

Liahona



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"When I saw Joseph Smith, he took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth, brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God; and that is the beauty of his mission."

President Brigham Young (1801–77), *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 458–59.



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Family Home Evening Ideas

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



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID STOKER

"Helping Children Recognize the Holy Ghost," page 10: After reviewing this article, consider planning aural, visual, and kinesthetic activities that will help your children learn how the Holy Ghost speaks to them. You might read and role-play the Christmas story. You could learn hymns and Primary songs about the Savior's birth and perform them for friends and neighbors. You might look at pictures of the Savior together or place a nativity in a prominent place in your home. You could plan a family service activity. Whatever you choose to do, help your children recognize when they are feeling the Spirit.

"Becoming Better Saints through Interfaith Involvement," page 26: Consider finding a way to interact with another religious faith during this Christmas season. You might join with another Christian family to read the Christmas story or perform service. You might invite a family from a non-Christian faith to join you for family home evening and take turns learning about each other's beliefs and traditions. Consider discussing with your children afterward what truths they learned from your friends.

IN YOUR LANGUAGE

The *Liahona* and other Church materials are available in many languages at languages.lds.org.

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**By President
Henry B. Eyring**
First Counselor in the
First Presidency

FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOREVER

Wherever you live, you have friends who are searching for the greater happiness you have found in living the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They may not be able to describe that happiness in words, but they can recognize it when they see it in your life. They will be eager to learn the source of that happiness, especially when they see that you face trials just as they do.

You have felt happiness as you have kept the commandments of God. That is the promised fruit of living the gospel (see Mosiah 2:41). You don't faithfully obey the Lord's commandments to be seen by other people, but those who observe your happiness are being prepared by the Lord to hear the good news of the Restoration of the gospel.

The blessings you have been given have created obligations and wonderful opportunities for you. As a covenant disciple of Jesus Christ, you are obligated to extend to others an opportunity to find increased happiness, especially to your friends and the members of your family.

The Lord saw your opportunity and described your obligation with this commandment: "It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor" (D&C 88:81).

The Lord makes that commandment easier to obey through the change that occurs in your heart as you accept and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, your love for others grows, as does your desire for them to have the same happiness you have experienced.

One example of that change is how you welcome the chance to help in the Lord's missionary work. Full-time missionaries soon learn they can expect from a true convert a warm response to a request for a referral. The convert yearns for friends and family members to share in their happiness.

When your ward mission leader or the missionaries ask for the names of someone to teach, it is a great compliment to you. They know that friends have seen your happiness and, therefore, those friends have been prepared to hear and choose to accept the gospel. And they have confidence that you will be the friend they will need as they come into the kingdom.

You need not fear that you will lose friends by inviting the missionaries to meet them. I have friends who rejected the missionaries but have thanked me over many years for



offering them something they knew was so precious to me. You can make friends forever by offering the gospel, which they see has brought you happiness. Never miss an opportunity to invite a friend and especially a family member to choose to follow the plan of happiness.

There is no greater opportunity for that invitation than in the temples of the Church. There the Lord can offer the ordinances of salvation to our ancestors who could not receive them in life. They look down upon you with love and hope. The Lord has promised that they will have the opportunity to come into His kingdom (see D&C 137:7–8), and He has planted a love for them in your heart.

Many of you have felt joy in offering

the ordinances of the temple to others, just as you do when you give names of people to the missionaries to meet. You have felt even greater joy performing ordinances for your ancestors. It was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that our eternal happiness is possible only if we offer the way to that blessing to our ancestors through vicarious temple ordinances (see D&C 128:18).

Christmastime turns our hearts to the Savior and to the joy His gospel has brought us. We show our gratitude to Him best as we offer that happiness to others. Gratitude is turned to joy as we offer names to missionaries and as we take the names of our ancestors to the temple. That evidence of our gratitude can make friends and families that endure forever. ■

TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

President Eyring explains that we can show our gratitude for the Savior by sharing the gospel with others. You could discuss with those you teach how the gift of the gospel has blessed their lives. Consider inviting them to prayerfully identify those with whom they wish to share the gift of the gospel and how they might do so.

