

Liahona



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COVER STORY:

**Seeking Faith
in Christ, p. 12**

Your Favorite Christmas Gifts, p. 8

**Learning from Joseph Smith's
Journals, p. 32**

Test Your Nativity Knowledge, p. F8

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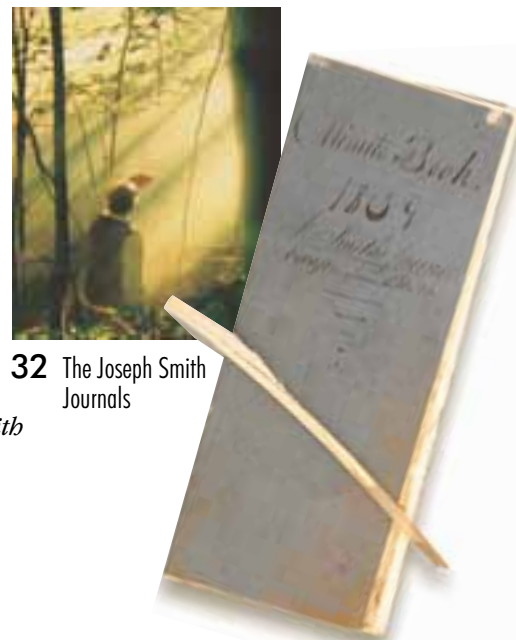
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FOR ADULTS

- 2 First Presidency Message:
These, Our Little Ones
President Gordon B. Hinckley
- 18 Mongolia: Steppes of Faith
Don L. Searle
- 25 Visiting Teaching Message:
*Become an Instrument in the
Hands of God by Exercising
Charity*
- 26 There Shall Be a Record Kept
among You
- 32 The Joseph Smith Journals
Mark Ashurst-McGee and Alex Smith
- 43 Latter-day Saint Voices
My Most Precious Gift
Consuelo Conesa Leone
Mother's Christmas Mouse
Betty LeBaron Mostert
A Christmas to Remember
Jerry O. Thompson
Did Heavenly Father Really Love Me?
Carol C. Watts
The New Recruit *Henny Rasmussen*
- 48 Comment



32 The Joseph Smith
Journals

ON THE COVER

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THE FRIEND COVER

Illustration by Jim Madsen.

FAMILY HOME EVENING IDEAS

*These teaching suggestions can
be used in the classroom as
well as in the home. You
may tailor these ideas to
your family or class.*

**"Finding Faith in the
Lord Jesus Christ,"**

p. 12: Read some of
the scriptures quoted by Elder
Robert D. Hales in this article. Also
have each family member think
of a Christmas song that helps
strengthen faith in Jesus Christ.
Sing the songs as a family. Have
family members share what these

scriptures and songs teach about
the Savior.

"The Joseph Smith Journals,"

p. 32: Invite family members
to share a memorable event
from the past week. Did they

write about that event
in their journals? To

illustrate the importance of jour-
nal writing, read the second para-
graph from the article. Discuss
different things that can be written
in journals. Explain that our journals
are valuable to us, our families, and
future generations.



As you look for the Tongan CTR ring hidden in this issue, think of how you can choose the right by preparing for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.



F10 A Christmas Visitor



F14 The Hot Chocolate Mishap

FOR YOUTH

- 8 The Best Christmas Gifts
- 12 Finding Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
Elder Robert D. Hales
- 17 Sharing Christmas *Daiana Melina Albornoz Díaz*
- 24 Poster: Joy to the World
- 38 A Prophet on the Earth *Jade Swartzberg*
- 40 Questions and Answers: How Can I Strengthen My Testimony to Make Sure I Stay Strong in the Gospel?

THE FRIEND: FOR CHILDREN

- F2 A Christmas Message from the First Presidency to the Children of the World: The Savior Is Born
- F4 Sharing Time: The Greatest Gift *Elizabeth Ricks*
- F6 From the Life of President Spencer W. Kimball: Holding Priesthood Keys
 - F8 Nativity Figures and Facts
Pat Graham
 - F10 A Christmas Visitor
Gwen S. Jones
 - F13 Special Witness: Why Is It Important to Follow the Prophet?
Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf
 - F14 The Hot Chocolate Mishap
Melanie Marks
 - F16 Coloring Page

17 Sharing Christmas

8 The Best Christmas Gifts



“A Prophet on the Earth,”
p. 38: Show a picture of President Gordon B. Hinckley. Discuss why it is important to have a prophet today. After you tell the story of Jade’s father, share with each other how having faith in living prophets can strengthen our testimonies of the gospel.

“A Christmas Visitor,” p. F10: Read the story, and invite your family to each think of someone he or she feels needs some extra love. Think of ways to show you care about them. For example,

you could invite them to family home evening or make a special card for them. Set a goal as a family to reach out to one of these people this week.

“The Hot Chocolate Mishap,”
p. F14: Begin by telling the family about Nicole’s dilemma. Have family members think of similar situations they may face. Take turns role-playing how to handle each situation. You could conclude by reviewing the promises of the Word of Wisdom (see D&C 89:18–21).

TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE

Numbers represent first page of article.

F= <i>The Friend</i>	Love, 8, 44, 46
Atonement, 8, 12	Miracles, 8
Book of Mormon, 43	Missionary work, 8, 17, 18, 47, F6, F14
Charity, 8, 17, 25, F10	Prayer, 12, 46
Christmas, 8, 17, 24, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, F2, F4, F8, F10	Priesthood, F6
Faith, 12, 18	Primary, F4
Family, 8, 17, 38	Prophecy, 12
Family home evening, 1	Prophets, 12, 32, 38, F6, F13
First Vision, 12, 32	Record keeping, 26, 32
Jesus Christ, 8, 12, 25, F2, F4	Scriptures, 18, 43, F8
Journals, 32	Service, 8, 17, 44, 46, F10
Joy, F10	Smith, Joseph, 12, 32
Kimball, Spencer W., F6	Testimony, 40
Kindness, 8, 17, 44	Word of Wisdom, F14



These, Our Little Ones

BY PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY

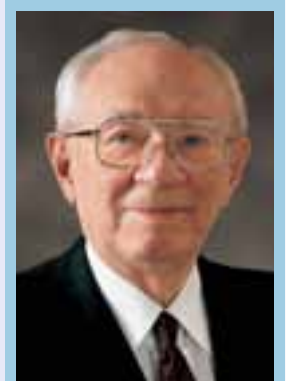
Once when our grandchildren were small, my wife and I took some of them to the circus. I recall that I was more interested in watching them and many others of their kind than in watching the man on the flying trapeze. I looked at them in wonder as they alternately laughed and stared wide-eyed at the exciting things before them. And I thought of the miracle of children who become the world's constant renewal of life and purpose. Observing them in the intensity of their interest, even in this atmosphere, I felt my mind revert to that beautiful and touching scene recorded in the book of 3 Nephi when the resurrected Lord took little children in His arms and wept as He blessed them and said to the people, "Behold your little ones" (3 Nephi 17:23).

It is so obvious that the great good and the terrible evil in the world today are the sweet and the bitter fruits of the rearing of yesterday's children. As we train a new generation, so will the world be in a few years. If you are worried about the future, then look to the upbringing of your children. Wisely did the writer of Proverbs declare, "Train up a child in

the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

When I was a boy, we lived on a fruit farm in the summer. We grew great quantities of peaches. Our father took us to tree pruning demonstrations put on by the agricultural college. Each Saturday during January and February, we would go out to the farm and prune the trees. We learned that by clipping and sawing in the right places, even when snow was on the ground and the wood appeared dead, we could shape a tree so that the sun would touch the fruit which was to come with spring and summer. We learned that in February we could pretty well determine the kind of fruit we would pick in September.

E. T. Sullivan once wrote these interesting words: "When God wants a great work done in the world or a great wrong righted, he goes about it in a very unusual way. He doesn't stir up his earthquakes or send forth his thunderbolts. Instead, he has a helpless baby born, perhaps in a simple home and of some obscure mother. And then God puts the idea into the mother's heart, and she puts it into



As we train a new generation, so will the world be in a few years. If you are worried about the future, then look to the upbringing of your children.

the baby's mind. And then God waits. The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts. The greatest forces in the world are babies."¹

And those babies, I should like to add, will become forces for good or ill, depending in large measure on how they are reared. The Lord, without equivocation, has declared, "I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth" (D&C 93:40).

Four Imperatives

If I may be pardoned for suggesting the obvious, I do so only because the obvious is not observed in so many instances. The obvious includes four imperatives with reference to children: (1) love them, (2) teach them, (3) respect them, and (4) pray with them and for them.

There once was a commonly seen bumper sticker that asked the question, "Have you hugged your child today?" How fortunate, how blessed is the child who feels the affection of his or her parents. That warmth, that love will bear sweet fruit in the years that follow. In large measure, the harshness that characterizes so much of our society is an outgrowth of harshness imposed on children years ago.

The neighborhood in which I grew up was a microcosm of the world, with many varieties of people. They were a close-knit group, and I think we knew them all. I think also we loved them all—that is, except for one man. I must make a confession: I detested that man. I have since repented of that emotion, but as I look back, I can sense again the intensity of my feeling. Why this strong antipathy? Because he whipped his children with strap or stick or whatever came to hand as his vicious anger flared on the slightest provocation.

Perhaps it was because of the home in which I lived, where there was a father who, by some quiet magic, was able to discipline his children without the use of any

instrument of punishment, though on occasion they may have deserved it.

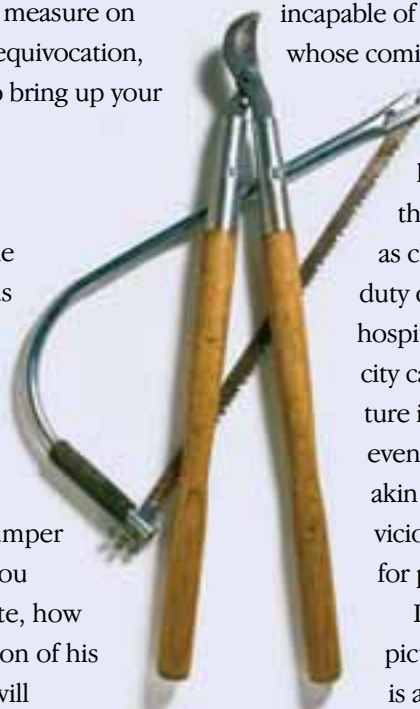
I have since discovered that the man I disliked was one of that very substantial body of parents who seem incapable of anything but harshness toward those for whose coming into the world they are responsible. I

have also come to realize that this man, who walks in the memories of my childhood, is but an example of uncounted thousands across the world who are known as child abusers. Every social worker, every duty officer in the emergency room of a large hospital, every police officer and judge in a large city can tell you of them. The whole tragic picture is one of beating, kicking, slamming, and even of sexual assault on small children. And akin to these violent child abusers are those vicious men and women who exploit children for pornographic purposes.

I have no disposition to dwell on this ugly picture. I wish to say only that no one who is a professed follower of Christ and no one who is a professed member of this Church can engage in such practices without offending God and repudiating the teachings of His Son. It was Jesus Himself who, while holding before us the example of the purity and innocence of children, declared, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . , it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Could there be a stronger denunciation of those who abuse children than these words spoken by the Savior of mankind?

Begin at Home

Do you want a spirit of love to grow in the world? Then begin within the walls of your own home. Behold your little ones, and see within them the wonders of God, from whose presence they have recently come.



When I was a boy, we learned that by clipping and sawing in the right places, even when snow was on the ground and the wood appeared dead, we could shape a tree so that the sun would touch the fruit which was to come with spring and summer.

President Brigham Young (1801–77) once said: “A child loves the smiles of its mother, but hates her frowns. I tell the mothers not to allow the children to indulge in evils, but at the same time to treat them with mildness.”²

He further stated, “Bring up your children in the love and fear of the Lord; study their dispositions and their temperaments, and deal with them accordingly, never allowing yourself to correct them in the heat of passion; teach them to love you rather than to fear you.”³

Of course, there is need for discipline with families. But discipline with severity, discipline with cruelty, inevitably leads not to correction but rather to resentment and bitterness. It cures nothing and only aggravates the problem. It is self-defeating. The Lord, in setting forth the spirit of governance in His Church, has also set forth the spirit of governance in the home in these great words of revelation:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained . . . , only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; . . .

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

“That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death” (D&C 121:41, 43–44).

The Endurance of Example

Behold your little ones, and teach them. I need not remind you that your example will do more than anything else in impressing upon their minds a pattern of life. It is always interesting to meet the children of old friends and to find in another generation the ways of their fathers and mothers.

The story is told that in ancient Rome a group of women were, with vanity, showing their jewels one to another. Among them was Cornelia, the mother of two boys. One of the women said to her, “And

Behold your little ones, and teach them. Your example will do more than anything else in impressing upon their minds a pattern of life.



The noble Roman mother responded, pointing to her sons, “These are my jewels.” Under her tutelage they grew to become two of the most persuasive and effective reformers in Roman history.

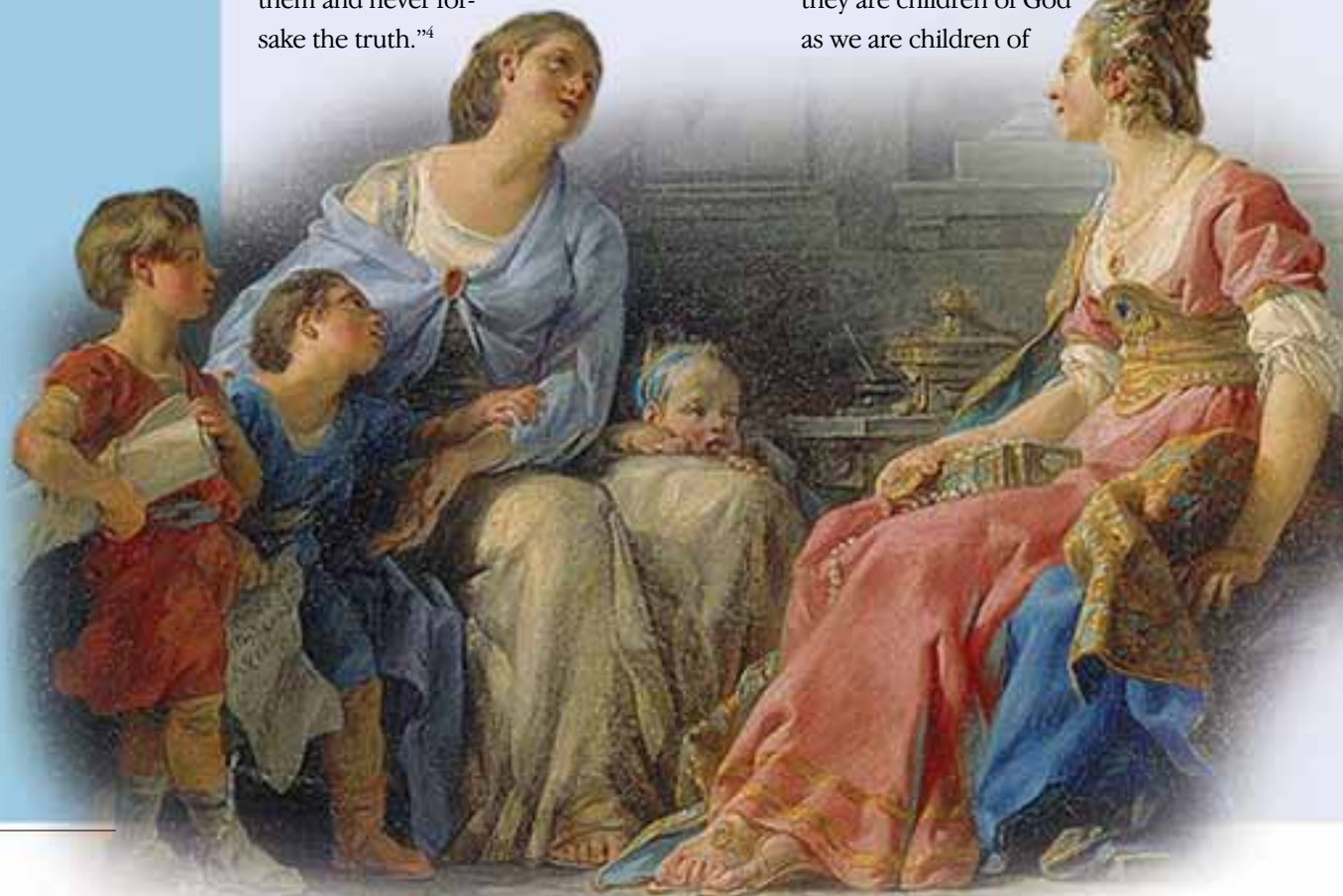
where are your jewels?” To which Cornelia responded, pointing to her sons, “These are my jewels.” Under her tutelage and walking after the virtues of her life, they grew to become Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus—the Gracchi, as they were called—two of the most persuasive and effective reformers in Roman history. For as long as they are remembered and spoken of, the mother who reared them after the manner of her own life will be remembered and spoken of with praise also.

May I return again to the words of Brigham Young: “Let it be your constant care that the children that God has so kindly given you are taught in their early youth the importance of the oracles of God, and the beauty of the principles of our holy religion, that when they grow to the years of man and womanhood they may always cherish a tender regard for them and never forsake the truth.”⁴

I recognize that there are parents who, notwithstanding an outpouring of love and a diligent and faithful effort to teach them, see their children grow in a contrary manner and weep while their wayward sons and daughters willfully pursue courses of tragic consequence. For such I have great sympathy, and to them I am wont to quote the words of Ezekiel: “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20).

But such is the exception rather than the rule. Nor does the exception justify others of us from making every effort in showing forth love, example, and correct precept in the rearing of those for whom God has given us sacred responsibility.

Nor let us ever forget the need to respect these, our little ones. Under the revealed word of the Lord, we know they are children of God as we are children of



CORNÉLIE, MÈRE DES GRACQUES, BY NOËL HALLÉ

God, deserving of that respect which comes of knowledge of that eternal principle. In fact, the Lord made it clear that unless we develop in our own lives that purity, that lack of guile, that innocence of evil, we cannot enter into His presence. Declared He, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Channing Pollock once wrote these interesting and provocative words: “Contemplating the adolescence through which we scorned the wrong, some of us must wish . . . that we could be born old, and grow younger and cleaner and ever simpler and more innocent, until at last, with the white souls of little children, we lay us down to eternal sleep.”⁵

Sources of Strength

Behold your little ones. Pray with them. Pray for them and bless them. The world into which they are moving is a complex and difficult world. They will run into heavy seas of adversity. They will need all the strength and all the faith you can give them while they are yet near you. And they will also need a greater strength which comes of a higher power. They must do more than go along with what they find. They must lift the world, and the only levers they will have are the example of their own lives and the powers of persuasion that will come of their testimonies and their knowledge of the things of God. They will need the help of the Lord. While they are young, pray with them that they may come to know that source of strength which shall then always be available in every hour of need.

I love to hear children pray. I appreciate hearing parents pray for their children. I stand reverently before a father who, in the authority of the holy priesthood, lays his hands upon the head of a son or daughter at a time of serious decision and in the name of the Lord and under the direction of the Holy Spirit gives a father’s blessing.

