

RUNNING TO THE TEMPLE

In December 1999 we were preparing for our annual Christmas trip to the Bern Switzerland Temple. The trip, a special tradition we began shortly after our marriage, is one way we commemorate the Savior's birth.

We live about eight hours by car from the temple, and bad weather preceded our departure. Uprooted trees, a sharp wind, and icy roads would make the journey treacherous.

I felt uncertain and didn't understand why we were encountering so many obstacles when we knew that the Lord wanted us to go to the temple. Would He not open our way?

My husband, Antonio, and I knelt in prayer with our children and said

to our Heavenly Father that unless He told us differently, we would head for Bern the next day.

"If the road is truly impassable," Antonio said after our prayer, "we'll come back."

I felt our decision was right, but I was still fearful. The next morning, full of doubt, I wanted to pray again. Antonio told me we had already received our answer, but he lovingly and patiently knelt beside me.

When we left, it was barely dawn and dark clouds hovered over us. As we drove, I could see a small bit of blue sky near the mountains. A timid ray of sun broke through the clouds.

That glimmer of sunshine

strengthened my vacillating faith.

Miraculously, the sun came out and the temperature rose. There was no fog, no ice, no wind—only a clear, extraordinarily warm winter day. My eyes filled with tears. It seemed that Heavenly Father had answered our prayers.

After we arrived at Bern, it began to snow heavily and continued to snow throughout our stay. As we headed to the temple before dawn the next morning, the storm turned into a blizzard. For a minute I was afraid, and I began to run along the sidewalk that leads to the temple.

Then a thought came into my mind: "This is the way it should be. The world howls



ILLUSTRATION BY STAN FELLOWS

MY CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

at us with troubles, but we must run to the peace of the Lord found in His house.”

We had a wonderful time at the temple that Christmas season, but we worried about our trip home. The snow continued to fall, and our youngest son developed a high fever. On the day of our departure, however, the snow miraculously stopped, and our son’s fever broke after he received a priesthood blessing.

As the peace of the temple sustained us, a Bible verse came to my mind: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). With gratitude, I realized that no, it is not. ■

Antonella Trevisan, Udine, Italy

During the fall of 1968, our bishop asked my parents if they would pledge money toward building the Provo Utah Temple. Wards don’t do that today, but it was common back then. My dad pledged U.S. \$1,000. That might not seem like much money, but it was to us. My father was working two jobs to help support a son in college, a son on a mission, and five children at home.

When my father sat us down for family council and told us he had pledged \$1,000 toward the temple, I remember thinking, “You might as well have pledged \$1 million because both amounts are unreachable.” I couldn’t believe he had pledged that much, and we had less than four months to gather the funds.

We chose four ways to help raise money: we would forfeit gift giving that Christmas and donate the money we would have spent on gifts; my sisters and I would donate our baby-sitting money; my little brother would do odd jobs to earn money; and as a family we would go to a local farm, pick apples daily for a few weeks, and donate the earnings.

We gift wrapped a shoebox that would hold our deposits, added a picture of a temple and a picture of Jesus Christ, and placed the box on a small table. Excitement grew as our donations increased. Our focus switched

from the presents we wanted to our gift for the Savior. I so appreciated the gift He had given God’s children—His life—that I wanted to give something back to Him.

Picking apples turned out to be the most difficult and satisfying way to earn money. It was draining, but we were strengthened and rewarded as we spent time together as a family. We began to be “knit together in unity and in love” (Mosiah 18:21).

As Christmas approached, I would peek into the donation box, but I was always disappointed. Despite our efforts, we were far from our goal.

I felt wonderful, though, about our decision to forfeit presents. I knew that our sacrifices were small, but I had faith that the Savior would be pleased.

One day my dad announced that we had reached our goal and that he had donated the money. I never found out how we raised the rest so quickly.

The fulfillment of Dad’s pledge that Christmas was miraculous. But for me, the real miracle was that through giving instead of receiving, I grew closer to the Savior. That was better than any Christmas gift I could have received. Seven years later the gift was returned to me as I knelt across an altar in the Provo Temple to be sealed for time and all eternity to my husband. ■

Joan Burton Stott, California, USA



As we headed to the temple before dawn the next morning, the storm turned into a blizzard.

Upon opening a box, I found a homemade apron fashioned from Christmas fabric.



STRINGS OF SACRIFICE

One Christmas years ago I had too much on my mind to savor the season. My husband, Andy, had developed a cough that, following medical tests, briskly evolved into lung damage, surgery, reconstruction of his esophagus, and biopsies—“just to be safe.” His surgery occurred a week before we moved to a new home.