Share Your Testimony

You could share the gift of the gospel this Christmas by giving a friend or neighbor a copy of the Book of Mormon with your testimony written inside. Follow these steps to get it ready:

1. On a piece of paper, measure a rectangle about 4½ x 6½ inches (11½ x 16½ cm) and have an adult help you cut it out.
2. Add a picture of yourself—either a drawing or a photograph—at the top of the page.
3. Write your testimony under your picture.
4. Have an adult help you attach the paper to the inside cover of the Book of Mormon.



YOUTH

Could I Share a Book of Mormon?

By Josh Arnett

During my first year of high school, my seminary teacher invited my class to give copies of the Book of Mormon to nonmember friends. Even though I was incredibly timid, I accepted the invitation.

It took me a couple of days to build up the courage, but I eventually gave my friend Britny the book during lunch hour and bore a brief testimony. Britny thanked me for the book.

At the end of that school year, Britny moved, but we kept in touch. She told me about her new school and how almost all of her friends

were members of the Church, but she never talked about anything spiritual with me.

That changed before I left for my mission. I got a message from Britny saying she had big news for me: she was going to be baptized, and she wanted to thank me for being her friend and setting a good example.

God took a shy 15-year-old boy with no missionary experience and directed him to share the gospel with someone He knew would accept it. I know that by listening to the Spirit, we can all find people around us who are waiting to learn about the restored

gospel. I know that if we help bring even one person to the Lord, “how great shall be [our] joy with him [or her] in the kingdom of [our] Father!” (D&C 18:15).

The author lives in Washington, USA.



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

The Divine Mission of Jesus Christ: The Only Begotten Son

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

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is called the Only Begotten Son because He is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal Father. He inherited divine powers from God, His Father. From His mother, Mary, He inherited mortality and was subject to hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, and death.¹

Because Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten of the Father, He was able to lay down His life and take it up again. The scriptures teach that “through the atonement of Christ,” we “obtain a resurrection” (Jacob 4:11). We also learn that all “might be raised in immortality unto eternal life” if we “would believe” (D&C 29:43).

As we come to understand more fully what it means for Jesus to be the Only Begotten Son of the Father, our faith in Christ will increase. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Faith



in Jesus Christ is the conviction and assurance of (1) His status as the Only Begotten Son of God, (2) His infinite Atonement, and (3) His literal Resurrection.”² Modern prophets have testified: “[Jesus Christ] was . . . the Only Begotten Son in the flesh, the Redeemer of the world.”³

From the Scriptures

John 3:16; Doctrine and Covenants 20:21–24; Moses 5:6–9

NOTES

1. See *Gospel Principles* (2009), 52–53.
2. D. Todd Christofferson, “Building Faith in Christ,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2012, 53; *Liahona*, Sept. 2012, 13.
3. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2000, 2–3.

Faith, Family, Relief



From Our History

In the New Testament we read of women, named and unnamed, who exercised faith in Jesus Christ, learned and lived His teachings, and testified of His ministry, miracles, and majesty. These women became exemplary disciples and important witnesses in the work of salvation.

For example, Martha bore strong testimony of the Savior’s divinity when she said to Him, “I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (John 11:27).

Some of the earliest witnesses of the Savior’s divinity were His mother, Mary, and her cousin Elisabeth. Soon after the angel Gabriel visited Mary, she visited Elisabeth. As soon as Elisabeth heard Mary’s greeting, she “was filled with the Holy Ghost” (Luke 1:41) and bore testimony that Mary would become mother to the Son of God.

What Can I Do?

1. Why is it important for me to understand the roles of Jesus Christ?
2. How can our faith increase as we keep our covenants?