How much more beautiful would be the world and the society in which we live if every father looked upon his children as the most precious of his assets, if he led them by the power of his example in kindness and love, and if in times of stress he blessed them by the authority of the holy

priesthood; and if every mother regarded her children as the jewels of her life, as gifts from the God of heaven, who is their Eternal Father, and brought them up with true affection in the wisdom and admonition of the Lord.

Said Isaiah of old, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isaiah 54:13). To which I add, “Great also shall be the peace and the gladness of their fathers and mothers.” ■

NOTES

1. In Charles L. Wallis, ed., *The Treasure Chest* (1965), 53.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 340.
3. *Teachings: Brigham Young*, 172.
4. *Teachings: Brigham Young*, 172.
5. “The World’s Slow Stain,” *Reader’s Digest*, June 1960, 77.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Show a picture of the Savior with children. Invite the family to read and discuss some of the scriptures that President Hinckley quotes in the article. Illustrate the scriptures with examples from the article. Conclude by sharing how these scriptures have guided you.
2. To demonstrate the ripple effect, drop a small object into a bowl of water. Read portions of the “Four Imperatives” section to emphasize the effect of parents’ actions on their children. Conclude by reading the last two paragraphs of the article.
3. If the family has young children, illustrate the power of example by having family members mimic one person. That person could clap hands, take three steps, turn around, and so on. Read the first paragraph in the section “The Endurance of Example,” and share the story of the Roman woman and her attitude toward her children. Discuss how her example influenced her sons. Consider sharing one or two quotes from that section. Testify of the power of example.

The Best Christmas Gifts

... are those that come from the heart and build our faith.

Christmastime is a season of gift giving, in memory of the gifts given by the Wise Men to the Christ child and the gift Christ gave us in the Atonement.

Excitement is in the air as we anticipate giving and receiving gifts. Gifts come in all sizes and shapes, but it seems that the best gifts are those that can't be wrapped: gifts of service, family, faith, and testimony.

Enjoy the following memories from our readers of gifts given and received.

Simple reminders. The best gift I have ever received came from my grandmother and consists of two items: a pillowcase and a necklace with a locket. Although they are simple items, they mean a lot to me. My name is written on the pillowcase with glow-in-the-dark letters, and below my name it reads, "Did you think to pray?" Whenever I have jumped into bed without praying, the glow-in-the-dark words remind me to kneel and pray.

The locket holds two pictures: one of me and one of the Savior. While the pillowcase reminds me to pray at home, the locket reminds me to be like the Savior at school and other places I go.

Paige I., Utah, USA

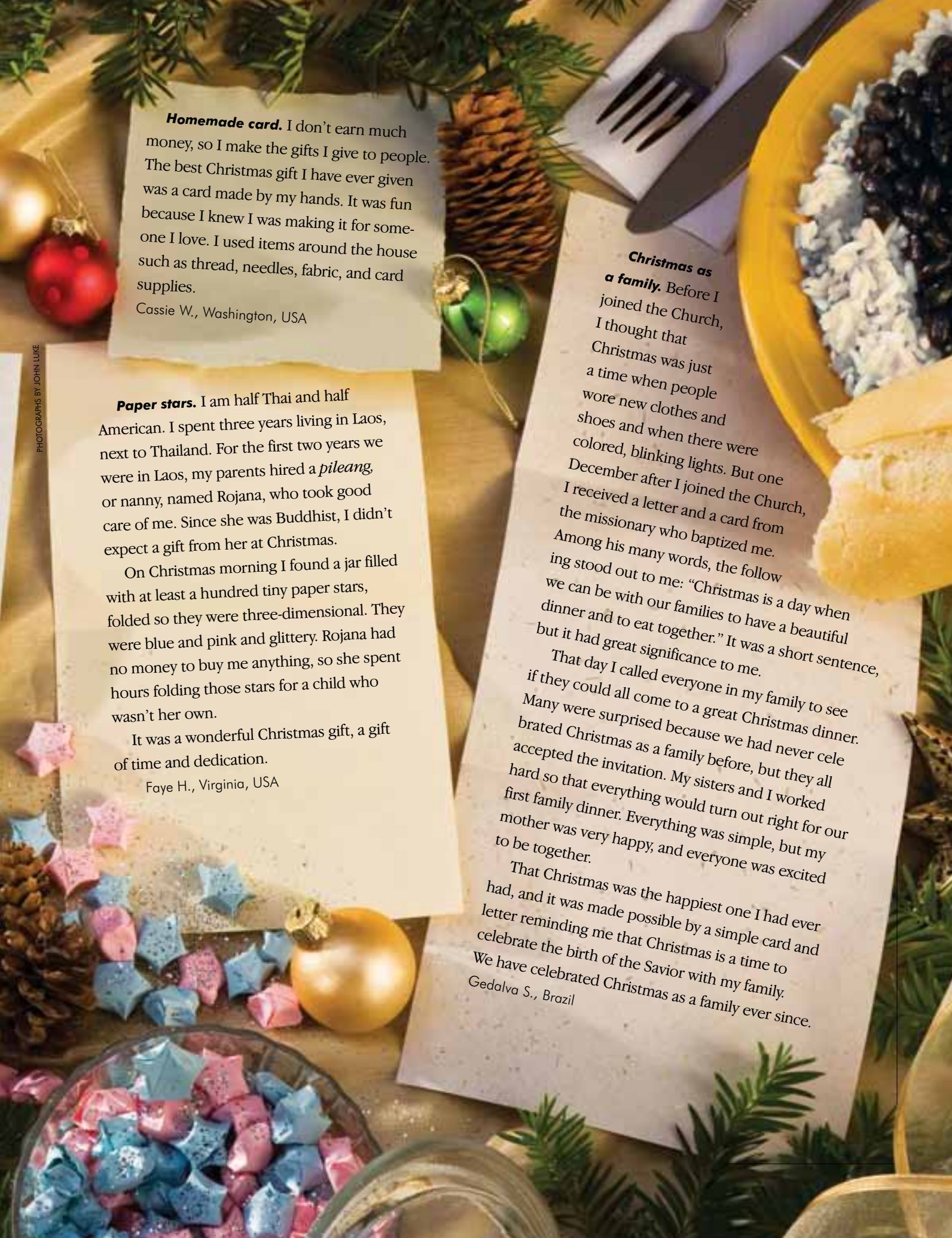
First Presidency devotional. One of my favorite Christmas experiences took place when I had been a member of the Church for a year and a half. I listened to the First Presidency Christmas devotional. It's always great to hear from the prophet, but during the Christmas season it was especially fantastic.

As we sat in the chapel and listened to the prophet's words, we felt the Spirit very strongly. His words were meaningful, and I was able to better understand the true spirit of Christmas and the importance of loving our neighbors and rendering service.

Even more important, my testimony of Jesus Christ grew stronger that day.

When I was a child, I always got the gifts I wanted on Christmas, but I have never received a better gift than hearing from a prophet that Jesus Christ lives and that this is His true Church.

Alvaro M., Uruguay



Homemade card. I don't earn much money, so I make the gifts I give to people. The best Christmas gift I have ever given was a card made by my hands. It was fun because I knew I was making it for someone I love. I used items around the house such as thread, needles, fabric, and card supplies.

Cassie W., Washington, USA

Paper stars. I am half Thai and half American. I spent three years living in Laos, next to Thailand. For the first two years we were in Laos, my parents hired a *pileang*, or nanny, named Rojana, who took good care of me. Since she was Buddhist, I didn't expect a gift from her at Christmas.

On Christmas morning I found a jar filled with at least a hundred tiny paper stars, folded so they were three-dimensional. They were blue and pink and glittery. Rojana had no money to buy me anything, so she spent hours folding those stars for a child who wasn't her own.

It was a wonderful Christmas gift, a gift of time and dedication.

Faye H., Virginia, USA

Christmas as a family. Before I joined the Church, I thought that Christmas was just a time when people wore new clothes and shoes and when there were colored, blinking lights. But one December after I joined the Church, I received a letter and a card from the missionary who baptized me. Among his many words, the following stood out to me: "Christmas is a day when we can be with our families to have a beautiful dinner and to eat together." It was a short sentence, but it had great significance to me.

That day I called everyone in my family to see if they could all come to a great Christmas dinner. Many were surprised because we had never celebrated Christmas as a family before, but they all accepted the invitation. My sisters and I worked hard so that everything would turn out right for our first family dinner. Everything was simple, but my mother was very happy, and everyone was excited to be together.

That Christmas was the happiest one I had ever had, and it was made possible by a simple card and letter reminding me that Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of the Savior with my family. We have celebrated Christmas as a family ever since.

Gedalva S., Brazil



"The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of love and of generosity and of goodness. It illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world's busy life and become more interested in people than in things."

President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, "The Precious Gift," First Presidency Christmas Devotional, December 3, 2006.

Living Christmas card.

When I served as a missionary in Brazil, all of our appointments fell through on Christmas night, so I suggested to my companion, "Let's be a live Christmas card and visit our neighbors!" To my surprise, we were well received at every house. As we sang the wonderful hymns of Christmas and read their corresponding scriptures, I felt something extraordinary and profound. I understood more fully the love of the Savior, and I could see tears in the eyes of our neighbors who before had been so suspicious of us. After we returned home and had our dinner, I recorded the following in my journal: "Tonight we shared the birth of the King of kings with our neighbors. The Spirit magnified us and united us for eternity."

Nivaldo P., Brazil

Christmas away from home. My favorite gift was my first Christmas away from home, when my parents, sister, and I went to visit my brother and his family.

We were used to family Christmases at our house, but this year my other siblings were going elsewhere, and we decided to visit my brother, Josh, and his family because they couldn't come home. I wasn't sure what to expect, and I thought that if we weren't home for Christmas, it wouldn't be fun. It seemed that Christmas just wouldn't be the same. My parents, sister, and I had already opened our presents to each other before we left home.

When my brother picked us up at the airport, my four-year-old niece, Kialeey, started to sing Christmas songs, and I started to feel better. On Christmas morning I enjoyed watching the faces of my nieces and nephews light up as they opened their presents. It was nice, instead of focusing on what I got, to look at others opening their presents and to feel their joy.

Hannah S., Montana, USA

◦ EVANGELHO SEGUNDO
MATEUS

HINOS



Gift of baptism.

My companion and I had been teaching a 14-year-old girl named Martha, and she was nearly ready for baptism and confirmation. We had a few more lessons to teach, and she needed to stop working on Sundays so she could come to church. She loved what she was learning and believed it, but she worked for her aunt and was too young to get any other job. Martha struggled with the decision, so we taught her the blessings of the Sabbath day and encouraged her to pray.

Christmas Eve was a rainy day, and when it was almost time to go home, we felt we should stop by and say hello to Martha. Almost before we knocked on the door, she came running out and hugged us, jumping up and down with enthusiasm. She said, "I don't have to work on Sundays anymore! I'm coming to church! I'm going to get baptized!" Even the rain seemed wonderful after that. Christmas Eve seemed like the perfect time to see someone make the decision to devote her life to Christ. We were two of the happiest missionaries you've ever seen.

Erin B., Utah, USA

Family. The best Christmas gift I ever received was when all of my brothers and sisters, my dad, and I were together for the first time in years. I love my family more than anything in the world, and it made my dad so happy, which made me happy.

Heather R., Utah, USA

Gift of health. In October we heard the shocking news that our beloved stake president had suffered a heart attack and was in a coma. As the weeks passed, members of our stake prayed earnestly for him. The doctors were very concerned, but then he came out of his coma and drastically improved. He lives in my ward, and one Sunday before Christmas I walked into the chapel and was surprised to see him sitting on the stand. After the speakers gave their talks, the stake president came to the pulpit and told us that he could feel the strength of our prayers. As I looked at him, tears streaming down my cheeks, I realized his return to health was a great Christmas present for all of us.

Katie B., Washington, USA ■

Want to learn more about gift giving? Read "Giving with Joy" (Liahona, Dec. 1996; Ensign, Dec. 1982), by Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, at www.lds.org. Click on "Gospel Library."



FINDING FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

BY ELDER ROBERT D. HALES
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

When the Savior was born, an angel of the Lord appeared to humble shepherds, announcing, “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” (Luke 2:10–11).

But there is more to the Christmas story than the transcendent miracles of a new star in the sky and the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem. These marvelous occurrences were the culmination of centuries of prophecy and testimony from prophets of God. Without these prophecies, many may feel justified in not believing these miraculous events. But we have been given many witnesses of the birth, life, and mission of the Savior from prophets in every dispensation. Sacred records give us the prophecies of thousands of years—not only of the first coming of our Savior, but also of the *Second Coming*—a glorious day that will certainly, most assuredly, come.

Believing in the Savior and His mission is so essential that the first principle of the gospel is faith in Jesus Christ (see Articles of

Faith 1:4). What is faith? The Apostle Paul taught that faith “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). How do we gain evidence of our Savior, whom we have not seen? The scriptures teach us, “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to *know* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to *believe* on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful” (D&C 46:13–14; emphasis added).

Believing the Prophets

From the beginning of time, prophets have *known* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, of His mortal mission, and of His Atonement for all mankind.

If we had lived in the days of these prophets, would we have believed on their words? Would we have had faith in the coming of our Savior?

In ancient America, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that on the night of the Savior’s birth “there [would] be great lights in heaven, . . . insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day” (Helaman 14:3).

Many believed Samuel and confessed their sins, repented, and were baptized. But,



How do we gain evidence of our Savior, whom we have not seen? We have been given many witnesses of the birth, life, and mission of the Savior from prophets in every dispensation.

for the most part, the Nephites were blind to the “signs and wonders”; instead of heeding them, the Nephites “depend[ed] upon . . . their own wisdom, saying: Some things [the believers] may have guessed right, . . . but . . . it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come” (Helaman 16:15–18).

In those days and ours, some naysayers, called anti-Christ, convinced others that there was no need for a Savior and His Atonement. When Samuel’s prophecy was finally fulfilled and there was a “day and a night and a day, as if it were one day” (Helaman 14:4), what joy must have filled the hearts of those who had believed the prophets! “It had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets” (3 Nephi 1:20). A new star appeared, according to the prophetic promise. Those who believed on the words of the prophets recognized the Savior and were blessed to follow Him.

The prophecies of Christ’s *first* coming were fulfilled “every whit.” As a result, many throughout the world believe that the Savior did come and did live in the meridian of time. But there are still many, many prophecies yet to be fulfilled! We hear living prophets prophesy and testify of Christ’s *Second* Coming. They also witness of the signs and wonders all about us, telling us that Christ will surely come again. Are we choosing to believe on their words? Or, despite their witnesses and warnings, are we “walking in darkness at noon-day” (D&C 95:6), refusing to see by the light of modern prophecy and denying that the Light of the World will return to rule and reign among us?

Finding Faith

Throughout the course of my life, I have known many good and generous people who adhere to Christian values. However, some lack faith that He lives, that He is the Savior of the world, and that His Church has been restored. Because they do not believe in the words of the prophets, they miss the joy of the gospel and its saving ordinances in their lives.

I have a dear friend who, one day in a moment of brotherly tenderness, asked, “Elder Hales, I want to

believe, I’ve always wanted to believe, but how do I do it?”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The very fact that you are reading this message, during the Christmas season or any other time of the year, means that you are hearing God’s word. The first step to finding faith in Jesus Christ is to let His word—spoken by the mouth of His servants, the prophets—touch your heart. But it is not enough merely to let those words wash over you, as if they alone could transform you. You must do your part. Hearing requires an active effort—taking seriously what is taught, considering it carefully, studying it out in our minds. As the prophet Enos learned, it means letting others’ testimonies of the gospel “[sink] deep into [our] heart[s]” (Enos 1:3). Let us review Enos’s profound, faith-building experience:

First, Enos heard the gospel truths from his father. Second, he let his father’s teachings about “eternal life, and the joy of the saints” sink deep into his heart (Enos 1:3). Third, he was filled with a desire to know for himself whether these teachings were true and where he, himself, stood before his Maker. To use Enos’s words, “my soul hungered” (Enos 1:4). By having this intense spiritual appetite, Enos qualified himself to receive the Savior’s promise: “Blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6). Fourth, Enos records, “I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens” (Enos 1:4). It wasn’t easy. Faith did not come quickly. In fact, Enos characterized his experience in prayer as a “wrestle which [he] had before God” (Enos 1:2). But faith did come. By the power of the Holy Ghost he did receive a witness for himself.

We cannot find Enos-like faith without our own wrestle before God in prayer. I testify that the reward is worth the effort. If you do these things sincerely and unceasingly, the words Christ spoke to His disciples will be fulfilled in your

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK HELMIRICH, POSED BY MODEL, DETAIL FROM ENOS 4: I DID RAISE MY VOICE THAT IT REACHED THE HEAVENS, BY WALTER RANE, COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART



We cannot find Enos-like faith without our own wrestle before God in prayer. The words Christ spoke to His disciples will be fulfilled in your life: “Ask, and it shall be given you.”

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

Gaining Strength through Faith

Once we find the beginnings of our faith in Jesus, our Heavenly Father allows for our faith to be strengthened. This occurs in many ways, including through the experience of adversity. Our faith is acquired through prayer, with a sincere desire to draw close to God and trust in Him to bear our burdens and give us answers to life’s unexplained mysteries of the purpose of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here on earth in mortality? And where are we going after our mortal sojourn on earth?

When the challenges of mortality come, and they come for all of us, it may seem hard

to keep believing. At these times, only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement can bring us peace, hope, and understanding. Only faith that He suffered for our sakes will give us the strength to endure to the end. When we gain this faith, we experience a mighty change of heart, and, like Enos, we become stronger and begin to feel a desire for the welfare of our brothers and sisters. We pray for them, that they too will be strengthened through faith on the Atonement of our Savior.

Let us consider a few of these prophetic witnesses of the effects of the Atonement in our lives. As we do, I invite you to let them sink deep into your heart and fill whatever hunger may be in your soul.

“And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father

In the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were visited by the Savior and testified, “We saw the Lord . . . and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah.”



and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, . . . that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed” (Moses 5:9).

Ammon witnessed, “Behold, I have seen my Redeemer, and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name” (Alma 19:13).

And finally, Joseph Smith—as a 14-year-old boy—exercised unwavering faith and followed James’s direction to “ask of God” (James 1:5). God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to him and gave him instructions. How glorious was this First Vision to the first prophet of this last dispensation! Sixteen years later in the Kirtland Temple, he was visited by the Savior again and testified, “We saw the Lord . . . and his

voice was the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (D&C 110:2–4).

To all those whose souls are hungering for faith, I invite you “to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written” (Ether 12:41). Let their witness that the Savior gave His life for you sink deep into your heart. Seek a witness of this truth through the Holy Ghost in prayer, and then see your faith strengthened as you joyfully meet the challenges of this mortal life and prepare for life eternal.

Jesus Christ did come. He did live. And He will come again. That is a wonderful truth to carry in our hearts at Christmas and all year long. ■



DETAIL FROM THE DESIRES OF MY HEART, BY WALTER RANE, COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART; JESUS CHRIST, APPEARS TO THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH AND OLIVER COWDERY, BY WALTER RANE, COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART

Sharing Christmas

We knew our first Christmas as Latter-day Saints would be different. But sharing is what made it extraordinary.

