or her family again. But years later I opened the *Church Almanac* to a section on the Philippines and read that Aniceta Pabilona Fajardo was the first Filipino to join the Church in those islands.¹ What a wonderful blessing to think of the seeds that were planted during that Christmastime in 1945. ■

Erwin E. Wirkus, Idaho, USA

NOTE

1. See "Philippines," *Deseret News 1991–1992 Church Almanac*, 157; recent issues of the *Church Almanac* spell Sister Fajardo's first name Aneleta.

We pulled a branch from a mango tree and stuck it in the ground. Aniceta and her family looked on with delight and amazement.





By Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939)
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

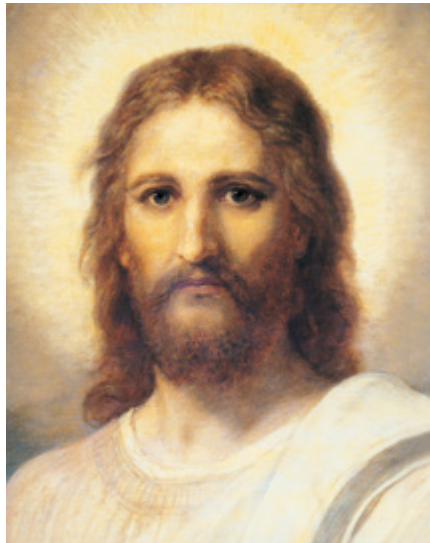
I KNOW THAT HE LIVES

I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt!

I love to contemplate what it cost our Father in Heaven to give us the gift of His Beloved Son, that worthy Son of our Father, who so loved the world that He laid His life down to redeem the world, to save us and to feed us spiritually while we walk in this life, and prepare us to go and dwell with Him in the eternal worlds. . . .

I recall an experience which I had . . . , bearing witness to my soul of the reality of [the Savior's] death, of His Crucifixion, and His Resurrection, that I shall never forget. . . .

. . . I found myself one evening in the dreams of the night in that sacred building, the temple. After a season of prayer and rejoicing I was informed that I should have the privilege of entering into one of those rooms, to meet a glorious personage, and, as I entered the door, I saw, seated on



a raised platform, the most glorious being my eyes have ever beheld or that I ever conceived existed in all the eternal worlds.

As I approached to be introduced, He arose and stepped towards me with extended arms, and He smiled as He softly spoke my name. If I shall live to be a million years old, I shall never forget that smile. He took me into His arms and kissed me, pressed me to His bosom, and blessed me, until the marrow of my bones seemed to melt! When He had finished, I fell at His feet, and, as I bathed them with

my tears and kisses, I saw the prints of the nails in the feet of the Redeemer of the world. The feeling that I had in the presence of Him who hath all things in His hands, to have His love, His affection, and His blessing was such that if I can receive that of which I had but a foretaste, I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt!

. . . I see Jesus not now upon the cross. I do not see His brow pierced with thorns nor His hands torn with the nails, but I see Him smiling, with extended arms, saying to us all: “Come unto me!” ■

Capitalization has been standardized.

From Bryant S. Hinckley, Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard (1949), 147–57, as reprinted in “Classic Discourses from the General Authorities: The Sacramental Covenant,” New Era, Jan. 1976, 7–11.

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In Church Magazines

Ensign: The Lord has promised us an abundant life if we follow His servants' counsel. See page 12 to find out how one young adult has cultivated a more abundant life.

New Era: This month, youth can learn more about the Savior from Church leaders (pages 2, 14, and 16). Also, see how the new Sunday learning format is helping youth grow (page 20), and get the sheet music for a new Christmas song (page 9).

Friend: Help your family have a Christ-centered Christmas! Put on a play about the Savior's birth (page 44) and learn a new song about the Nativity (page 19). Look for more stories and activities in this month's *Friend* to help your family celebrate Christmas this year.

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