

# *Including* Grandpa Keiser *in Our* Christmas

*I dreamed that my grandfather wanted his temple ordinances done, but how could we find time for family history in the middle of the busy Christmas season?*

By Serena Kugath

One night near Christmastime I dreamed of my step-grandfather, Grandpa Keiser, who had died when I was 11. He had never been able to have any children of his own but had enjoyed being a grandpa to my cousins and me, bringing food to my single mother and winter coats and treats to us. In my dream he asked if he had been a “real” grandpa to me, and I told him that he definitely had been. He then asked if I would do for him what I would do for a “real” grandpa. I woke up and puzzled over what he had meant, until it hit me: Grandpa Keiser wanted his temple ordinances done.

I quickly began researching Grandpa Keiser’s life and discovered through census records that his family was the same size as mine! An idea began to form in my mind. Through family history and temple service, we could spend Christmas with our ancestors and link our family both backward and forward. I realized that this was an opportunity to teach our nine children, ages 19 to 1, that the spirit of Christmas is not about what they receive but what they give.

That night for family home evening I asked our children if they would like to serve my grandpa and his family for

Christmas this year. Their response was immediate, sincere, and affirmative, so we began our family history Christmas.

## **Christmas at the Temple**

Including everyone in our project became a challenge. Only some of our children were old enough to perform baptisms for the dead, and only my husband and I could complete the rest of the temple ordinances, so we found other ways to involve the kids. Our older daughters willingly provided hours of babysitting so my husband and I could return to the temple often during the busy holiday season. All of us also began to learn the FamilySearch program, and our daughters excelled.

We sealed Grandpa Keiser’s family together on December 23, the last day that our temple was open before Christmas. There was a greater spirit of unity and love in our home that Christmas. We began a tradition of family history that year that now allows us to spend quality time together every year during the holiday season.

My mother, sisters, and I gather names for all of the cousins to take to the temple during the week of Thanksgiving.

The temple workers are excited to accommodate us, as they tell us that the holidays are actually a slow time for them.

We also distribute family ordinance cards to adult family members to take to the temple over the holidays.

Our family members become as excited and grateful about the time and effort spent in researching our progenitors as they do about a thoughtful and timely purchased gift. The eternal gifts associated with family history have often taken the place of crowded parking lots and chaotic struggling for discounted items.

For many people, Christmas is about family. For us, serving Grandpa Keiser has blessed us by making our Christmas about family both past and present. ■

*The author lives in Idaho, USA.*

## Other Ways to Bring Your Ancestors Home for Christmas

Christmastime is family time. Incorporating family history into our Christmas traditions can help us come to know our ancestors and see our families as extending both backward and forward. Here are a few suggestions on how your family might develop some Christmas traditions that celebrate family history:

- **Tell some stories.** While gathered around the Christmas tree, the fireplace, the dinner table—wherever your family meets—recount favorite stories from individual ancestors.
- **Give the gift of family history.** You can make memoir books, photo albums, photo biographies, and many other gifts related to family history for family members, neighbors, and friends.
- **Sample some foreign traditions.** Wherever your ancestors come from, they probably had different Christmas traditions than you do now. Discover some traditional foods, games, or other activities from your ancestors' homelands and try them out with your family.
- **Decorate your Christmas tree to reflect your family tree.** Create ornaments that represent the ancestors whose work you have done. Place names and pictures (if available) of these ancestors among the tree's decorations.



*The Kugaths place pictures of their ancestors inside clear ornaments to hang on their Christmas tree.*