BY DAIANA MELINA ALBORNOZ DÍAZ

When I was 17, my mother had a sewing job for a doll factory. She worked from home, but she would go to the factory to get more to do and to turn in her work. The man she gave her sewing to had something special about him.

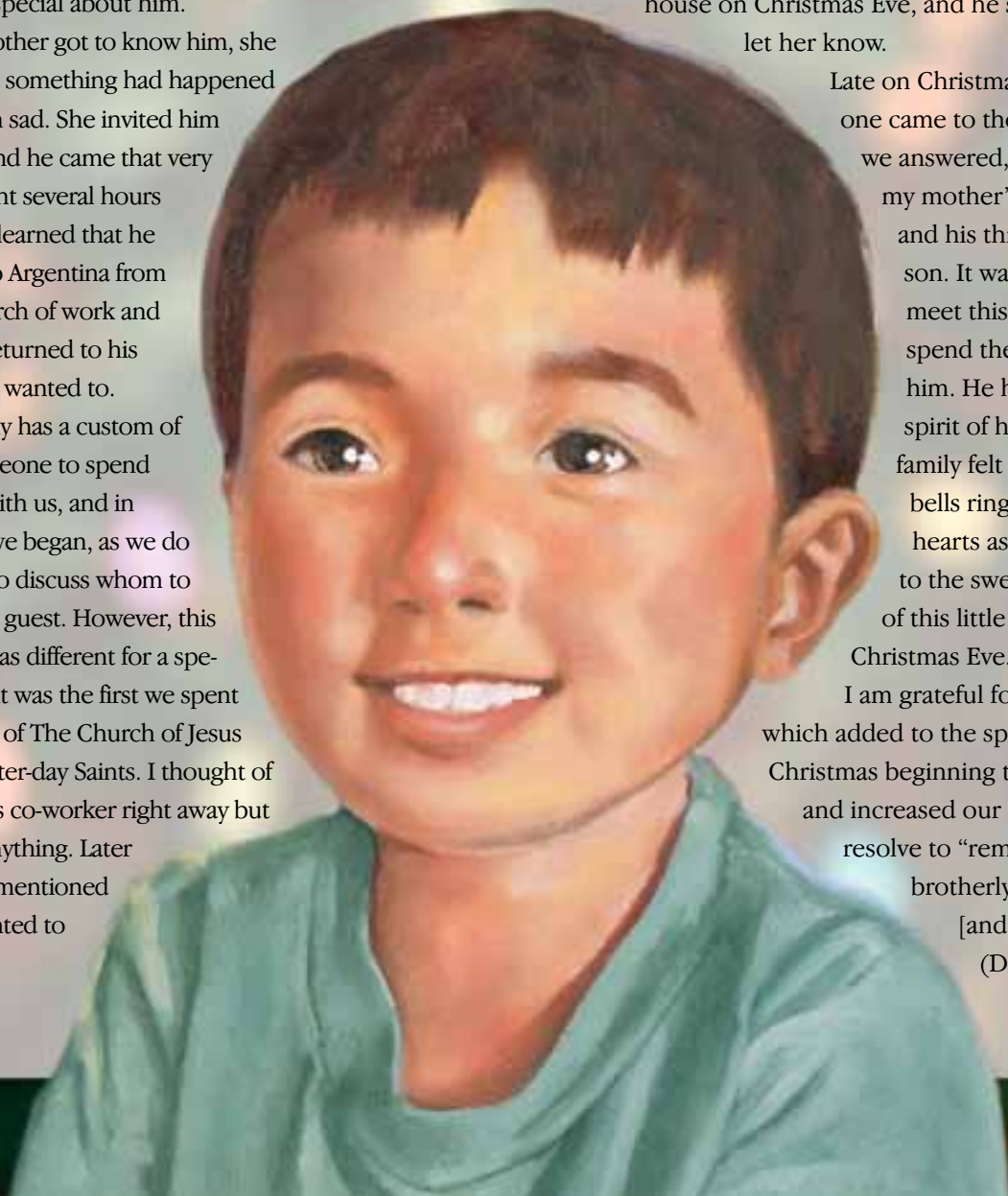
As my mother got to know him, she realized that something had happened to make him sad. She invited him to visit us, and he came that very day and spent several hours with us. We learned that he had come to Argentina from Brazil in search of work and had never returned to his home, as he wanted to.

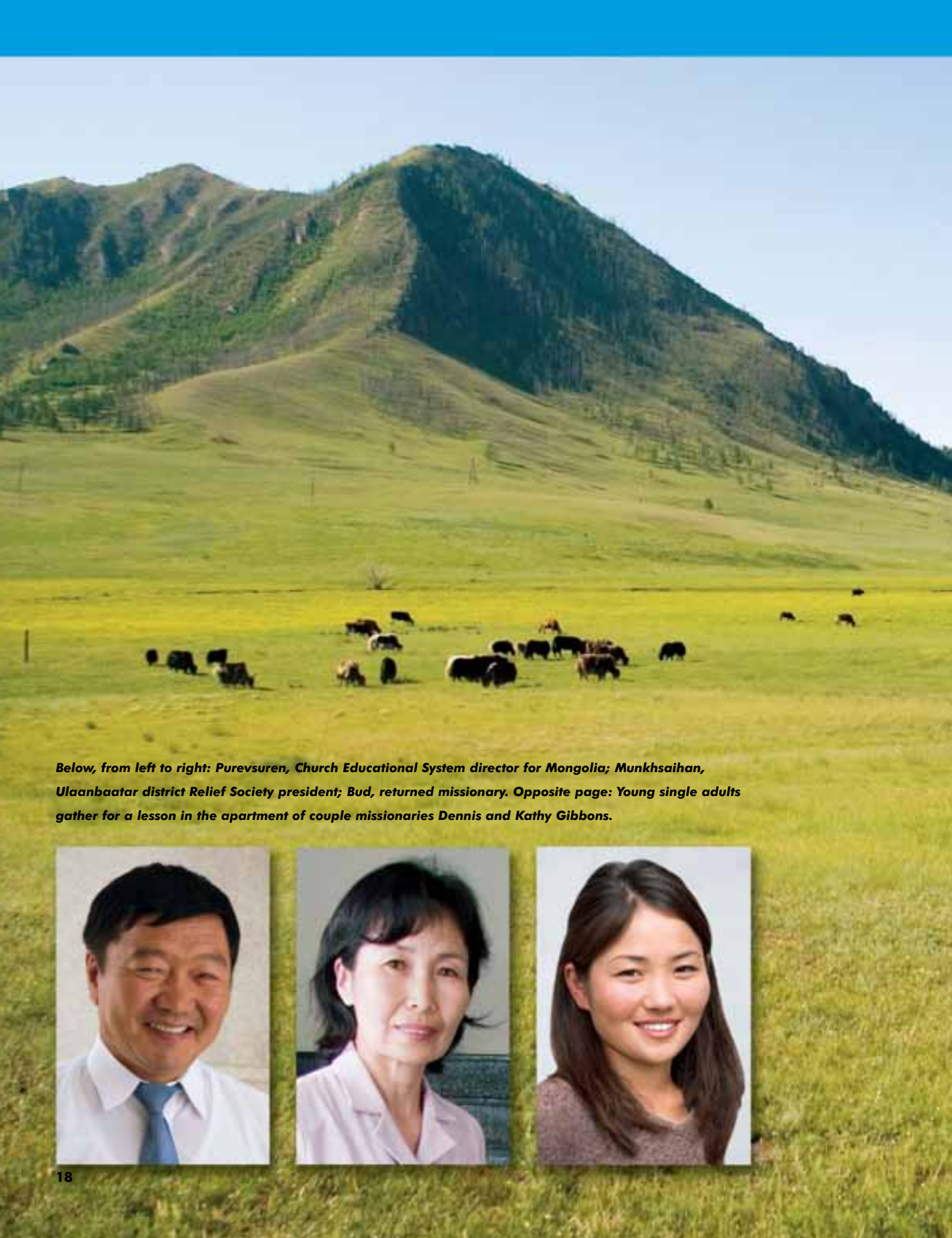
Our family has a custom of inviting someone to spend Christmas with us, and in December we began, as we do every year, to discuss whom to invite as our guest. However, this Christmas was different for a special reason; it was the first we spent as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I thought of my mother's co-worker right away but didn't say anything. Later my mother mentioned that she wanted to invite him.

The next time my mother turned in her sewing, she asked him whom he was going to spend the holidays with, and he replied that he didn't know. My mother told him how nice it would be if he would come to our house on Christmas Eve, and he said he would let her know.

Late on Christmas Eve, someone came to the door. When we answered, there stood my mother's co-worker and his three-year-old son. It was exciting to meet this little boy and spend the evening with him. He had the loving spirit of his father. Our family felt like we had bells ringing in our hearts as we listened to the sweet singing of this little boy on Christmas Eve.

I am grateful for the gospel, which added to the spirit of our Christmas beginning that year and increased our family's resolve to "remember . . . brotherly kindness [and] charity" (D&C 4:6). ■





Below, from left to right: Purevsuren, Church Educational System director for Mongolia; Munkhsaihan, Ulaanbaatar district Relief Society president; Bud, returned missionary. Opposite page: Young single adults gather for a lesson in the apartment of couple missionaries Dennis and Kathy Gibbons.



Mongolia

Steppes of Faith

The gospel is relatively new to Mongolia, but as members change themselves through faith in Jesus Christ, they are changing the world around them.

BY DON L. SEARLE
Church Magazines

Sculpted on a mountainside on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, Genghis Khan looks down on the capital of the Mongol homeland. The giant image of the great khan is a reminder that he once conquered an empire covering most of Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Eastern Europe. “In twenty-five years, the Mongol army subjugated more lands and people than the Romans had conquered in four hundred years. . . . Genghis Khan conquered more than twice as much as any other man in history.”¹ The

khan’s descendants and their influence would be dominant forces in history for centuries to come.

In July 2006, Mongolia celebrated the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Mongol Empire. Today, some might call this a “developing country,” but that term should be used in a positive sense. Energetic and creative Mongolians are rapidly developing both their country and themselves.

For some, this has included developing faith in Jesus Christ. From the 1920s until 1990, no religion was officially tolerated in Mongolia. Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in 1993. Now there are 2 districts and 20 branches in Mongolia, with more than 6,000 members. Missionaries find that many Mongolians accept the gospel readily.

Following are just a few of their stories.

Purevsuren

Sh. Purevsuren was introduced to God and Bible stories while studying at a university in the Soviet Union. (Mongolians ordinarily go by their first name, with initials of the surname in front for official purposes.) He bought a Bible from a fellow student because the book had Russian on one page and the same text in English on the facing page. Purevsuren read surreptitiously at night to learn English; reading the Bible openly would have meant expulsion.

His father had taught him Buddhist principles of honor and right, and Purevsuren had always



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DON L. SEARLE



Above: Odgerel (left), Ulaanbaatar district president; Soyolmaa, one of the first missionaries from her country; Ankhbayar, also a returned missionary. Below: A Primary leader teaches children a lesson. Opposite page, top: Adiyabold and his family in a Mongolian tent home. Opposite page, bottom: Odgerel (back row, wearing a cap) and his extended family, with members from four generations.

tried to live by those. His spiritual interest in the Bible came only after he returned to Mongolia, married, and was a university professor. In connection with his work, he visited India. A Christian he met there gave him a Bible and shared feelings about the divinity of Jesus Christ. Purevsuren remembered his father's teachings about a life following this one. "I had a fundamental belief about God from my father," he says, and he began to wonder how God would want him to prepare for the next life.

As the head of a consortium of Mongolian educators, he was invited to visit the United States, where he first saw the Book of Mormon. In Utah, a Church member who hosted the tour group gave him a copy of the book. Purevsuren read in it briefly, then put it aside.

In September 2000, his family came into contact with LDS missionaries in Mongolia and listened to the missionary discussions. This time he read the Book of Mormon with new eyes and found truth he had been seeking. He and his wife were baptized and confirmed that November. Only a week or two later, he was called as branch president.

Their children were not interested at first in this new church. Their son, then in high school, was especially resistant, but, obediently, he agreed to his father's request to listen to the missionaries. Eventually, both

children were baptized and confirmed. Their son served a mission in Idaho.

Now Purevsuren is deeply involved in teaching young people as coordinator of the Church Educational System for Mongolia, a position he was given in 2001.

There are about 600 institute students in Mongolia and some 700 in seminary. Those numbers have grown by about 300 percent since 2001, even though students often face opposition from family members, and the cost of attendance, in time and transportation, is high.

What is the most rewarding part of his job? "The best thing, I think, is seeing so many kids joining the Church through seminary" as students bring their friends.

Soyolmaa

"I was a hard kid," U. Soyolmaa says, looking back on the period in high school after her parents died. She became involved in drinking and partying while at a university in Russia. After returning to Mongolia, she was surprised when a friend from those party days invited her to visit a church. Her friend seemed so changed.

Soyolmaa was not unfamiliar with teachings of Christianity, but at first she resisted her friend's invitation. When she finally said yes, she felt excited but did not understand why. At the Church meetings, she was captivated



immediately by feelings of peace, of belonging, of knowing where her life should go. Soyolmaa joined her friend's church, and in 1995, they were the first two missionaries called from Mongolia. Soyolmaa served in Utah.

Currently, she is director of Materials Management for the Church in Mongolia. She is also public affairs director for the country, a counselor in the district Relief Society presidency, and a Gospel Doctrine teacher in her branch.

"It is a privilege to be a member of the Church," she says. "Because I am in the Church, my life keeps climbing upward."

The Church is not well-known in Mongolia, and there is more negative information available about Latter-day Saints than positive. There must be constant efforts to spread truth.

Members are the best ambassadors for the Church. They stand out, she explains, because of "that light, that happiness" seen in their faces. They feel a confidence, a joy through the gospel that many others do not have.

Like Latter-day Saints elsewhere, she says, Church members in Mongolia "have the same beliefs, so in the gospel we belong to one big family."

Odgerel

When his mother invited him to visit a Christian church in 1995, O. Odgerel did not know she was already a member. Working at a public library, she was in charge of renting out its assembly room. Drawn by singing she heard from that room one day, she was invited to join the meeting. Later, she listened to the missionary discussions and was baptized and confirmed.



Odgerel had been born in Russia while his parents were students there and had been educated in Soviet socialism; it was almost his religion. But when the Soviet Union fell apart, what he had believed in was gone. He turned to drinking and partying, thinking the only purpose in life was to enjoy oneself before dying. He soon realized, however, that this lifestyle was a dead end and he ought to abstain from things that he could see were harming him.

Like many other Mongolians, he found it easy to accept the Book of Mormon when he read it. "Mongolian people may receive the gospel really quickly because they can see the good things in it easily," Odgerel says. They "open their hearts to it very sincerely." So it was with him. He had felt there was a Supreme Being. Through the gospel, he found a God and a way of life he could believe in. "That was my happiest moment," he says.

Mongolian society could benefit from the reshaping that the gospel brings to people's lives, he says. Drinking is a problem; so too is immorality. In Mongolia, there is only the worldly model, now strongly reinforced via television, to shape behavior. There is no strong religious tradition in the country to work against it. But through the gospel of Jesus Christ, Odgerel says, people find a righteous way to direct their lives.

Odgerel is president of the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia District, which has 11 branches and some 3,700 members. About 70 percent of the members are single.

Ankhubayar

From 2001 to 2003, E. Ankhubayar served in the Utah Salt Lake City South Mission. Now in his mid-20s, he is the young single adult leader in the Ulaanbaatar district.

He spoke no English when he received his mission call; two American missionaries read the letter to him. Now he



manages the one-room distribution center in the Church offices in Ulaanbaatar, helping members obtain gospel materials available in Mongolian and materials in English for those who can use them. He says that as a missionary, he helped people learn about the gospel, and he is still doing the same.

Ankhubayar came into the Church in 1998 with the rest of his family—parents and younger brother. While his family was attending a Church meeting, he had two dreams that influenced him. In both he was fleeing from certain destruction when a bright, shining personage saved him. Ankhubayar’s parents told him later that this personage was undoubtedly the Savior and invited him to pray about the meaning of his dream. The answer he received led him to listen to the gospel.

Before they joined the Church, “my family was not close,” he says. Now “we talk to each other. I can feel my mother and father’s love.” In the mission field, Ankhubayar felt like Church members were family. He works now to share the gospel with friends so they too can enjoy this feeling.

One person with whom he has shared the gospel is his girlfriend, who was baptized and confirmed. If they should marry, they would face the dilemma many young Mongolian couples struggle with: where to live. Housing is scarce, and the cost is too high for many young marrieds. They may end up living with parents in a small apartment or perhaps in the traditional *ger*, the circular, one-room tentlike home of the Mongol nomads.

Majigsuren

Since missionaries in Mongolia are not allowed to proselytize, their contacts come through inquiries or referrals. When Mongolians find the gospel, the first people they refer to the missionaries are usually loved ones, so branches often include members of extended families.

Z. Majigsuren lives in a small apartment in Darkhan, Mongolia, with her husband, two teenage daughters, and several members of her extended family: Her daughter and son-in-law and their young daughter also live there. So too does a son with his wife and their baby.

Majigsuren’s son-in-law, A. Soronzonbold, is president of the Darkhan district. Her son, Kh. Sergelen, is first counselor in the presidency of the Darkhan Second Branch. And Majigsuren is first counselor in the branch Relief Society presidency.

Missionaries first came to Darkhan in 1996, and she was baptized and confirmed in 1997, one of the pioneer members in the city.

“I am very grateful that all of my children are members of the Church,” she says. Majigsuren remembers the fruit of the tree of life that Lehi saw in vision (see 1 Nephi 8). “I wanted to partake of that fruit and return to my Heavenly Father.” She wanted her children to partake also. She is grateful that two of them have now been sealed to their spouses in the Hong Kong China Temple: her daughter, K. Selenge, who is married to Soronzonbold, and Sergelen with his wife, T. Altantuya.

Members, she says, “need to come to church, they need to pray, and they need to keep the faith. The most important is faith,” because without that, they will not do the others.

Her son, Sergelen, became interested in the Church because he could see how his mother and sister had changed as a result of becoming members. He had listened as a senior missionary couple taught the story of Lehi to his mother, and he had realized that she too was trying to lead her children in doing right.

Like many Mongolian members, Sergelen says, “I love to read the Book of Mormon because each time I read I discover new things.” The story of Captain Moroni is a favorite. He is also moved by Jacob 6:11–12, calling on all to “repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate.”





“I’m so grateful I had the opportunity to serve a mission in Russia,” Sergelen says. He did not baptize many people, but he believes seeds were planted that will blossom in the future. Since 1993, more than 530 young people from Mongolia have served missions. More than 300 served in the United States, and a significant number served in Russia.

Sergelen’s brother-in-law, Soronzonbold, has been a member of the Church since he was 18, and now, in his mid-20s, serves as president of the Darkhan district, with its five branches. He is a university student. “I am grateful for my calling in the Church because I learn so much from it,” he says.

Mongolians are impressed, Soronzonbold explains, because members serve in the Church without pay.

“Before I became a member, I was very selfish,” he says. Now he has a goal of learning as much as he can about the gospel. “Our challenge is to learn and to share.”