A few weeks before Christmas, I visited with my neighbor Janae. She asked if I was ready for Christmas. I managed to reply that I was as ready as I would be. I mentioned that we’d always made Christmas cookies with my grandma just before Christmas, and that I’d wanted to make aprons for the girls but probably wouldn’t get around to it.

A week later I settled in the overstuffed chair beside our Christmas tree. The girls were in bed, and Andy was working in his office when I heard the doorbell. I opened the door to find

Janae on my doorstep, holding three packages as snowflakes fell behind her.

“Come in,” I said, certain that she could sense my surprise.

“Thanks, but I need to get back,” she said. “These are for your girls.”

Janae handed me the packages.

“They’re aprons,” she said. “They’re not the best, but I was able to finish them tonight.”

In a moment of humbled astonishment, I breathed a thank-you. We hugged, and I watched her make her way home.

As I sat again in my chair, I carefully unfastened the white satin ribbon of one box. Upon opening it, I found a homemade apron fashioned from Christmas fabric. I ran a seam between my thumb and forefinger as I thought about Janae. She had four small children, including twins who were just over a year old. She

taught piano, and she held a busy and important calling in our ward.

I tried to figure out when she would have had time to make aprons, and I knew at once that she didn’t have time. She made time.

Tears fell as I felt the love of Heavenly Father extended through Janae—a measure of warmth and comfort as I was encircled about “in the arms of [His] love” (D&C 6:20).

It has been many years since we received the aprons. My daughters have long since outgrown them, but I keep them in my pantry, hanging by their strings from a polished hook underneath newer ones. Each time I see Janae’s gifts, I’m reminded of the comfort and love I felt that night. They remind me of what I want to be—a disciple of Jesus Christ worthy of revelation and willing to give service. ■

Candice A. Grover, Idaho, USA

I WAS NOT ALONE

Sitting in a hastily dug defensive position, I looked out over the sand toward the north—toward Iraq. It was December 24 during Desert Shield, and I had drawn guard duty starting at midnight.

I was the only Latter-day Saint in my battalion, so the holiday was even lonelier. We had been in the desert of Saudi Arabia since August, and now Christmas was here with a cold, starlit night. The camp was asleep, and I had a few hours with the bluish-grey dunes and my thoughts.

I thought of my wife and son in Georgia, USA, and how I would miss the festivities back home—the tree, the presents, a real Christmas dinner. Then I began to ponder the Christmas story.

I wondered about the night that Christ was born. I wondered how dark it was and if there was a moon to cast its brightness over the landscape or if there was only starlight. Since there were no electric lights at His birth, the night must have been something like the one I was witnessing. There would have been no festivities—just dark, quiet night.

Then a wonderful thought struck me. The Bible states that Wise Men later came from the East, guided by a star that appeared in the night sky. As I looked into the dark sky, I realized I was to the east of Bethlehem and that one of the centers of knowledge at that time was Baghdad. Could the Wise Men have come from a location not far from where I was? What star shone? Was it still in the sky? Could I see it?

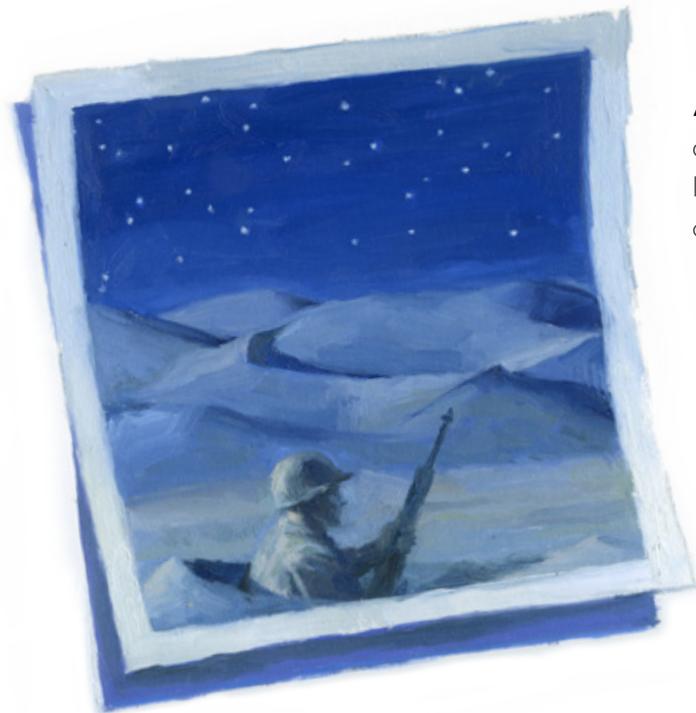
I gazed skyward in wonder at God's creations and felt a warmth that came from within. It did not matter if I was in the same location or if the same star was in the sky. What

mattered is that I shared the same knowledge as the Wise Men of an infant born in Bethlehem who is the King of kings.

