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Glory to God in the Highest

*Whenever we act in concert with the Lord—doing His bidding,
lifting those around us—we are bearing witness
that He lives and that He loves us.*

Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem of Judea, the prophet Isaiah declared, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

King Benjamin, 125 years before the Savior’s birth, prophesied, “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 3:8).

The day before the birth of the baby Jesus, Nephi, the son of Nephi, heard a voice saying, “On the morrow come I into the world” (3 Nephi 1:13).

The next day, oceans away, the Christ child was born. There’s no question that His mother, Mary, looked on in wonder at her newborn son, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh.

On the hills of Judea surrounding Bethlehem, Luke tells us, shepherds were abiding in their fields (see Luke 2:8). These shepherds were “just and holy men” (see Alma 13:26) who would bear witness of the Christ child.

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. . . .



“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:9–11, 13–14).

Imagine that scene in Judea—the sky filled with the brilliance of a magnificent star and choruses from heaven marking this singular event. The shepherds then went “with haste” (Luke 2:16) to see the babe lying in a manger. Later “they made known abroad” (Luke 2:17) what they had heard and seen.

Each year at Christmas we add our witness to that of the shepherds—that Jesus Christ, the literal Son of the living God, came to a corner of the earth in what we call the Holy Land.

The shepherds reverently went to the stable to worship the King of kings. How will we worship Him this season? Endlessly shopping? Hustling about our homes decorating and wrapping? Will that be our tribute to our Savior? Or will we also bring peace to troubled hearts, good will to those in need of higher purpose, glory to God in our willingness to do His bidding?

Jesus put it simply: “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, has resonated with believers across the world. I have witnessed for myself the fervor of those from the isles of the sea to the enormity of Russia who have embraced the Savior’s sacred word.

The Message of Christmas

Among the early Saints who gathered to Zion was Hannah Last Cornaby, who settled in Spanish Fork, Utah, USA. In the difficult early days of the restored Church, Christmas was sometimes marked with a precious orange or a carved toy or perhaps only a rag doll—but not always. Hannah wrote of December 25, 1856:

“Christmas Eve came, and my darlings, with childish faith, hung up their stockings, wondering if [they] would [be filled]. With aching heart, which I concealed from them, I assured them they would not be forgotten; and they fell asleep with joyful anticipations for the morrow.

“Not having a particle of sweetening, I knew not what to do. They must not, however, be disappointed. I then thought of some squashes in the house, which I boiled, then strained off the liquid, that, when simmered a few hours, made a sweet syrup. With this, and a little spice, I made gingerbread dough which, when cut into every conceivable variety of design, and baked in a skillet, (I had no stove,) filled their stockings and pleased them as much as would the most fancy confectionaries.”¹

Between the lines of this story is an account of a mother working through the night without even an oven to ease her efforts. Yet she was committed to bring joy to her children, to reinforce their faith, to affirm in their home, “Happy day! All is well!”² Isn’t that the message of Christmas?

President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “Our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given.”³

Whenever we act in concert with the Lord—doing His bidding, lifting those around us—we are bearing witness that He lives and that He loves us, no matter our temporal challenges.

After Scottish convert John Menzies Macfarlane joined the Church with his widowed mother and brother, the three of them journeyed to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1852. He was 18 years old. Over the years, he became a surveyor, a builder, even a district judge, but it was his music that distinguished him.

He organized his first choir in Cedar City, Utah, and took his ensemble around southern Utah. After a performance in St. George, Elder Erastus Snow (1818–88), an Apostle and leader of the colony, encouraged John to move to St. George and bring his family and music with him.

Times had been hard in 1869, and Elder Snow asked Brother Macfarlane to stage a Christmas program that would lift the people’s spirits. Brother Macfarlane wanted a new and engaging musical piece for the event. But no matter how hard he tried to compose, nothing came. He prayed for inspiration and prayed again.