Munkhsaihan

Before she found the gospel, A. Munkhsaihan saw the world as a dark place with little hope. Finding faith and hope through the gospel changed the world for her.

In the years before 1990, she taught Russian. But when the political and cultural climate of Mongolia changed, she found that she needed to learn English so she could teach it.

Munkhsaihan studied English for a year with Latter-day Saint missionaries. Before listening to the missionary discussions, she determined that she would examine their faith carefully. She found their religion was more than a faith based on true principles—it was a way of life. She was baptized and confirmed in June 2000, and the rest of her family joined the Church a month later. Now she sees the world as a much brighter place for her, her children, and her grandchildren. Currently, she serves as president of the Relief Society in the Ulaanbaatar district.

After the gospel changed her own life, Munkhsaihan wondered what would happen if she applied its principles in her work as a teacher. She began trying consciously to love all her students—and with some that was difficult. She began to pray for her students. Interestingly, she found *herself* changing; she developed a greater capacity to love them. Even though the students did not know she was praying for them, their attitudes toward her changed as well.

“As we exercise faith in the gospel, we can change ourselves,” she says.

And this, her experience suggests, is how the gospel may change Mongolia. As members change themselves through faith in Jesus Christ, they will change the world around them. ■

NOTE

1. Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (2004), xviii.

Above, from left: Two Mongolian returned missionaries begin married life together. Majigsuren, a pioneer member in Darkhan. Tuvshinjargal, Ulaanbaatar district Primary president, and her daughter Anudari.

Below: Likeness of Genghis Khan sculpted on a mountainside.

Opposite page: Horsemen represent Mongol troops in the annual Naadam celebration.



រីករាយបូណ្យល្អ វៃអង្គ * MAAYONG PASKO * メリークリスマス * GLÆDELIG JUL
 ZALIG KERSTFEEST * MERRY CHRISTMAS * MALIGAYANG PASKO
 JOYEUX NOËL * 聖誕快樂 * FRÖHE WEIHNACHTEN * GOD JUL
 ХРИСТИЙН МЭНДЭЛСНИЙ БАЯРЫН МЭНД ХҮРГЭЕ * BUON NATALE
 GOD JUL * 메리 크리스마스 * FELIZ NATAL * СЧАСТЛИВОГО РОЖДЕСТВА
 MANUIA LE KERISIMASI * FELIZ NAVIDAD * HYVÄÄ JOULUA
 KILISIMASI FIEFIA * ពុទ្ធពិញ្ញាណកិច្ចសម្រាប់ * ВЕСЕЛОГО РІЗДВА * FELIZ NATAL
 MAAYONG PASKO * GLÆDELIG JUL * メリークリスマス * រីករាយបូណ្យល្អ វៃអង្គ
 ZALIG KERSTFEEST * MERRY CHRISTMAS * MALIGAYANG PASKO * GOD JUL
 JOYEUX NOËL * 聖誕快樂 * FRÖHE WEIHNACHTEN * BUON NATALE
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 KILISIMASI FIEFIA * ពុទ្ធពិញ្ញាណកិច្ចសម្រាប់ * ВЕСЕЛОГО РІЗДВА * FELIZ NATAL
 MAAYONG PASKO * GLÆDELIG JUL * メリークリスマス * រីករាយបូណ្យល្អ វៃអង្គ
 ZALIG KERSTFEEST * MERRY CHRISTMAS * MALIGAYANG PASKO * GOD JUL
 JOYEUX NOËL * 聖誕快樂 * FRÖHE WEIHNACHTEN * BUON NATALE
 ХРИСТИЙН МЭНДЭЛСНИЙ БАЯРЫН МЭНД ХҮРГЭЕ * РОЖДЕСТВА
 MANUIA LE KERISIMASI * FELIZ NAVIDAD * HYVÄÄ JOULUA
 KILISIMASI FIEFIA * ពុទ្ធពិញ្ញាណកិច្ចសម្រាប់ * ВЕСЕЛОГО РІЗДВА * FELIZ NATAL
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JOY TO THE WORLD

Become an Instrument in the Hands of God by Exercising Charity



Prayerfully select and read from this message the scriptures and teachings that meet

the needs of the sisters you visit. Share your experiences and testimony. Invite those you teach to do the same.

What Is Charity?

President Howard W. Hunter

(1907–95): “‘A new commandment I give unto you,’ [the Savior] said, ‘That ye love one another; . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.’ (John 13:34–35.) This love that we should have for our brothers and sisters in the human family, and that Christ has for every one of us, is called charity or ‘the pure love of Christ.’ (Moro. 7:47.) It is the love that prompted the suffering and sacrifice of Christ’s atonement. It is the highest pinnacle the human soul can reach and the deepest expression of the human heart. . . .

“The Savior has commanded us to love one another as he has loved us; to clothe ourselves ‘with the bond of charity’ (D&C 88:125), as he so clothed himself. We are called upon to purify our inner feelings, to change our hearts, to make our outward actions and appearance conform to what we say we believe. . . .

“Those who are filled with the love of Christ do not seek to force others to do better; they inspire others to do better, indeed inspire them to the pursuit of God. We need to extend the hand of friendship. We need to be kinder, more gentle, more forgiving, and slower to anger” (“A More Excellent Way,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 61–63).

How Can Charity Help Me Be an Instrument in the Hands of God?

Ether 12:28: “Faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness.”

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve

Apostles: “Once we see through the eye of faith that we are children of a loving Father who has given us the gift of His Son to redeem us, we experience a mighty change in our hearts. We feel ‘to sing the song of redeeming love’ [Alma 5:26], and our hearts overflow with charity. Knowing that the

love of God ‘is the most desirable of all things . . . and the most joyous to the soul’ [1 Nephi 11:22–23], we want to share our joy with others. We want to serve them and bless them” (“Cultivating Divine Attributes,” *Liabona*, Jan. 1999, 31; *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 27).

Anne C. Pingree, former second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency: “We can alter the face of the earth *one family and one home at a time* through charity, our small and simple acts of pure love.

“Charity, the Savior’s pure love, is the ‘highest, noblest, strongest kind of love,’ which we ‘pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart’ to possess. Elder Dallin H. Oaks teaches us that charity ‘is not an *act* but a *condition* or state of being [one becomes].’ Our day-to-day offer-

ings of charity are ‘written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; . . . in [the] fleshy tables of [our] heart[s].’ Little by little our charitable acts change our natures, define our characters, and ultimately make us women with the courage and commitment to say to the Lord, ‘Here am I; send me’” (“Charity: One Family, One Home at a Time,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 108–9). ■



There Shall Be a Record Kept among You

Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy, the current Church historian and recorder, recently talked with Church magazines about the past, present, and future of this important office.

Why are Latter-day Saints taught that it is important to keep records and to gather and preserve Church history?



Elder Marlin K. Jensen: The scriptures, especially the

Book of Mormon, make clear that “remembering” is a fundamental and saving principle of the gospel. We keep records to help us remember. Remembering the past gives us needed perspective as God’s children to have faith in our future destiny and thus to live more faithfully in the present.

On April 6, 1830, the day the Church was organized, the Lord commanded the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). This is the revelation upon which the office of Church historian and recorder is based.

On that day the Prophet learned how important it is to the Lord for a history of the Church to be kept, and he soon called Oliver Cowdery to be the first Church historian and recorder. In the beginning Oliver recorded minutes of meetings, patriarchal blessings, membership information, and certificates of priesthood authority. He also began what might be called a narrative history of the Church.

Record keeping began with a commandment from God and continues to the present day.

What does the calling of Church historian and recorder entail?

Elder Jensen: The work of the Church historian and recorder is largely one of record keeping. It includes the gathering and preserving of Church history sources, the

recording of ordinances, and the collection of minutes. The scriptures also suggest there is a responsibility to ensure the records are used “for the good of the church, and for the rising generations” (D&C 69:8).

The roles of historian and recorder are complementary and at times almost indistinguishable. I think that’s why, in the early days of the Church, sometimes a recorder was appointed and sometimes a historian and why over time the roles were joined together in one calling.

What is the purpose of recording and teaching Church history?

Elder Jensen: The primary purpose of Church history is to help Church members build faith in Jesus Christ and keep their sacred covenants. In fulfilling this purpose, we are guided by three main considerations:

First, we seek to bear witness of and defend the foundational truths of the Restoration.

Second, we desire to help Church members remember the great things God has done for His children.





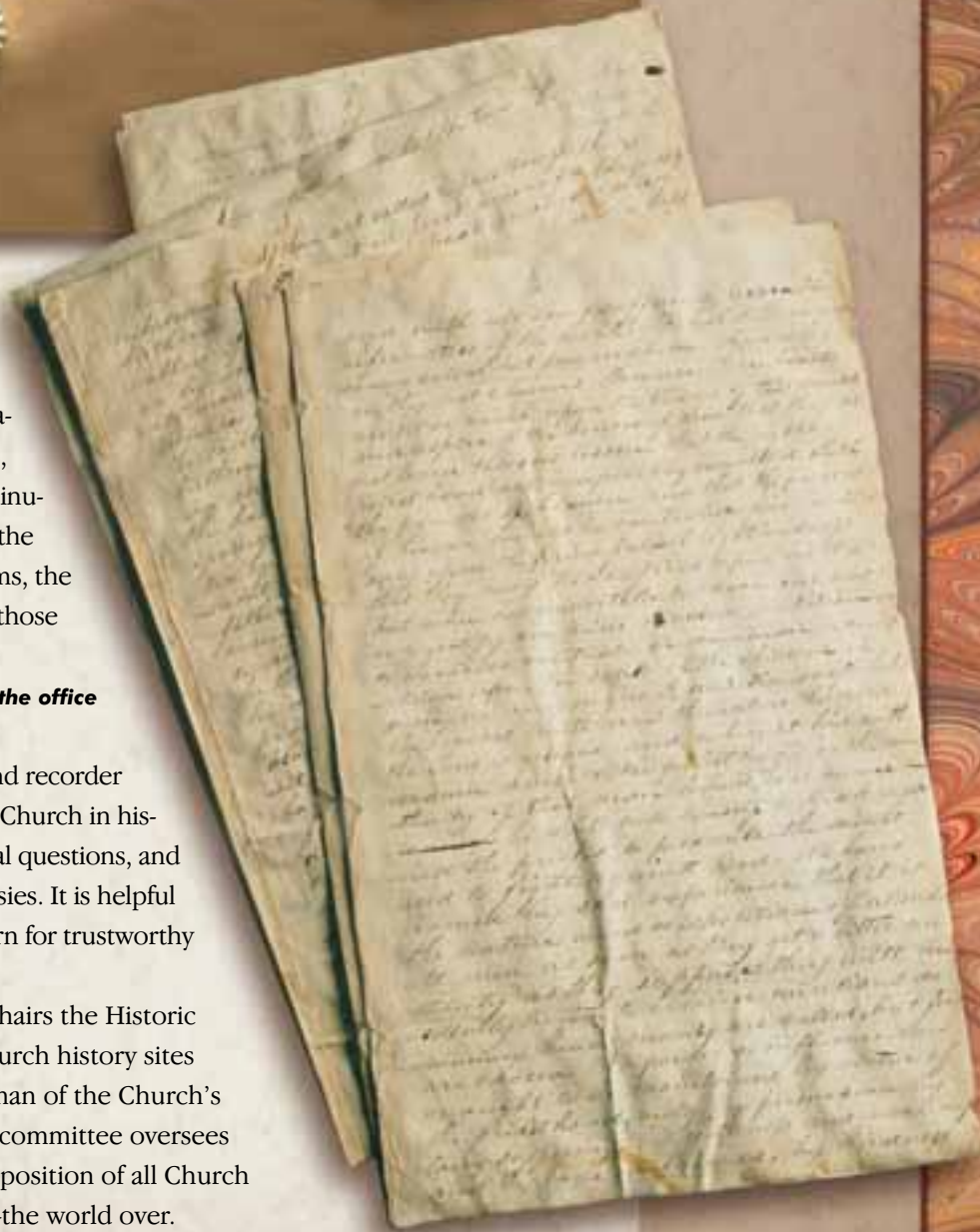
Opposite page: Oliver Cowdery served as the first Church recorder. Below: Pages of this Joseph Smith journal show the revelation that became Doctrine and Covenants 121.

Third, we have a scriptural charge to help preserve the revealed order of the kingdom of God. This includes the revelations, documents, procedures, processes, and patterns that provide order and continuity for the exercising of priesthood keys, the proper functioning of priesthood quorums, the performance of ordinances, and so on—those things that are essential to salvation.

How else does the Church benefit from the office of Church historian and recorder?

Elder Jensen: The Church historian and recorder can provide an authoritative voice of the Church in historical matters. There are always historical questions, and sometimes there are historical controversies. It is helpful to have an office to which anyone can turn for trustworthy answers.

The Church historian and recorder chairs the Historic Sites Committee, which administers Church history sites and landmarks. He also serves as chairman of the Church's Records Management Committee. This committee oversees the creation, management, and final disposition of all Church records—ecclesiastical and corporate—the world over.



OLIVER COWDERY WRITING WITH A FEATHER PEN, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT; PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRAIG DIMOND AND JED CLARK; BORDER © ARTBEATS

LEARN MORE ABOUT CHURCH HISTORY

The Internet makes Church history more accessible than ever. Following are some of the resources available in English on the Church history Web site at www.lds.org/churchhistory:

- Joseph Smith Web Site, which reviews the life and mission of the Prophet. It features historical photographs and documents.
- Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868, which is a searchable database of individuals and companies traveling west to Utah.
- Historic Sites, which shows the location, pictures, and brief history of major Church sites.
- Museum of Church History and Art, which shows art and artifacts that document the history of the Church and its members.



Among the most essential and sacred records are those evidencing the performance of temple ordinances. They are preserved as a part of what I feel is that book “which shall be worthy of all acceptance” (D&C 128:24). Members can have confidence that all records, including those of their temple ordinances, are safe.

How is the Church using technology to carry forth the work of the historian’s office?

Elder Jensen: I work with the Family and Church History Department, which collects and preserves the essential materials of Church history. We are developing a technology plan that will better enable us to collect, preserve, and make Church history available for a global Church membership. Obviously the Internet will play an increasingly important role in what we do.

The books, documents, artifacts, historic sites, and pictures that we have collected through the years constitute in a sense the “crown jewels” of the Church’s history. We feel an obligation to share these in approved and appropriate ways with members everywhere. Viewing a page from the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon on the Internet or taking a virtual tour of the upper room of the Smith family cabin where Moroni appeared to young Joseph Smith are experiences that will connect members to our past in faith-promoting ways.

Technology will also better enable us to train and assist local leaders, clerks, and others who are responsible for the compilation of annual histories for stakes, wards, and missions. With the help of technology, historical information will flow more easily to and from Church headquarters.

How can the history of the Church become a heritage for all of us, whether we are new members or have been in the Church for generations?

Elder Jensen: Someone once said that a people can be no greater than its stories. The history of the Church begins with the compelling account of Joseph Smith and his search for the true Church. When we believe Joseph’s account, we become part of a great body of believers whose lives change by embracing the restored gospel.



This experience becomes a very important part of our common Latter-day Saint heritage. It also helps explain why the history of the Church's beginnings is so critical to the Church's existence and continued growth and vitality.

There are other great stories in our history that deserve to be known and taught at church and at home. The lessons of Kirtland, the trials of Missouri, the triumphs and eventual expulsion of the Saints from Nauvoo, and the westward trek of the pioneers are stories that inspire Latter-day Saints in every land and language. But there are equally moving stories about

the rise and progress of the Church and the impact of the gospel in the lives of ordinary members in every nation touched by the restored gospel. These need recording and preserving as well.

The relationship between Church and family history is also worth considering. Usually a study of one will lead to a study of the other. Many of the Church's greatest stories are contained in personal and family histories, and these are a part of our individual and family heritages.

Finally, we need to remember that acquiring a heritage of Church history requires more than simply reading a history book. It includes visiting a historic site, visiting a



In the mountains south of Salt Lake City, the Granite Mountain Records Vault houses microfilm copies of much of our Church and family history. Inset: An architect's rendering of the new Church History Library, to be completed in the summer of 2009.

PHOTOGRAPH OF GRANITE MOUNTAIN RECORDS VAULT BY ELDON K. LINSCHOTEN

As today, ancient prophets, like Nephi, kept a record of their history. Bottom: A replica of the Book of Mormon plates.

museum to view historical artifacts, attending a family reunion, or keeping a personal journal. The key is for everyone to have personal involvement of some type with the past.

What do you think has been most meaningful to you personally about serving as Church historian and recorder?

Elder Jensen: I have come to realize that the scriptures contain sacred history. When the prophets wrote to us, they wove sermons and teachings into their historical narratives. For example, the Book of Mormon begins with the story of Lehi and his family. It is scripture, but it is also a narrative history. The Book of Mormon represents the finest type of historical writing we have. It is also

the best example of the connection between history and doctrine. I've come to understand and appreciate the power of scripture and history working together.

I have gained a testimony that all things are present before God—past, present, and future. That really harmonizes with the scriptural definition of truth, which is “knowledge of things as they are, as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24). We live in the present. We can't see the future, but the past is available for us to see—if it has been preserved. Our past can give us a perspective and a foundation that we really can't get in any other way. Whether it is the history of our grandfather or the



history of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the history of the trials of the Latter-day Saint pioneers during the early days of the Church or the history of Latter-day Saint servicemen during World War II—lessons from the past help us cope with our present and give us hope for our future.

I have come to appreciate the Prophet Joseph Smith more than ever before because of his monumental accomplishments as the founding prophet of this dispensation.

Of all the things I've come to treasure, I think the most important is the conviction that if we're honest in heart and desire to know God, we can come to know Him and feel accountable to Him. We have the example of the Prophet Joseph Smith to thank for that. He modeled it, he taught it, and he held out the promise that we can come to know Christ also. That's priceless to me. ■



A CURRENT PROJECT OF INTEREST

Joseph Smith Papers

Elder Jensen: I think the most significant project we are working on right now is the Joseph Smith Papers Project. This is a monumental multiyear effort to gather the documents that the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, caused to be written, or received, as well as the sermons he delivered, the correspondence that came to him, the legal matters in which he was involved, and revelations he received. We plan to publish those papers in a series of volumes.

The Joseph Smith Journals

The Prophet Joseph's seven journals are among the most important records that help us understand him and the development of the Church during his life.

BY MARK ASHURST-McGEE AND ALEX SMITH

Editors of volumes in the Journals Series in the forthcoming *Joseph Smith Papers*, a multivolume work in progress at the Family and Church History Department. Over the next several years, it will publish all of Joseph Smith's letters, journals, histories, revelations, and other documents.

The Prophet Joseph Smith purchased his first journal on November 27, 1832—possibly in response to a revelation he received the same day concerning the necessity of Church record keeping (see D&C 85:1–5). It was a small pocketbook of 104 pages that he called a “Book for Record.”

The first words he wrote express his sincere intention “to keep a minute account of all things that [came] under [his] observation.” Joseph Smith, however, was more comfortable with the spoken word and expressed his frustration with the limitations of writing.¹ As a result, there were periods of effective journal keeping, but there were also gaps when months and even years went by in silence. Still, he returned again and again to journal keeping, or he arranged for others to carry on in his stead. Eventually, with the help of the faithful and dependable scribe Elder Willard Richards, the Prophet succeeded in establishing a method of steady journal keeping.