THE LORD WILL RETURN TO EARTH IN GLORY

All that we do in the Church—missionary work, family history and temple work, teaching the gospel, living Christlike lives—prepares us and others for eternal life and for the Lord’s Second Coming.¹

His first coming—His mortal life—was witnessed by relatively few people. When He returns “with power and great glory,” all humankind will witness it (D&C 29:11). The Second Coming will usher in the Millennium, when the Savior will “dwell in righteousness with men on earth a thousand years” (D&C 29:11).

The scriptures describe many events that will occur before the Second Coming. Some of them include:

- The Great Apostasy, a falling away from the truth (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; 2 Timothy 4:3–4).
- The Restoration of the gospel and of the priesthood, as well as the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (see Isaiah 29:4–18; Acts 3:19–21).
- The gospel being preached across the world (see Matthew 24:14).
- A time of war, wickedness, and natural disasters (see Matthew 24:6–7; 2 Timothy 3:1–7).
- “Wonders in the heavens and in the earth” (Joel 2:30; see also Matthew 24:29–30; D&C 29:14–16; 49:23).

Although we can see signs that His Second Coming is near, no one knows exactly when the Lord will return: “The hour and the day no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor shall they know until he comes” (D&C 49:7).

Some will not be prepared for the Savior’s return. It will be a fearful time for the wicked but a time of peace and triumph for the righteous. Thus, the scriptures and latter-day prophets have taught us to live so we will be prepared to meet our Savior whenever He comes again. The Lord taught:

“At that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins.

“For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day” (D&C 45:56–57; see also Matthew 25:1–13). ■

For more information, see Luke 21; 2 Peter 3; Doctrine and Covenants 45:16–52; 88:87–107; 133:17–56.

NOTE

1. See, for example, David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 24; and Neil L. Andersen, “Preparing the World for the Second Coming,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2011, 49.

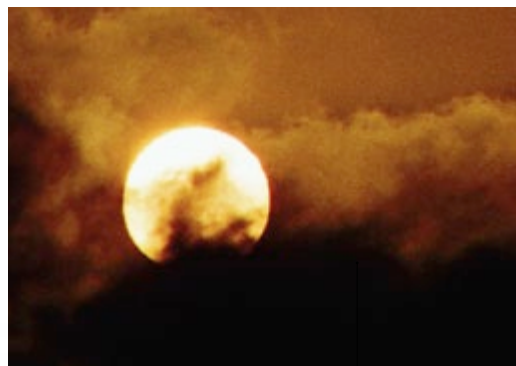


“We testify that [Jesus Christ] will someday return to earth. ‘And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together’ (Isaiah 40:5). He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts.”