I was not alone that Christmas; rather, I was united with all those who seek Him, whether they be Wise Men, prophets, or just lonely soldiers in a hole in the desert. That night my testimony of the birth of the Savior was strengthened, and the next morning the Holy Spirit was still with me.

Instead of being a sad Christmas that year, it became one of my most prized Christmases. ■

Robert Hoffman, Washington, USA



As I looked into the dark sky, I realized I was to the east of Bethlehem.



ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN GARRIS

I prayed that by the end of the night, the “Sub for Santa” jar would be full.

A MODERN-DAY WIDOW’S MITE

The borrowed white tablecloths and snowmen centerpieces gave the cultural hall a festive look as last-minute preparations were being made for our family Christmas party.

As we waited for our guests, my gaze drifted to a table where an empty jar—labeled “Sub for Santa”—sat. I prayed that by the end of the night, the jar would be full.

During our party preparations we had discovered that my cousin’s husband had been out of work for over a year and a half. Her family’s main source of income consisted of handling five paper routes, which required them to begin each day at 3:30 a.m. The majority of their income went to paying the mortgage and other necessities, leaving little for things they wanted, such as Christmas presents.

My cousin’s family was one of the first to arrive. I watched as they made their way toward the dining tables, past our Christmas jar. As they

approached, my cousin’s husband stopped to read the sign on the jar. Without hesitating, he took out his worn wallet, pulled out a couple of dollars, and tossed them in the container, oblivious to who the family “in need” was.

Emotion welled up in my throat, and I instantly recalled the New Testament story of the widow and her two mites. Wealthy men were flaunting their large donations to the treasury when “there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites” (see Mark 12:41–42).

The Savior then said to His disciples: “This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

“For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43–44).

Jesus Christ said she gave in “her want” and cast in “even all her

living.” She could have given only one mite. That probably would have satisfied what was required, but her faithful heart and willingness to sacrifice all caught the attention of the Son of God.

No one would have blamed my cousin’s husband for walking past the jar thinking, “If I had I would give” (Mosiah 4:24). His great example of charity and love for his fellowmen touched not only me but also other members of my family who were watching him. I knew his family would be fine because “charity is the pure love of Christ, . . . and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47).

We had hoped to give his family something that night, which we did later on, but by giving in the midst of his own time of need, he showed us that when it came to what mattered most, he was already a rich man. ■

Stephanie H. Olsen, Utah, USA

HOW DID THEY KNOW OF MY NEED?

Nearly 20 years ago I received my mission call to serve in Japan. With great anticipation and some anxiety, I prepared to leave for my mission in January. Around this time both of my parents lost their jobs.

I had funding for my mission once I arrived, but our family struggled financially. I wasn't sure where I would get money for upfront expenses like mission clothes, luggage, and other necessities. I was working a part-time job but wouldn't have enough. I was especially concerned with how I would get money to apply immediately for a passport so I would

have it in time to leave for Japan.

One afternoon, in desperation, I went to my room and pleaded with Heavenly Father. I shared my desire to serve in Japan and my gratitude that my dream of serving a mission would come true soon. I choked back tears, telling Him how I needed \$75 for a passport that I just did not have. When I arose from my prayer, I knew everything was going to work out. I didn't know how, but a quiet peace assured me that the Lord would provide.

Later that day I opened our mailbox to find a Christmas card inside. The individual who delivered it had made a concerted effort to maintain anonymity. There was no stamp on the card; it had been delivered by hand.

On the inside of the card was typed, "Congratulations! You are the recipient of random acts of Christian kindness. Merry Christmas, Hannah. Good luck on your mission."

Inside the card was \$100. I stood at my front door and cried. Who did this, and how did they know of my need?

Years later I still don't know who brought the money to my house that day. I have thought about that person, or persons, a lot since then. They demonstrated what I believe Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles meant when he said: "The compassion of Christlike friends deeply touches and changes our lives. . . . In this Church, prayers for help are often answered by the Lord through the simple, daily service of caring brothers and sisters. In the goodness of genuine friends, I have seen the reflected mercy of the Lord Himself."¹

That act of kindness changed me, helping me to leave on time for my mission and inspiring me to look for ways to be the answer to the prayers of others. ■

Hannah Eiselin, Arizona, USA

NOTE

1. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Valued Companions," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 32.

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