The series of journals produced by and for the Prophet contain several of the earliest existing copies of his revelations, and they provide the only detailed accounts of several

of his sermons. They are some of the most important records for understanding Joseph Smith and the development of the Church during his lifetime.

Following is a brief description of each of the Prophet's seven journals and information about several of the scribes who helped him keep them.

First Ohio Journal: 1832–34

The Prophet Joseph faithfully kept this first journal every day for nine days, then stopped for almost 10 months. He resumed in October 1833, when he left home on a proselytizing mission to Upper Canada. The entries during this mission are a rich source of insight into his sincerity and the spiritual and emotional dimensions of his personality. For example, Joseph recorded for October 12: “I feel very well in my mind. The Lord is with us, but [I] have much anxiety about my family.” Later that day he received a revelation assuring Sidney Rigdon and him of their families' well-being (see D&C 100:1). On his return to Kirtland, Ohio, on November 4, 1833, Joseph dictated a journal entry to Oliver Cowdery, the second elder of the Church: “Found my family all well according to the promise of the Lord, for which blessings I feel to thank his holy name.”

Before long, he turned to other scribes for help. In addition to using Oliver Cowdery as a scribe, the Prophet called upon Elders Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, his counselors in the First Presidency. In March 1834, while on another mission, Joseph Smith asked his traveling companion, Elder Parley P. Pratt, to help him keep the journal.



Not all of the entries appear in chronological order. On several occasions, Joseph backtracked to record an earlier event. He also used the journal to keep financial records and other miscellaneous notes, which are interspersed throughout the book.

The journal's most consistent entries are between late February and April of 1834, when the Prophet was recruiting help and raising funds for the expedition to relieve the Latter-day Saints who had been driven from their homes in Jackson County, Missouri.

Above: The first page of Joseph Smith's first Ohio journal. Inset: The front cover of this journal, bearing the Prophet's signature. Map: The Prophet's first and second journals were written in Kirtland, Ohio. His third and fourth were written in Far West, Missouri. His fifth, sixth, and seventh journals were written in Nauvoo, Illinois.



The Prophet's second Ohio journal (above) contains a historical account of Joseph Smith's First Vision (depicted below), and it records the conferral of priesthood keys by Moses, Elias, and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836 (opposite page).

Second Ohio Journal: 1835–36

The Prophet's second journal was a medium-sized ledger of 220 pages called a "Sketch Book." It contains Joseph's activities in and around Kirtland from late September 1835 to early April 1836. Joseph and Oliver began the record and then quickly turned it over to Frederick G. Williams. Soon afterward, the Prophet asked Warren Parrish to serve as a full-time scribe. Although Warren wrote most of the journal, Joseph Smith dictated much of it to him. The dictated entries are generally much longer than the entries Joseph wrote himself. And, while somewhat less personal, the dictated entries still bear the marks of Joseph Smith's style. The entries recorded by Warren Parrish and other scribes account for every day of the period covered by the journal.

This second journal contains an account of Joseph's First Vision, where God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph in a grove of trees near his home. It also tells of the angel Moroni's appearances to Joseph Smith in 1823. The journal records the Prophet's early efforts to translate the book of Abraham. Of particular theological significance is the January 21, 1836, vision of the celestial kingdom of heaven and the revelation that "all who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God" (D&C 137:7)—foreshadowing the doctrine of redeeming the dead through vicarious ordinances.

The focus of the journal, however, is the preparation for the special solemn assembly held three days after the dedication of the

Kirtland Temple. In the solemn assembly, Church officers would be "endowed with power from on high" (D&C 105:11) to preach the gospel throughout the earth. Hence, the priesthood officers needed to be prepared. The journal reports the several councils and private meetings held to achieve harmony and work out personal differences among the brethren.

The Prophet spent a great amount of time reorganizing priesthood quorums and councils so they would be properly organized for the solemn assembly. He insisted that the brethren be trained in the School of the Elders and in the associated Hebrew school. The journal tells of Joseph's enthusiastic and dedicated study of the Hebrew language during this time. It traces the Prophet's efforts in these endeavors and concludes by describing the dedication of the temple, the solemn assembly, and the Sunday meeting of April 3, 1836. On this Easter morning, the resurrected Christ appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Elder Oliver Cowdery. Moses, Elias, and Elijah then appeared and



LEFT: STILL IMAGE FROM THE RESTORATION; RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REIER TAKEN ON THE SET OF JOSEPH SMITH: THE PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION



conferred priesthood keys on the Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery. This entry is now found in *Doctrine and Covenants* 110.

First Missouri Journal: March–September 1838

Joseph Smith's first Missouri journal is recorded on 69 pages of a large ledger. In this and the remaining journals, Joseph assigned his scribes to observe his activities and record them on their own. Although Joseph Smith's personal involvement was diminished, the perspectives of the scribes do provide different vantage points on the Prophet's life that we would not otherwise have.

This journal begins with a brief retrospective account, apparently dictated by Joseph Smith, of his arrival in the Latter-day Saint community of Far West in Caldwell County, Missouri. He had just fled the dangerous environment of apostasy and legal harassment in Kirtland following the financial collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society.

The entries that follow, however, are letters, revelations, and other documents copied into the journal with little or no connecting narrative. The journal was titled "The Scriptorium Book," apparently to indicate that it was a repository for various "scripts," or written texts.² Most of the letters and other items recorded in April 1838 document the events leading up to the excommunications of Church leaders Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.

Except for one revelation, the journal was written by the Church's general clerk and recorder, George Robinson. When Brother Robinson's documentary record was finished, he began writing contemporary journal entries. By this point Brother Robinson had been appointed a scribe

to the First Presidency, and the journal focuses not only on the Prophet but also on his counselors—Sidney Rigdon and Hyrum Smith.

Between April and June 1838, Brother Robinson regularly kept the journal and recorded the First Presidency's efforts to plan the Latter-day Saint community of Adam-ondi-Ahman in neighboring Daviess County. Brother Robinson also recorded a number of the Prophet's revelations, including the revelation on tithing (see D&C 119).

Entries are consistent and detailed from late July to early September. These entries document the beginning of violent persecution of the Saints in northwestern Missouri. On September 2, 1838, George Robinson described the atmosphere in the area: "This looks a little too much like mobocracy; it foretells some evil intentions; the whole upper Missouri is all in an uproar and confusion." At the close of the journal, Latter-day Saints in Far West and other parts of Caldwell County, Missouri, began heading north to protect those in Daviess County from vigilantes.

Second Missouri Journal: September–October 1838

Scribe James Mulholland was one of many boarders in the Prophet's home over the years. He kept the Prophet's second Missouri journal in three pages of a handmade pamphlet. The entries cover only one month—from early September to early October. The journal, titled "Memorandum Etcetera," consists of brief notes regarding Joseph Smith's comings and goings, often tracking these movements to within the half hour. Written during a time of increasing conflict in Missouri, the journal may have been commissioned by the Prophet to provide a record that could be used in a court of law to document his daily whereabouts.

James Mulholland was not privy to the Prophet's intentions and activities, as was First Presidency scribe George Robinson. The last entry, dated October 5, 1838, concludes with "Did not see him all the afternoon; understood that he went from home." In fact, Joseph Smith had gone to De Witt, Missouri, to help the Saints who had been besieged by vigilantes.

Below: The Prophet's first Illinois journal was a 15-page handmade "Minute Book," shown here with a replica of a handmade quill pen.

First Illinois Journal: 1839

After a grueling confinement throughout the winter in Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph and his fellow Latter-day Saint prisoners were granted a change of venue for trial. Apparently to spare the state from the publicity of a trial, the guards allowed their prisoners to escape while en route to the new venue. They crossed the Mississippi River into Illinois on April 22, 1839, where they joined the Saints from Missouri, who had received a sympathetic reception from the citizens of Quincy, Illinois. That same day the Prophet hired James Mulholland to again keep a journal for him. From April to October 1839, Brother Mulholland recorded the Prophet's activities in 15 pages of a handmade pamphlet titled "Minute Book."

The journal traces the Prophet's efforts once again to gather the Saints and to build the kingdom of God. He purchased land upriver at Commerce, Illinois, and instructed the Saints to move there. Though the area was plagued with malaria-carrying mosquitoes, the Saints began draining the swampy lowlands and transforming Commerce into a beautiful city, which they later renamed Nauvoo.

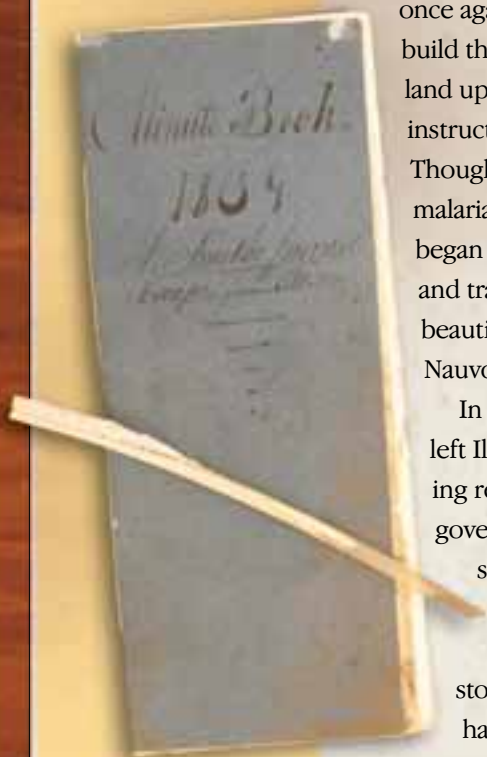
In late October 1839, Joseph Smith left Illinois for Washington, D.C., seeking relief and redress from the federal government for the deprivations suffered by Latter-day Saints in Missouri. Two weeks before Joseph left, James Mulholland stopped keeping the journal. He may have stopped because he, like many others, had fallen ill, probably with malaria. He died while the Prophet was away.

Second Illinois Journal: 1841–42

In December 1841, a few months after his return from missionary service in England, Elder Willard Richards began the longest and most consistent journal of the Prophet's life. This and the succeeding Illinois journal contain entries for virtually every day from mid-December 1841 until the Prophet's death in June 1844. Elder Richards began this journal in a large ledger titled "The Book of the Law of the Lord." This record appears to have been created to fulfill the injunction to "keep a history, and a general church record of all things that transpire in Zion, and of all those who consecrate properties" (D&C 85:1). Transcripts of several revelations precede the 89 pages of journal entries, which are interspersed in a record of numerous donations to the Church.

This journal describes many significant events in the Prophet's life such as the creation of the Relief Society and construction of the Nauvoo Temple. The entries describe Joseph's activities as President of the Church, mayor of the city, storekeeper, chief justice, newspaper editor, commanding officer of the Nauvoo Legion, and other positions. The journal entries also contain revelations, a record of court cases, and correspondence with Joseph's wife, Emma, and others.

In June 1842, when Willard Richards departed for Massachusetts to move his family to Nauvoo, he transferred this journal to William Clayton. With periodic help from Eliza R. Snow and an unidentified scribe, Brother Clayton kept the remainder of the journal and donation record. The events of December 20, 1842, were the last entries recorded.





Above: The third Illinois journal is a four-volume set for which Elder Willard Richards acted as scribe. The desk and document box shown here are believed to have come from the Smith family home in Nauvoo. **Inset:** This journal entry of April 6, 1843, records the opening day of a Church conference in Nauvoo.

Third Illinois Journal: 1842–44

Though half of the pages were still blank in the previous journal, a new journal, titled “President Joseph Smith’s Journal,” was started beginning on December 21, 1842, with Willard Richards again acting as scribe. This effort would eventually result in a four-volume, 1,045-page journal. It contains almost daily entries until June 22, 1844—just five days before the Prophet and his brother Hyrum were murdered.

The journal entries bear the stamp of their scribe, Elder Richards, but they capture the Prophet’s personality and character in ways that Joseph likely would not have written about himself. The entries range from lighthearted anecdotes to detailed accounts of legal cases over which Joseph Smith presided in the courts of Nauvoo. This wide scope of information helps us better understand the Prophet Joseph Smith. Some entries even provide insight into what he expected of the record keeping in his journal. For instance, on March 4, 1843, the Prophet told Elder Richards, “There

is one thing you fail in as historian—the naming or noticing surrounding objects, weather, etc.” Joseph’s review of this journal, though infrequent, demonstrates the importance he attached to providing historical context to the events of his life and the early Church.

Although the Prophet’s efforts to keep a record of his personal and ecclesiastical life waxed and waned, he eventually succeeded, with the help of others, in keeping a regular record of his doings. His journals serve not only as the basis for early Church history but as an example to us of the importance a record of our own life can have in the lives of our descendants. ■

Spelling and punctuation modernized in all journal quotations; the journals are in possession of the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.

NOTES

1. See, for example, letter from Joseph Smith, Greenville, Indiana, to Emma Smith, Kirtland, Ohio, June 6, 1832, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois; letter from Joseph Smith, Kirtland, Ohio, to William W. Phelps, Independence, Missouri, Nov. 27, 1832, in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, pages 1–4, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. See Noah Webster, ed., *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1845), “scriptory,” 731.



A Prophet

BY JADE SWARTZBERG

To my dad it came as glorious news—there are prophets on the earth today.

I have always known that Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, came to earth 2,000 years ago and that we have a living prophet of God on the earth today. But my father, Roy Swartzberg, who was raised as a Jew, did not always know.

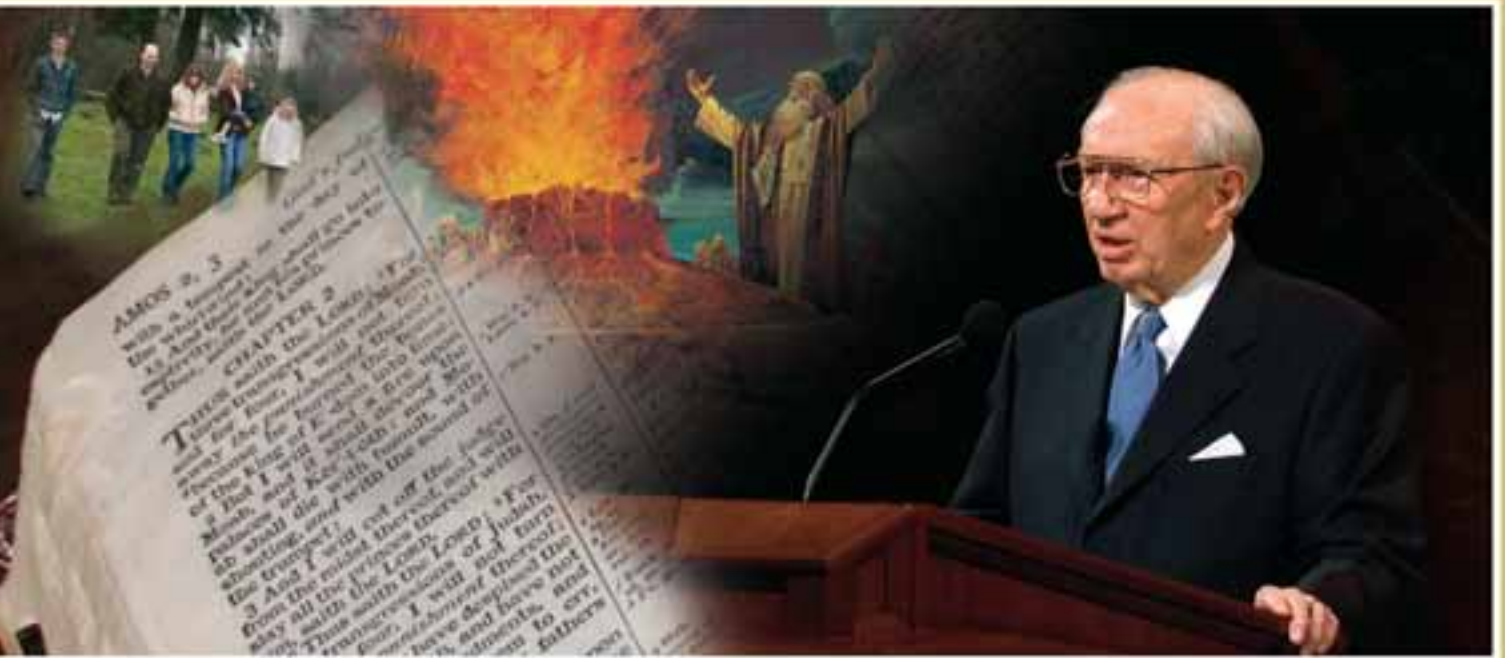
Growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home in South Africa, my dad knew about the Old Testament prophets, like Moses and Elijah, and he knew of the miracles they performed. When he heard about Moses parting the Red Sea or Elijah calling down fire from heaven, he marveled at the things these men could do for the people and wondered why there were no prophets on the earth today.

It was shortly after my dad's bar mitzvah that he first heard about the Prophet Joseph Smith. At the time he was living with his Jewish grandparents. His mother

had passed away, and his father had remarried and joined the Church.

One afternoon my dad's older brother, Mark, sat down with him and told him that he had joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He then told my dad about Joseph Smith, the First Vision, and the Restoration of the gospel and prophets to the earth. My dad says that something felt very right as he listened to his older brother bear testimony, and my dad already had faith in Heavenly Father and in prophets. To him, this was glorious news! There were prophets on the earth, and people once again spoke with God. He felt himself wishing it to be true.

After sharing his testimony with my dad, Mark invited him to pray about it. But as a Jewish boy, he had prayed only in Hebrew, standing up and facing in the direction of



on the Earth

Jerusalem, the Holy City. Mark explained how Latter-day Saints pray: kneeling, with arms folded to show reverence. This was new to him. He knelt to offer his first personal prayer to Heavenly Father.

Although the news about prophets felt right to my dad and he had a good feeling after his prayer, he did not decide to listen to the missionaries right away.

Soon he and his brother were sent to live with their step-grandparents, who were members of the Church. On Sundays the family would attend their Sabbath meetings, but my dad continued to go to the synagogue every Friday night and Saturday morning to observe the Jewish Sabbath.

He began, however, to attend Mutual activities with his brother, and when the seminary program was introduced in South Africa, he went to that too. There he learned about the Book of Mormon. The first scripture he ever memorized that wasn't in Hebrew was 1 Nephi 3:7: "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they

may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."

The missionaries were diligent in visiting him once a week, and after a while he started attending sacrament meeting in addition to his synagogue meetings. Finally, as he gained a testimony of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, he decided to listen to the missionary lessons. My dad was baptized on Christmas Day in 1973—the first time he celebrated the Savior's birth.

The story of my father's journey to the truth has given me a greater perspective, and his testimony of prophets has become a part of my own. Today I wear a small Star of David necklace as a token linking me to the Jewish heritage that I am proud of, but it also represents faith. It is because my father had faith in prophets as a young teen that I am blessed with a similar faith.

I know that President Gordon B. Hinckley is a prophet today just as Moses was, and I am so grateful for that fact! The heavens are indeed open, and through revelation, communication with our Heavenly Father continues today as in days of old. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID J. ZUSKIND, EXCEPT AS NOTED; ELIJAH CONTENTS AGAINST THE PRIESTS OF BAAL, BY JERRY HANSTON; PHOTOGRAPH OF PRESIDENT HINCKLEY BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN

Questions & Answers

“How can I strengthen my testimony to make sure I stay strong in the gospel?”