Then one night he woke his wife and exclaimed, "I have the words for a song, and I think I have the music too!" He hurried to the keyboard of their small parlor organ and played the tune, writing it down while his wife held before him the flickering light of a bit of burning flannel floating in a bowl of grease. The words and music flowed forth:

*Far, far away on Judea's plains,
Shepherds of old heard the joyous strains:
Glory to God,
Glory to God,
Glory to God in the highest;
Peace on earth, good will to men;
Peace on earth, good will to men!*⁴

Brother Macfarlane had never been to Judea to see that the plains were more like rocky hillsides, but the inspired message of

his music poured from his soul as a witness of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem, a beginning that would change the world forever.⁵

John Menzies Macfarlane testified of Jesus Christ through his music, and Hannah Last Cornaby testified of Christ through her service to her children. We likewise can serve the Lord and bear witness of Him through simple acts of selflessness. We too can make a difference within our families, our wards, our workplaces, and our other spheres of responsibility.

Make a Difference

One simple way we can make a difference is to become involved in the Church's annual social media Christmas campaign. The campaign is designed to help the Saints—and God's children throughout the world—focus on the Savior. This year the Church is launching another global effort to celebrate the birth of



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Christ and to encourage people to emulate Him by serving others during the Christmas season.

The Church is repeating its successful theme of last year: “Light the World” (see Mormon.org). The theme comes from John 8:12, which reads, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The campaign includes an advent calendar and related scriptural verses that provide ideas for people to serve and share the light of Christmas.

“Each of us came to earth having been given the Light of Christ,” President Monson has said. “As we follow the example of the Savior and live as He lived and as He taught, that light will burn within us and will light the way for others.”⁶

We come to know the Savior by doing what He did. As we serve others, we bring them—and ourselves—closer to Him.

“Name above All Names”

During Christmastime, I especially miss our little grandson Paxton. Born with a rare genetic disorder, Paxton suffered from countless health problems. Heavenly Father taught our family many special and tender lessons during the three short years Paxton blessed our lives.

My sister, Nancy Schindler, made a beautiful quilt in honor of Paxton. She called it “Name above All Names.” The quilt features 26 of the names of Jesus Christ—names beginning with the letters A through Z. The quilt reminds me of the glorious future family reunion with Paxton made possible through the Savior’s suffering, sacrifice, and Resurrection.

The quilt inspired me to begin a study of the names of Jesus Christ as revealed in the scriptures. Researching His names has become part of my personal scripture study. So far, I have identified hundreds of names for the Savior.

One of my responsibilities as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and as stated in the Doctrine and Covenants, is to bear testimony of Jesus Christ. The Doctrine and Covenants states, “The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or

special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23; emphasis added).

Recently I was asked to speak during a sacrament meeting at Primary Children’s Hospital in Salt Lake City. I felt prompted to speak about Jesus Christ and His hopeful names. I bore testimony of the Savior as “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16), a “high priest of good things to come” (Hebrews 9:11), “a God of miracles” who rose “with healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 27:23; 25:13), “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6), and “the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25).

At Christmastime, I like to recite the Savior’s different names as I walk to and from my office through the Christmas lights on Temple Square. I start with A, “Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:8); B, “the babe” of Bethlehem (Luke 2:12, 16); C, “Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6; see 2 Nephi 19:6); D, “the Deliverer” (Romans 11:26); E, the “exalted one” (Psalm 89:19); F, “the founder of peace” (Mosiah 15:18); and so on.

Throughout this Christmas season, I look forward to memorizing more of His names and to looking for opportunities to honor His name. As you strive to make a difference this Christmas season, I hope you will make the Savior the center of your efforts and that you will bring glory to Him as you serve others in His name.

I bear my witness that our Eternal Father lives. His plan of happiness profoundly blesses the lives of each of His children in all generations. I know that His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the babe born in Bethlehem, is the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

These words of praise speak truth to my ears: “Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, goodwill to men.”⁷ ■

From an address delivered to the BYU Management Society—Salt Lake Chapter in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, on December 13, 2016.

NOTES

1. Hannah Cornaby, *Autobiography and Poems* (1881), 45–46.
2. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “May We So Live,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 7.
4. “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains,” *Hymns*, no. 212.
5. See Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (1988), 223–24.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “Be an Example and a Light,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 86.
7. *Hymns*, no. 212.