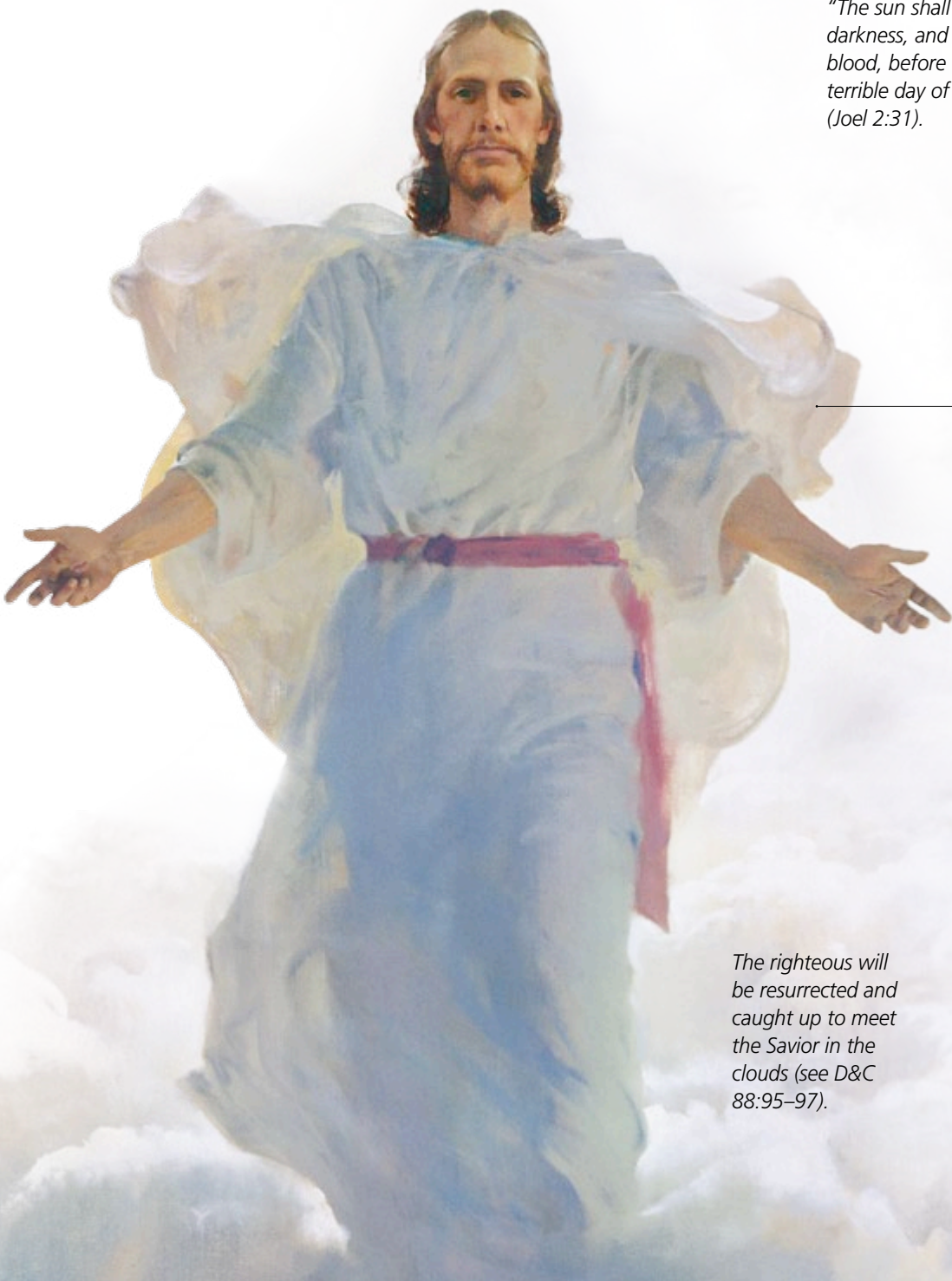
“The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2000, 3.



Before the Second Coming, there will be earthquakes, tempests, and thunder and lightning storms, and the waves of the sea will heave themselves "beyond their bounds" (see D&C 88:89–90).



"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:31).



The Savior will return in glory: "So great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame" (D&C 133:49).

The Savior will stand on the Mount of Olives, and the Jews will ask, "What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?" He will answer, "These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. . . . I am Jesus that was crucified." (See D&C 45:48–52.)

The righteous will be resurrected and caught up to meet the Savior in the clouds (see D&C 88:95–97).



HELPING CHILDREN RECOGNIZE THE HOLY GHOST

By Merrilee Browne Boyack

We can use the different ways the Holy Ghost communicates to help our children develop testimonies.

As the parents of four sons, my husband and I always seek ways to help our children feel the Spirit and gain a testimony. We had a breakthrough in understanding in an unusual way. I was standing in a store when the prompting came.

Our oldest son's grades in his social studies class were declining. We had talked with him about it, encouraging him to study harder, but there was still no improvement. We had been praying for ideas to help him. One day in a bookstore, I had a strong impression to buy a book from a pile of books that were on sale.

The book was about how each of us has distinct learning styles. Many people are visual learners, meaning they learn best by what they see. These learners often love art and reading. Some learn best aurally. They process information most effectively when they hear it. These people often love music. Finally, some learners are kinesthetic learners. They learn best when there is motion or activity involved. These learners sometimes struggle in school when teachers insist on them sitting still. They learn best when they're moving around.