L I A H O N A

Your testimony will be strengthened when the Holy Ghost testifies to you of spiritual truths. Here are a few ways to invite the Spirit into your life:

First, have effective daily scripture study.

Instead of forcing your eyes open for 15 minutes to quickly read your scriptures each night, really feast upon the words of Christ. As you study and ponder, your understanding will deepen, and you will feel the Holy Ghost, which will strengthen your testimony.

Make sure you are worthy to have the Spirit with you. Being worthy allows the Spirit to prompt you to act in ways that will be pleasing to Heavenly Father. You will also be able to feel the Spirit comforting you and assuring you that the gospel is true and that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ love you. Taking the sacrament worthily each week will help you have the Spirit with you.

Don't overlook your sins, even the small ones. For instance, don't lie; try not to be critical of people; tell your brother or sister you are sorry for yelling. Sin pulls you away from

Truly commit to study and ponder the scriptures.

Make sure you are worthy to have the Holy Ghost with you at all times.

Make sure you repent humbly even for little sins.

Think about what your testimony is based on.

Bear your testimony often.

the Lord's Spirit. Get in the habit of thinking about your thoughts and actions and, when needed, sincerely repenting.

Take some time to evaluate your testimony. Do you have a firm personal testimony of the Savior, Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon? Or do you go to church because that's where your friends are? Remember that the Church's mission is to bring people to Jesus Christ. Build your testimony upon the rock of Christ, “a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build, they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

Finally, confirm to yourself what you know by sharing your beliefs with someone else.

As prompted by the Spirit, bear your testimony, whether in testimony meeting, to your friends or family, or to people you meet. As you do, your testimony will be strengthened, and you will truly desire to stay strong in the gospel. Even the strongest testimonies will weaken if they are not put to use.

However, remember that having a testimony is not enough to keep you



READERS

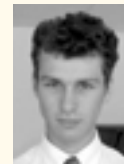
from straying. It was only after the Lamanites gained a testimony and were *converted* unto the Lord that they “never did fall away” (Alma 23:6). The scriptures remind us to pray always and be careful not to fall into temptation (see D&C 20:32–34). Don’t be discouraged if the process of developing your testimony and strengthening your conversion is slow. As you rely on the power of the Holy Ghost, a firm conviction will come.



I received my testimony through scripture study and constant prayer. That is not where it all ended. I keep studying and praying and

fasting. That gives me a fresh understanding of the gospel and keeps me in the strait and narrow path. I believe that with fresh understanding comes a stronger belief. The more you come to understand the gospel, the more you obey God’s commandments and stay true to the gospel.

Beatrice C., 21, Zimbabwe



I think there is no better way to strengthen your testimony than to realize first that you need the gospel in your life. Examples of other

members who testify that the Church is true help greatly as well. In addition, you can talk with your friends from your branch or ward about the gospel and what it means to them. If you do at least these things and ask Heavenly Father in your daily prayers with a real desire to increase your faith, then He will answer

you. He will give you the confidence and joy that come with accepting the gospel as an everlasting source of wisdom and happiness.

Maxim K., 22, Ukraine

Doing Duty to God or Personal Progress is one way to strengthen your testimony. Always attend Church meetings and Mutual, and always bear your testimony. Listen to your parents and Church leaders. Then you will feel the Spirit and know you are on the right track.

Earlson N., 20, Luzon, Philippines



As you are gaining a testimony and once you already have one, keep a scripture journal. Record your spiritual experiences. Record lessons or impressions you get from talks in

church. Record anything that is special to you spiritually, even if at the time it seems insignificant. When you are doubting or in a spiritual slump, every experience you have written down will help lift you back up to where you want to be and help you have the Spirit to guide you.

Meagen J., 17, Virginia, USA



I can strengthen my testimony and become strong against the enemy by praying, daily reading the scriptures, keeping the commandments of God, and always being grateful

to Him. When I keep the commandments, I feel strong against the enemy, and I remember all the good experiences I have had in this gospel. Thus, my testimony increases and becomes unshakable against evil, and it becomes impossible for me to leave this true gospel of Christ. We should always remember to nurture our faith as a small plant, which with our care, grows and becomes strong.

Bárbara M., 16, São Paulo, Brazil



Anything that does not draw us closer to God takes us away from Him. We have no middle ground, no foggy gray area where we can sin a little without suffering spiritual decline. That is why we must repent and come to Christ daily on submissive knees so that we can prevent our bonfires of testimony from being snuffed out by sin."

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Spiritual Bonfires of Testimony," *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 34.

Your testimony will get stronger gradually with the experiences you have. People rarely receive a testimony overnight. Your testimony will grow as you are willing to serve in the Church, keep the commandments, pray, fast, study the scriptures, attend Church meetings, and listen to others express their testimonies. If you do this, you will be blessed with moments of inspiration that will strengthen your own testimony. Also, don't hesitate to share it with others.

Elder Alberto Aquino, 21, Guatemala
Guatemala City South Mission



At times I have doubted, but thanks to the power of prayer and the power of the Holy Ghost, I have strengthened my testimony that we really are all children of God. Satan

will work hard to get you to doubt your testimony. Pray with all your heart to overcome those thoughts and also to help you remember when He has helped you before. He is always there to listen and help.

Saryn S., 17, Utah, USA

Responses are intended for help and perspective, not as pronouncements of Church doctrine.

NEXT QUESTION

"Every time I pray I say the same things. What can I do to make my prayers less repetitive and more meaningful?"

SEND YOUR ANSWER, along with your full name, birth date, ward and stake (or branch and district), and photograph (including your parent's written permission to print the photo and response) to:

Liahona, Questions and Answers 1/08

50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420

Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA

Or e-mail: liahona@ldschurch.org

Please respond by January 15, 2008. ■

My Most Precious Gift

By Consuelo Conesa Leone

As I thought about all the gifts and cards we would be giving during another Christmas season, suddenly a question came to my mind. Of all the gifts I had received during Christmastime in the past, had any of them significantly affected my life? Then I remembered December 1963.

I was home alone because my parents had gone out. I was a young teacher at the time. Classes had ended, I was on vacation, and Christmas was fast approaching. I looked around for something to read, but I had already read everything in our home library. I decided to go see a neighbor who had a good book collection and had often loaned books to me. This time she offered a book that two young men—foreigners—had left with her.

“I’d like to know your opinion of it,” she said. “The content seems interesting.”

She then added that the young men were missionaries. Missionaries? My interest in the book immediately died. At the time I was not interested in anything having to do with religion, but I took the book anyway.

As I said good-bye, my neighbor added, “Inside the book you’ll find a little note they wrote, suggesting that before reading the book, a person

needs to say a prayer to God.”

Not having any plans that rainy Saturday, I decided to read the “interesting” book. I opened it and found the note written by the missionaries. I put the book on my bed, knelt down, and for the first time in my life, offered up a prayer to God in my own words.

As I started to read, the story captivated me. How was young Nephi able to exercise such unshakable faith? I wondered if I would ever be capable of doing something like that. As I read the book of Mosiah, I drew strength from the words of King Benjamin. At the time I had no idea I was reading a book that would become my favorite for more than 40 years.

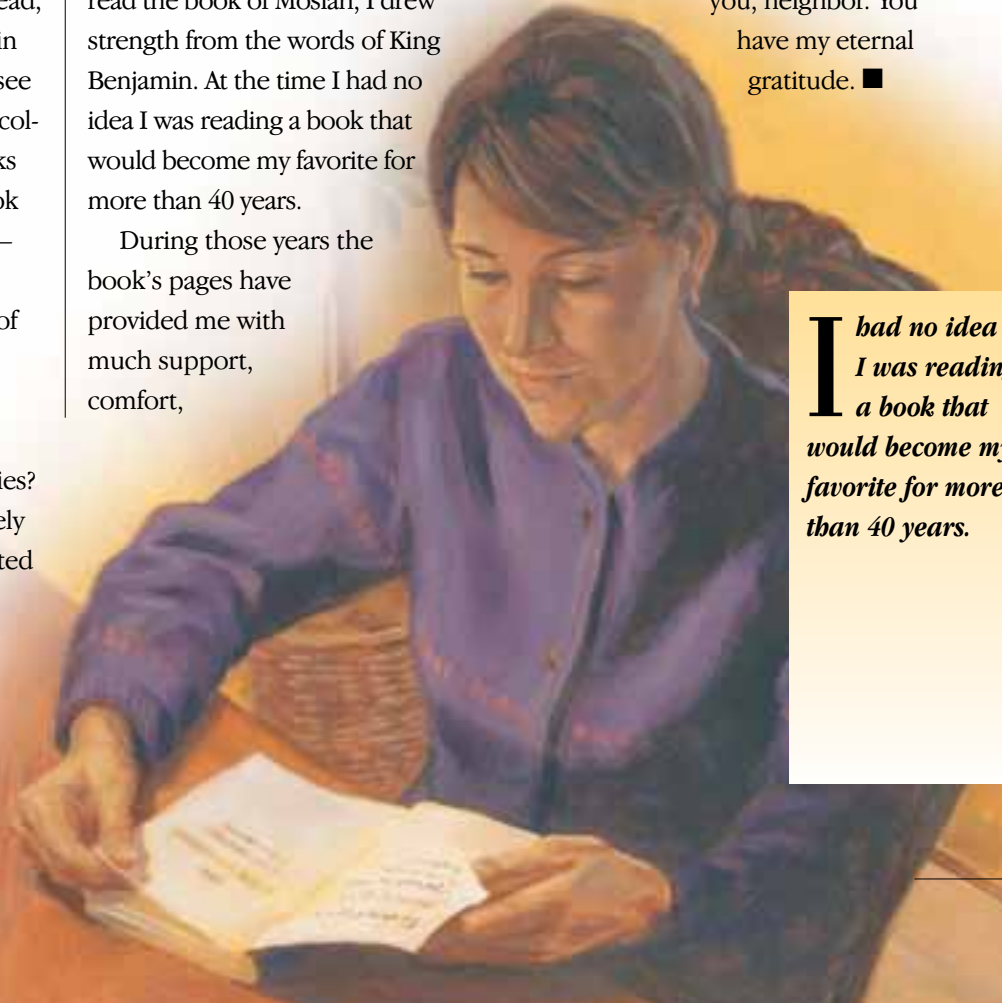
During those years the book’s pages have provided me with much support, comfort,

and strength, and I have discovered many important insights that I shared in talks and lessons at the little Tucumán Branch in Argentina, where I was baptized and confirmed. Two years later, while serving a full-time mission, I also wrote little notes on pieces of paper, suggesting to investigators that they pray before reading the copy of the Book of Mormon my companion and I left in their hands.

So many years have passed since then. But how could I have forgotten the most precious Christmas gift I ever received and the neighbor who gave it to me? I can hardly remember her face, and I struggle to remember

her name—Marina. Thank you, neighbor. You have my eternal gratitude. ■

I had no idea I was reading a book that would become my favorite for more than 40 years.



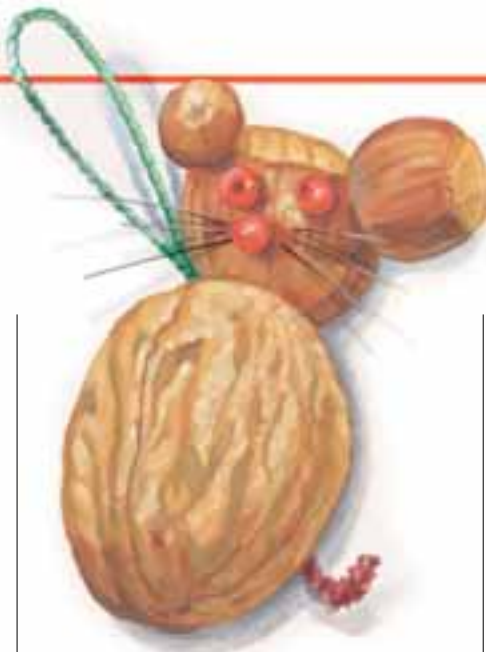
Mother's Christmas Mouse

By Betty LeBaron Mostert

When I was a child in the 1950s and 1960s, our Christmas traditions were not elaborate—except for the stockings. Because we children enjoyed our Christmas stockings so much, we continued the tradition when we married and had children of our own. Buying surprises and assembling dozens of Christmas stockings, however, soon became too much for my aging parents, especially my mother, who had a serious case of rheumatoid arthritis that limited her mobility and energy.

Eventually, I volunteered to take over the project. Our annual extended family home evening, in which we acted out the Christmas story and opened our stockings, found me exhausted from the demands of being the mother of several small children and juggling the events of an active life. As I watched everyone dump treasures out of the gingham Christmas stockings I had carefully prepared, I was feeling a little sorry for myself.

As expected, my stocking was empty except for the standard candy cane and Japanese orange that I had placed there earlier. But as I shook



them out, I noticed a little bedraggled mouse made of a walnut and hazelnuts. One ear was much bigger than the other, and the whiskers were crooked. The tail had been cut too short, and the loop to hang it on the tree was off center. I was confused. Had someone's kindergarten project ended up in my stocking?

I looked up and saw my mother watching me from her wheelchair across the room. With a gnarled, bent finger, she beckoned to me.

"I wanted to do something for the Christmas stockings," she said. "They made these little mice in Relief Society, and they were so cute."

Her tears were close to the surface, and her gentle voice shook as she continued.

"I couldn't get my fingers to work, so I made only one. It didn't turn out, but I knew you wouldn't mind."

I looked again at the little mouse in my hand. She was right. I didn't mind. In fact, her little bedraggled mouse became the most precious treasure of all that Christmas.

For more than 20 years, I have tenderly removed the tissue paper from the misshapen mouse crafted

by misshapen fingers and carefully placed it on a branch. My angel mother has been free of her crippled body for several years, but her Christmas mouse reminds me of two profound truths.

The first is that my mother honored me by believing that I could look past the mouse's crooked ears and feel the love and sacrifice that went into its creation. The second is that if I, as an imperfect mortal, am capable of finding beauty in a humble little mouse, how much more is our Father in Heaven capable of seeing past our imperfect efforts and understanding our pure intentions.

I know that when we do our best to give to others and to Him, our gift is not just good enough—it is of incalculable worth. ■

A Christmas to Remember

By Jerry O. Thompson

My wife and I had been married less than two years; we were caring for a newborn; and, like typical struggling student families, we were stretching our finances trying to make ends meet.

Graduation was still a few years away, and we were trying to make the best of the Christmas season. I had several part-time jobs, and my wife, Lisa, was working as a secretary.

We didn't have a lot of extras, but we were happy.

A few months before Christmas, I was still getting to know the families I was recently assigned to home teach. One family in particular stood out because of the adversity they had recently faced. Two of their children had died in an accident from which the father was still recuperating, and the mother suffered from a crippling illness that had left her physically impaired. Despite these challenges, this family had a great spirit about them, and they set an example by the way they followed the commandments.

During my home teaching visit in December, I saw that they did not have a Christmas tree. My heart sank for their children. Knowing of their physical, spiritual, and financial struggles, my wife and I decided to do something for them.

We had saved enough money to buy a Christmas tree, so we decided to go out on Christmas Eve, buy the biggest tree we could afford, gift wrap it, and anonymously leave it at this family's home. Fortunately, no one was home as we dropped off the tree. As we drove home afterward, we anticipated the joy they would feel

upon returning home and finding the tree waiting for them. This small sacrifice added a spirit of peace and joy to our holiday that I had not felt before.

When we arrived at our apartment, we had our own surprise waiting for us on the doorstep: a beautifully decorated Christmas tree! My wife wept as she beheld this anonymous gift of love given to us in our financial need.

We later found out that this gift was given to us by the same family to whom we had given our tree. Even in their dark hour, this family had sought to bless others. Our hearts were filled with the true spirit of Christmas that year. It was a Christmas we will never forget. ■

When we arrived at our apartment, we had our own surprise waiting for us.



Did Heavenly Father Really Love Me?

By Carol C. Watts

Usually I loved the music, activities, and excitement that accompanied the holiday season, but this season was different because our family had moved to a new town. I knew we needed to be there at that time, but I felt uncomfortable and out of place.

I voiced my discontent to my husband, Rob. We had moved several times since our marriage, and he knew I had trouble with feelings of insecurity. Rob asked me, "Do you realize how much Heavenly Father loves you?"

"Of course," I replied.

"But," Rob persisted, "do you feel *in your heart* that He loves you?"

Tears came as I realized that I did not. For as long as I could remember, I had felt that I was less than everyone else. Rob challenged me to pray and ask Heavenly Father to let me feel His love for me. That night I did so.

A couple days later I went grocery shopping. In addition to purchasing the usual items, I had planned to buy some ground beef and a roast. I realized, however, that we did not have enough money to afford the meat. It would be another week before we had any money. We also



needed fuel for the car so we could travel to an out-of-town family party.

We weren't destitute, but I prayed about our situation, telling Heavenly Father that it would be nice if we could somehow buy the needed items.

The next evening as I was prepar-

A *s I was preparing dinner, the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, the only thing I found on the doorstep was a large paper grocery sack.*

ing dinner, the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, the only thing I found on the doorstep was a large paper grocery sack. I reached down to pick it up and saw a \$20 bill stapled to the top of the folded-down sack, with "Merry Christmas!" written in crayon across the front.

Inside the sack were several packages of frozen ground beef, as well as a couple packages of steaks. I was dumbfounded. I had told no one that we were out of money until our next check, not even my husband. How could someone be so sensitive to the Spirit that he or she gave us not only the meat we needed but also almost the exact amount of money it took to fill up our car? During fast and testimony meeting, I expressed gratitude for the gifts, hoping that the person responsible was there.

This experience was a turning point for me. Heavenly Father had answered my prayer. He did love me, He knew my needs, and He let me know by showing me. Since then I have sought to improve my ability to hear the whisperings of the Spirit. I often pray now that I might be an instrument in answering someone else's prayer. ■

The New Recruit

By Henny Rasmussen

I picked up my husband's memoirs and read, once again, his account of finding the Church more than half a century ago:

"As a 20-year-old in 1951, I was at the school of sergeants at the Kronborg Castle [in Denmark]. On Christmas night I was on guard duty on the embankment that surrounds the castle. At one point I stopped, looked up to the stars, and felt that there was more between the sky and the earth than I had thus far thought. In other words, I began to believe that there was a God, which I had never really believed before. My parents were absolutely not religious, and they and I came to church only for baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals.

"When months later I became a sergeant, I got my own troop: 44

new recruits—or more exactly, 43 plus 1. This one was very different, and when I asked him what it was that made him different from the others, he said he would tell me in the evening inside my quarters.

"There he told me about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for five evenings in a row. On the sixth day, Sunday, I went to church. And with that my new life began.

"The Church involved me completely. Little by little I became acquainted with the members of the Church. I found out that my recruit was not so much different than the overall membership.

"I became convinced that the Church was true, that it was the Lord's Church—and I was baptized. A truly magnificent day."

I am grateful that my husband, Orla, who died in 1998, included these words in his personal history. That long-ago Christmas night, when my husband first sensed that God truly did exist, and his conversations with the new recruit are responsible for our meeting each other, being sealed in the temple, and having five children—who have now brought grandchildren and great-grandchildren into our family. We have had a rich life in the Church and many blessings. I am grateful for that Christmas night and for the new recruit in Denmark those many years ago. ■

A Useful Teaching Tool

As Young Women president I make good use of the *Liabona* articles, especially the Posters, because they help us get the youth to think about gospel principles and put them into practice. I use the talks and stories in the *Liabona* because they are true stories about people who may be of a different culture, race, or

sex—but we still have our testimonies and the true gospel in common.

Jessica Moreira de Macías, Ecuador

Having the *Liabona* on Hand

One Saturday when I was a bishop, I was preparing to go out with my family to the beach when the Spirit caused me to stop. My family asked what happened, and I responded that I couldn't go with them because I had to visit a certain couple. I didn't understand the reason, but I returned home and prayed and felt that I should take with me a copy of the *Liabona*. I did not know what message I would share, but as I arrived I felt I should talk about eternal marriage.

Later, the husband told me that God sent me there because they had been having a fight that stopped when I arrived. What that couple

needed at that moment was the message I had brought.

It is very important that we have the *Liabona* in our homes because we don't know when we will need it to solve our problems. I am grateful to always have the *Liabona* in my home. I feel the Spirit stronger when I read it and seek to apply its teachings.

Marcial F. Lima, Brazil

I Am Not Alone

The *Liabona* magazine is indeed a great help to me. Each time I read it, it helps me focus on what I should be doing every day. It gives me the courage I need to face my trials, it gives me hope when everything around me looks bleak, and it helps enlighten my mind whenever I'm troubled. It's also a great tool for my husband and me each time we prepare lessons for family home evening. All the messages and stories are inspiring, and when I read other members' experiences similar to my own, it adds to my strength. Every time I read the *Liabona*, I get the feeling that I am not alone. Heavenly Father loves me, and through this magazine He lets me know.

Bernadette Santo Domingo, Philippines

The Good Samaritan

Soon after I was baptized, a longtime member gave me all of his past issues of the *Liabona* (1999–2002), and since then I have been a subscriber. Whenever I can, I also give a copy of the *Liabona* as a gift.

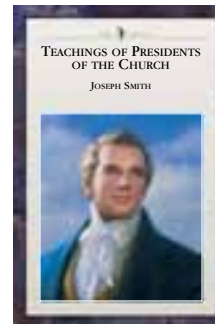
I was touched by the article by John W. Welch, "The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols" (Feb. 2007). I learned that what is most important for humans is knowledge, compassion, and service.

Ginalva Pedro da Silva, Brazil

The Lord's Work Moves Forward

I have two callings: I am a branch missionary and the first counselor in the Young Women organization. The *Liabona* helps me prepare lessons and organize activities for the youth. I gave the *Liabona* to my friends who are not members of the Church, and they were happy to read it. I know the Lord's work moves forward to all nations and kindreds.

Natasha Vavenko, Ukraine



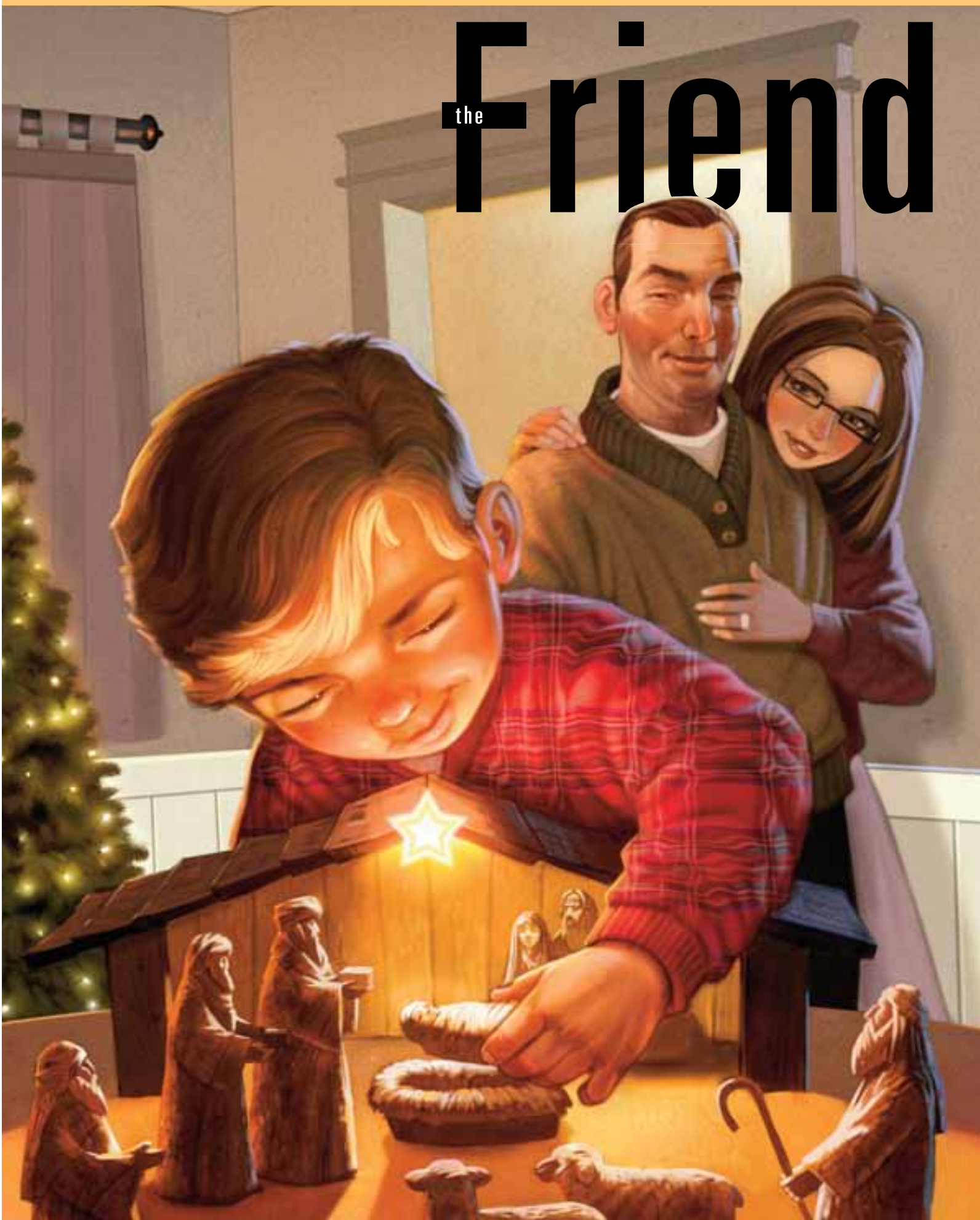
COMING NEXT MONTH

Starting in January, adult members of the Church will be studying the

teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith in Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood meetings. An article in next month's *Liabona* relates highlights from the Prophet's life and explains how *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* is an authoritative compilation of the Prophet's teachings.



the Friend



The Savior Is Born

At this wonderful time of year, we remember the angelic message given to the humble shepherds so long ago:

“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 this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

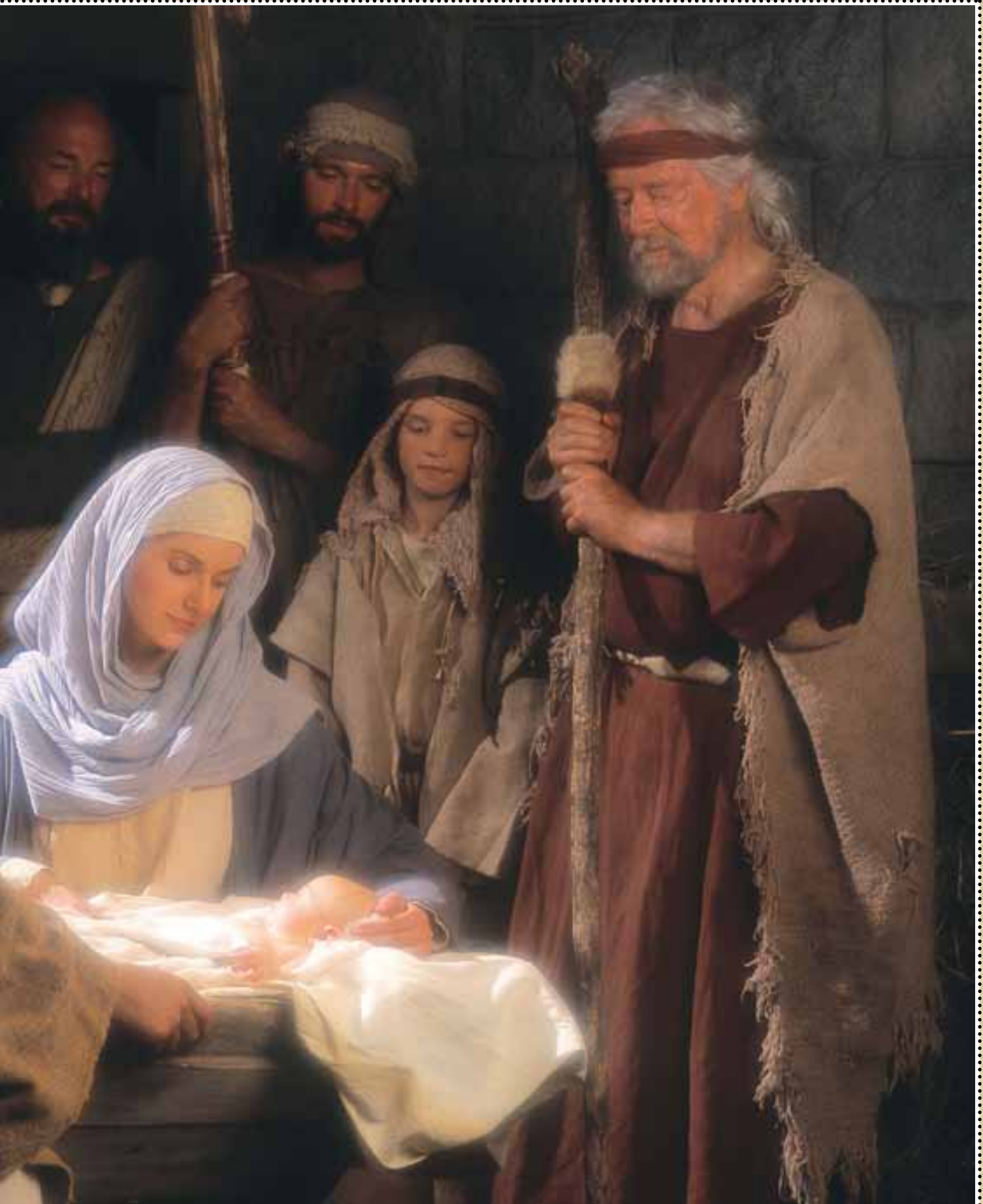
“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:10–14).

The message of the birth of Jesus Christ gives us the knowledge of what we must do to return to live with our Father in Heaven. As we keep the commandments and become more like our Savior, we will find peace in our hearts and joy in our lives.

We testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. As we follow His example of obedience and service to others, our own lives are blessed with happiness and peace. ●







Shepherd: *"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."*—John 10:11

King: *"And the Lord said: Blessed is he through whose seed Messiah shall come; for he saith—I am Messiah, the King of Zion."*—Moses 7:53

Note: *This activity may be copied or printed from the Internet at www.lds.org. For English, click on "Gospel Library." For other languages, click on "Languages."*

Star: *"There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."*
—Matthew 2:1-2

Lamb: *"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."*
—John 1:29



Gift: *"Wherefore, by faith was the law of Moses given. But in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way; and it is by faith that it hath been fulfilled."*
—Ether 12:11



The Greatest Gift

“This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

BY ELIZABETH RICKS



Do you like to receive gifts? We all do. Gifts show us that someone cares about us. Knowing that someone cares about us and loves us makes us happy. When we love people, we want to give them gifts.

What kinds of gifts do you like to give to the people you love? The gifts that you give do not need to be fancy or expensive. Your gift can be reading a story to a younger child, helping your mom or dad prepare a meal, or saying a kind word.

Because our Heavenly Father loves us, He gives us many gifts. In John 3:16, we read about a most precious gift: “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.”

Jesus came to earth as a baby born in Bethlehem. His life is an example for us. He also atoned for our sins and gave us the opportunity to return to live with our Heavenly Father again. If we follow Jesus Christ in faith, we can receive another wonderful gift: “If thou wilt do good, yea, and hold out faithful to the end, thou shalt be saved in the kingdom of God, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 6:13).

As we follow Jesus Christ in faith, we look forward to the time when He will return to earth. We know that He will come again and that someday we will receive the greatest of all the gifts of God—eternal life.

Activity

Each of the ornaments on the opposite page is a symbol of Jesus Christ. Read the scripture references to find out how the ornaments are symbols. Mount the ornaments on heavy paper, and cut them out. Cut out the

scriptures. Glue or tape each one on the back of the correct ornament to remind you how the ornament is a symbol of Christ. Put a ribbon through the top of the ornament, and hang it where your family can enjoy it.

Sharing Time Ideas

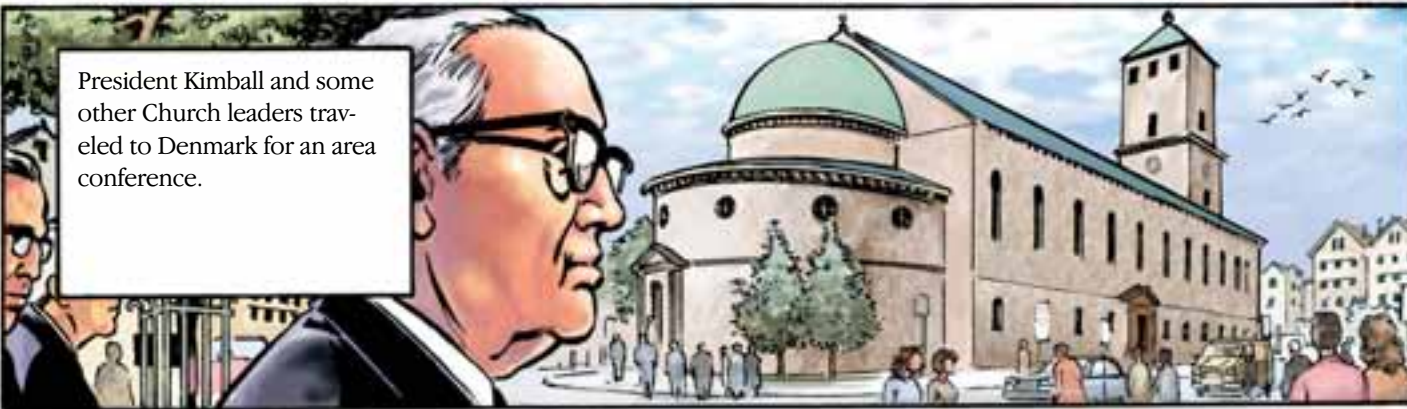
1. *Display a flag, a heart, and a smiley face. Ask the children what these may represent (country, love, happiness). Explain that each is a symbol. Ancient prophets told people that Jesus Christ would come to earth. Some used symbols to teach of Christ. Display a picture of a lamb (see Primary 2 manual, 123). Explain that a lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ. Discuss ways that Jesus Christ is like a lamb. Pass out the following scripture references: Genesis 22:3–8; Exodus 12:21–28; Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; 1 Nephi 12:6. Read the scriptures, and discuss how each tells of Christ. Explain that when we understand symbols, we can see that the ancient prophets foretold Christ’s coming to the earth. Bear testimony that just as you know that Christmas is coming soon, the prophets knew that Christ would be born.*

2. *Invite two children to hold Gospel Art Picture Kit 238 (The Second Coming) and 239 (The Resurrected Jesus Christ). Have the children point out what is the same and what is different. Ask the children holding the pictures to read the title and the summary on the back. Explain that one is a picture of what Jesus might look like when He comes again and the other is a picture of what He might have looked like when He was resurrected. Tell them that there is a reason for the similarity. Ask all of the children to look up Acts 1:11. Display a globe. As you read the scripture, move the picture of the resurrected Jesus away from the globe as you read, “. . . taken up from you into heaven.” Move the picture of the Second Coming toward the globe as you read, “. . . shall so come in like manner.” The week before Primary, invite several children to be prepared to share things they have learned this year that will help them prepare for the Second Coming. Between participants, sing songs you learned this year and review the principles the songs teach. Bear testimony that as we follow Jesus in faith, we can enjoy eternal life. ●*



FROM THE LIFE OF PRESIDENT SPENCER W. KIMBALL

Holding Priesthood Keys

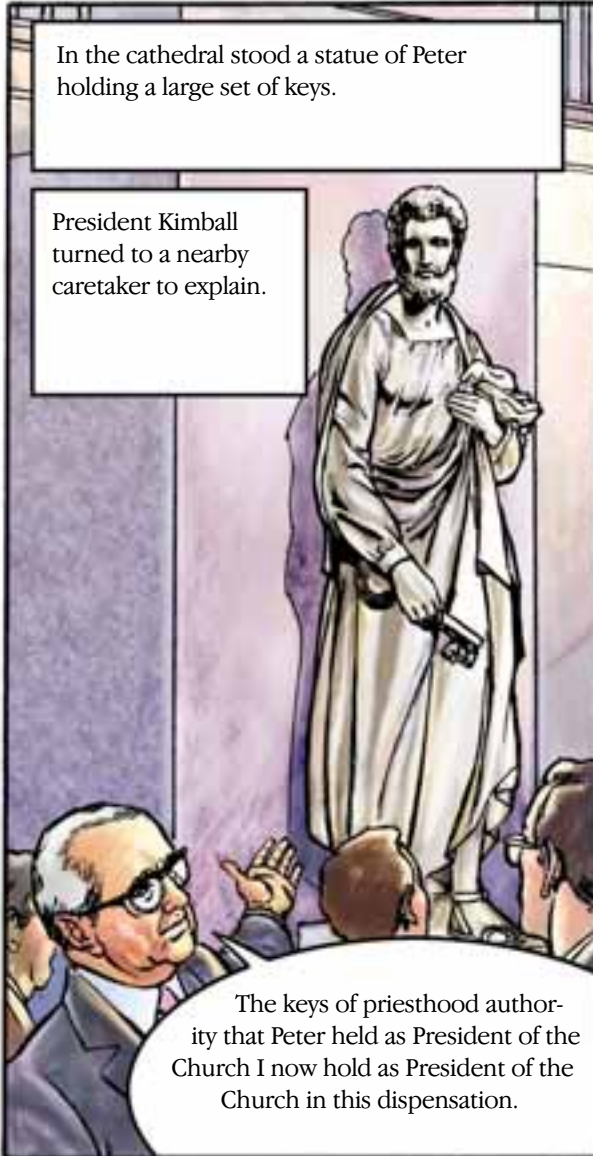


President Kimball and some other Church leaders traveled to Denmark for an area conference.



While there, they visited a cathedral to see Thorvaldsen's original famous sculpture, the *Christus*.

Isn't it beautiful?



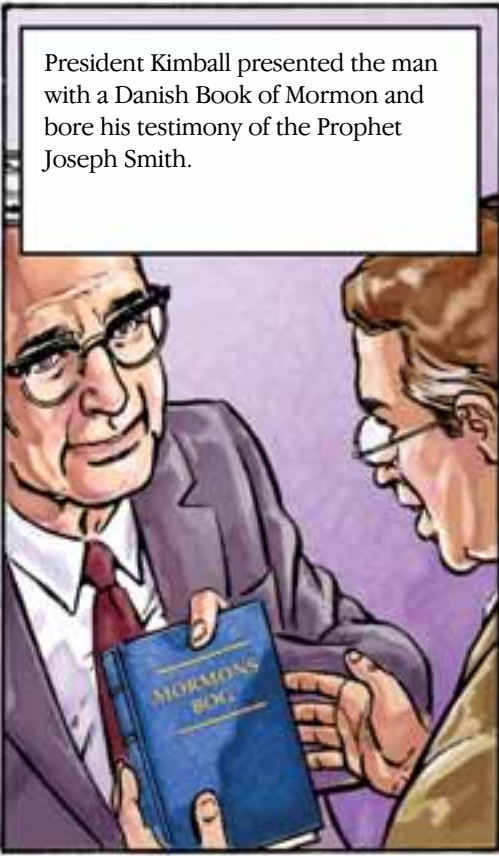
In the cathedral stood a statue of Peter holding a large set of keys.

President Kimball turned to a nearby caretaker to explain.

The keys of priesthood authority that Peter held as President of the Church I now hold as President of the Church in this dispensation.



Every day you are near Apostles in stone, but today you are in the presence of living Apostles.

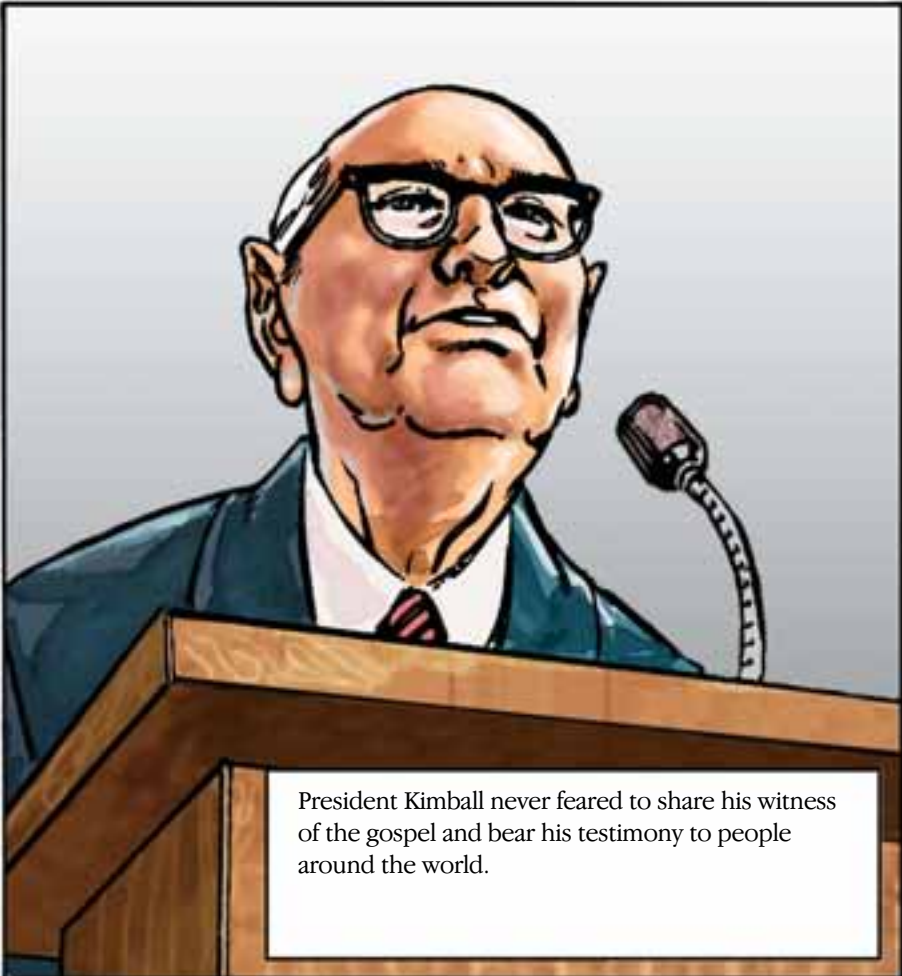


President Kimball presented the man with a Danish Book of Mormon and bore his testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith.



The man was moved to tears.

Today I have been in the presence of servants of God.



President Kimball never feared to share his witness of the gospel and bear his testimony to people around the world.





Nativity Figures and Facts

BY PAT GRAHAM

This matching game offers some interesting ideas about the figures of the Nativity. Most of the information is found in the scriptures. You can learn something new while you have fun playing this game with your family or friends.

Instructions: Glue the rectangles on heavy paper, and cut them out. Begin the game with the rectangles

spread out facedown. The first player turns over two rectangles. If the figure and the fact do not match, the rectangles are turned facedown again, and the next player takes a turn. If the figure and the fact match, the player reads the fact aloud, keeps the pair, and takes another turn. Play until all the rectangles are matched. The player with the most matches wins.

	<p>Star of Bethlehem</p> <p>The heavenly sign of Jesus's birth had been foretold by prophets in Israel and in the Americas. The Wise Men in the East knew the meaning of the star (see Matthew 2:1–2, 7, 9).</p>
	<p>Jesus</p> <p>The scriptures refer to Jesus by many names: Messiah, Redeemer, Savior, Jehovah, Firstborn, Good Shepherd, Lamb of God, Light of the World, Only Begotten Son, and Son of God. Can you name any others? (See Topical Guide, "Jesus Christ," 240; Guide to the Scriptures, "Jesus Christ," 127.)</p>
	<p>Mary</p> <p>Although Jesus's father was Heavenly Father, Jesus's birth fulfilled the prophecy that Jesus would be a descendant of King David, because Mary was a descendant of King David.¹</p>
	<p>Angels</p> <p>Angels appeared to Mary, Joseph, and shepherds (see Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:26–27; 2:8–9).</p>



Stable
 During this time, inns were rectangular with a courtyard in the center for animals. Because the rooms surrounding the courtyard were filled, Joseph may have cared for Mary's delivery in that center courtyard.²



Manger
 Joseph and Mary placed the baby Jesus in a manger probably filled with sweet straw (see Luke 2:7). Many artists have shown the Christmas manger as a wooden trough. But it may also have been carved from rock.³



Shepherds
 The work of a shepherd was to lead the sheep to food and to protect them. Often the shepherd slept at the entrance of the stone-enclosed sheepfold.⁴ Those who help with the Lord's work are like shepherds. Jesus asks them to feed His lambs and sheep (see John 21:15-17; D&C 112:14).



Joseph
 Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a noble, kind man. He was a carpenter. It is thought that he died before Jesus began His ministry.⁵



Wise Men
 The Wise Men came to worship the Savior. They did not go to the stable but to a house some time after Jesus was born.⁶ They received revelation not to report the whereabouts of the child to Herod but to return to their own country (see Matthew 2:12).

NOTES

1. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 86.
2. See Russell M. Nelson, "Christ the Savior Is Born," *New Era*, Dec. 2006, 4.
3. See Madeleine S. and J. Lane Miller, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 8th ed. (1973), "manger," 416.
4. See *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "shepherd," 675.
5. See *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "Joseph," 351.
6. See *Jesus the Christ*, 97-99.

Note: If you do not wish to remove pages from the magazine, this activity may be copied or printed from the Internet at www.lds.org. For English, click on "Gospel Library." For other languages, click on "Languages."

A Christmas Visitor

"I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful"
(2 Corinthians 7:4).

BY GWEN S. JONES

Based on a true story

Please, Mom, can we invite Sister Fuhriman just *one* more time?" Greg pleaded. His younger brothers' anxious faces poked out from behind Greg like pegs on a coat rack.

"It will be Christmas Eve, and she shouldn't be alone," Layne said. Scott and Jim nodded.

"You know how many times we have tried to invite Sister Fuhriman to our house," Mom said. "She rarely goes out. But you may invite her for Christmas Eve if you like."

The boys cheered and bounded outside.

Soon the door burst open again. "It's a miracle, Mom!" Greg called. "She said she'd love to come. Isn't that great?"

The next day snow started falling. Greg knew that Sister Fuhriman avoided going outside in bad weather, even to the mailbox. "Do you think she will still come tomorrow?" Greg asked. Mom wasn't sure.

On Christmas Eve, Aunt Carolyn and her three children arrived just as Layne finished cleaning up the kitchen after dinner. "Can we go get Sister Fuhriman now?" Layne asked.

"All right," Dad said. "Remember to help her as she walks across the road. It's slick outside."

"We will, Dad," Scott said.

"And if she decides not to come after all, don't make her feel bad about not coming," Dad said.

"We won't, Dad," Greg said. The boys stepped outside into the snow-covered landscape. The snow had stopped falling, and there was still a little daylight to show them the way.



Eight-year-old Adam was helping Bekah and Jill get into their costumes for the family Christmas pageant when the boys stepped through the door—helping Sister Fuhriman inside! She smiled cheerily, her cheeks bright from the cold.

The family tried not to seem so surprised that their guest of honor had really come.

Dad made Sister Fuhriman feel welcome and helped her choose a seat next to Mom. Greg slipped out of his coat and sat at the piano. After an opening prayer, he began to play Christmas hymns softly. Scott read from the Bible as the younger children acted out the story of the first Christmas. Wearing a bathrobe, three-year-old Bekah reverently played the part of Mary while Dan pretended to be Joseph. Jill played the part of an angel with a gold garland pinned in her hair. Cousins played shepherds and Wise Men, all come to worship the infant King.





Soon the strains of “Silent Night” faded, and the reverence of the sacred story gave way to hugs, smiles, and compliments all around. To finish off the night, they enjoyed Mom’s warm cinnamon rolls. All too soon, the evening was over.

The boys again put on their coats, hats, and mittens to escort Sister Fuhriman across the road. The glow of the porch light pushed away the darkness, making their walk across the snow-packed country road pleasant in spite of the cold.

“Good night, Sister Fuhriman,” Greg called as he and his brothers turned back toward their house.

“Merry Christmas,” Sister Fuhriman called. “And thank you.”

Greg glanced over his shoulder just before he stepped back into his house. Sister Fuhriman was still on her porch, watching. She waved.

* * *

Some months went by, and the family moved to a different town. The following December, Greg came into the house carrying an envelope. “We got a letter from Sister Fuhriman,” he called. He tore it open and read:

“I will miss your family this Christmas. I don’t believe

I ever told you how much I enjoyed Christmas Eve in your home. I must tell you now what I did not tell you then.

“Some years before you moved into the house across the road from me, I had a dream. I could see your house, all lit up and glowing. When I awoke from that dream, I had the most wonderful, happy, peaceful feeling—something I had not experienced very often since my husband’s death.

“Months went by, and I forgot all about my dream. Then came your invitation for Christmas Eve. I had such a wonderful time sharing in your family celebration.

“After the boys walked me back home, I stood on my porch to make sure they returned home safely. Just then I noticed your house all aglow. It was the same picture I had seen in my dream years ago, and I had the very same feeling of peace. I just wanted

you to know how I appreciated you.”

As Greg read Sister Fuhriman’s words, he remembered the warmth he had felt that night. He was grateful his family had shared their celebration with Sister Fuhriman, bringing her Christmas comfort and joy. ●



President Gordon B. Hinckley,
“A Season for Gratitude,”
Liahona, Dec. 1997, 6; *Ensign*,
 Dec. 1997, 4.

“Christmas is more than trees and twinkling lights. . . . It is peace.”

Why is it important to follow the prophet?



Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shares some of his thoughts on this subject.

We have a living prophet on the face of the earth. He knows our challenges and fears.

Today, we have again apostles, seers, and revelators who are watchmen on the tower. God speaks to us through them.

The prophets speak to us in the name of the Lord and in plainness.


The Lord loves you; that is why He has given you the words of prophets to guide you on your journey through life.

Let us listen and be instructed and edified by those who hold all the keys of the kingdom.

Let us listen to the prophets of our days as they help us to focus on the things that are central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.



From "See the End from the Beginning," Liahona and Ensign, May 2006, 44; "The Global Church Blessed by the Voice of the Prophets," Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2002, 12.



*“All saints who remember to keep and do these sayings . . . shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones”
(D&C 89:18).*

The Hot Chocolate Mishap

BY MELANIE MARKS

Based on a true story

It was cold! Nicole and her friends hurried into the busy café to warm up for a few minutes. As they stood inside, Nicole glanced at the menu.

“I’m going to get some hot chocolate,” she said.

“Me too,” Beth said.

Audrey looked at her watch, and Heather said, “We don’t have much time. Remember, my mom is picking us up at two o’clock.”

Nicole looked at the long line. It would sure be nice to have a cup of hot chocolate to keep her warm while they finished their Christmas shopping. “Beth and I will meet you in the clothing store next door,” she told Heather. “We won’t take long.”

Heather and Audrey left, and Beth and Nicole got in line.

“Look, they have French vanilla,” Beth said, pointing at the menu.

Nicole’s eyes brightened. “Yum! I love French vanilla hot chocolate.” But then she frowned, a little uncertain. “It doesn’t say French vanilla *hot chocolate*,” she said. “It just says French vanilla.” She bit her lip. “Isn’t there a French vanilla *coffee* too?”

Beth shrugged. When it was Nicole’s turn to order, she asked the employee about it, just in case.

“It’s hot chocolate,” the lady behind the counter assured her.

“Great!” Nicole said. “I’ll have a large French vanilla.”

Beth ordered one too, and they left the café. When they met up with Heather and Audrey, Nicole sniffed her steaming cup. She gasped. “I think this is French vanilla coffee!”

Beth took a sip. “I think so too. But oh well. It’s nice and hot. I’m getting all warmed up.”

“But it’s coffee!”

“So?”

Nicole told her friend, “I belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I’m not supposed to drink coffee.”

“You can drink coffee this one time,” Heather said impatiently. “You don’t have to be perfect every second

of the day. We won't tell anyone. Just come on. We need to hurry."

Nicole could see that the line in the café was now even longer, and they didn't have much time left to shop. But she knew what she needed to do. "I'm going to exchange this for hot chocolate," she said firmly. "You guys go ahead. I'll meet you at the toy store."

She started to walk away alone, but Audrey caught up to her. "I'll wait with you," she said. Audrey was a Latter-day Saint too.

As the girls stood in line, Audrey said, "I'm glad you didn't drink the coffee."

Nicole smiled. "Me too."

When Nicole explained to the lady behind the counter that the drink was actually coffee, the lady apologized and exchanged it for hot chocolate. Then Nicole and Audrey hurried through the cold to catch up with their friends. Nicole felt warm inside, but not just from the hot chocolate. She knew she had chosen the right. Despite what her friends had said about no one ever knowing, Heavenly Father knew. And she felt He would be proud of her. ●

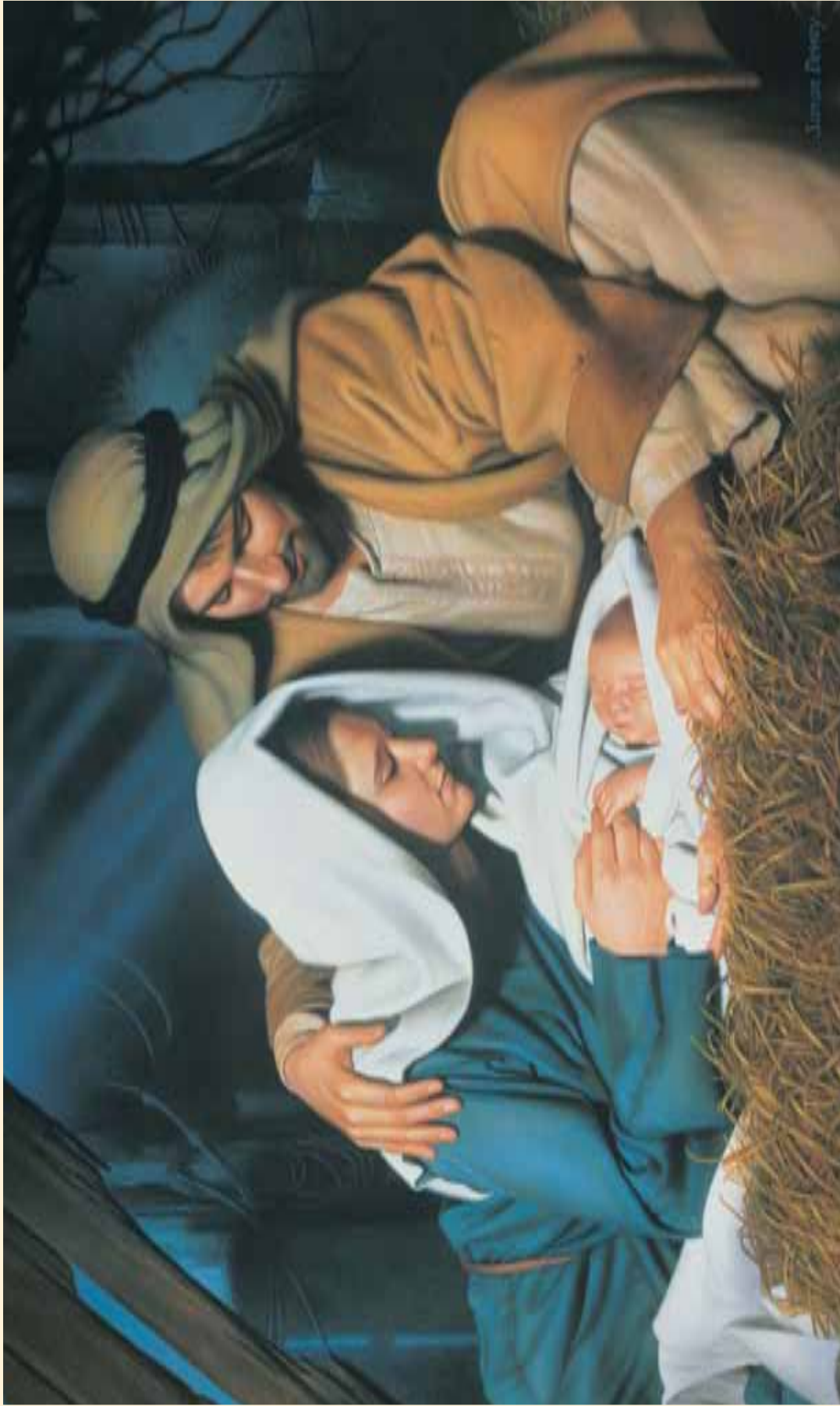


"Distinguish yourself from worldly crowds. . . . Choose to be different; you will be blessed both physically and spiritually."

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Addiction or Freedom," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 8.



JESUS CHRIST ONCE LIVED ON THE EARTH, AND I HAVE FAITH THAT HE WILL COME AGAIN
“This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye
have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).



His Name Shall Be Called Wonderful, by Simon Dewey

“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; see also 2 Nephi 19:6).



Christmas is a season
of gift giving, in memory of the
gifts given by the Wise Men to the
Christ child and the gifts given by the Savior
to all of us. See "The Best Christmas Gifts," p. 8.