There was the answer! Our son was obviously an aural learner—he loved music and talking! We discovered that he was often being pulled out of class for other activities during social studies and was then told by the teacher to go

home and read the material. He was struggling because he wasn't hearing the class discussion. Once we understood this, we encouraged him to read his assigned material aloud and then discuss it with us. His grades shot back up.



Facilitating Spiritual Experiences

But our understanding of learning styles didn't stop there. We realized as we studied this more and observed our children that the Holy Ghost often teaches our children in the ways they learn best. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the Spirit talks to us in our language and in ways we can understand. The Holy Ghost adapts His language to be understood by all, even little children. "Our Heavenly Father is always available to us. He adapts to our level of understanding. 'If He comes to a little child, He will adapt himself to the language and capacity of a little child' (Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 3:392)."¹

Knowing that the Spirit adapts His communication for our understanding can encourage parents to create opportunities for their children to hear teachings from the Holy Ghost in ways they will understand best. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isaiah 54:13).

As I mentioned, our oldest son's primary method of learning was aural. Both he and our third son love music, so in our home we often played beautiful music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir as well as classical music. They felt the Spirit deeply in this environment. We also had many lively discussions regarding the gospel, and this helped them learn truths that were reinforced by the Spirit as they heard them.

Another son was primarily a visual learner. He loved to read and would feel the Spirit best while reading the scriptures or gospel-centered books. We provided many books for him to read that helped him feel the Spirit and gain a testimony. We also placed pictures of gospel scenes and sayings on our walls so that our house became a feast of visual learning.

Our second son was a visual and kinesthetic learner. He was a very active boy and was happiest on a mountain bike or hiking with his dad. We discovered that he felt the Spirit best when he was outdoors and moving. We had many family camping trips where we talked about Jesus Christ, the Creation, and the plan of salvation. These messages reached our second son in a powerful way as he took part in these activities.

My husband and I also discovered that kinesthetic learning can occur when doing service. So we did lots of service activities with our children so they could see, hear, and participate. This created a wonderful environment where all of our sons could internalize lessons of charity and Christlike service, and these projects especially resonated with our second son.

Hearing and Understanding

We also learned that people "hear" the Holy Ghost in a variety of ways. I was teaching a Sunday School lesson to relatively new converts, and I asked the question, "How do you feel

the Spirit?" Their answers were very enlightening. One said, "I feel clarity in my thoughts." Another said, "I have a warm feeling inside," while another shared, "I feel a deep sense of peace." A woman who had been a member for a few months said, "I feel prickles all over!" And several stated that they occasionally would "hear" a voice speaking to them or that new ideas would come to them.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: "In its more familiar forms, revelation or inspiration comes by means of words or thoughts communicated to the mind (see Enos 1:10; D&C 8:2-3), by sudden enlightenment (see D&C 6:14-15), by positive or negative feelings about proposed courses of action, or even by inspiring performances, as in the performing arts. . . . 'Inspiration comes more as a feeling than as a sound.'"²

It is clear that each of us may hear and feel the communication of the



Holy Ghost in a variety of ways. We should move beyond simply teaching children that they will have a warm feeling because they might not experience that feeling; they may receive inspiration in a different way.

Elder Jay E. Jensen, formerly of the Presidency of the Seventy, related this story about a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who was touring a mission. In between zone conferences, this Apostle turned to the member of the Seventy who had spoken at the previous conference and said, “I wonder if you might have left an impression in the missionaries’

minds that has created more problems than you can resolve. As I have traveled throughout the Church, I’ve found relatively few people who have experienced a burning of the bosom. In fact, I’ve had many people tell me that they’ve become frustrated because they have never experienced that feeling even though they have prayed or fasted for long periods of time.” Elder Jensen continued: “Over the years, I have tried to learn the different ways in which the Spirit of the Lord works. Surely God does speak from heaven, but he manifests, confirms, or gives direction in a variety

of ways.”³ It’s very important to teach our children that they need to learn to hear the Spirit in the way He speaks to them.

As we teach our children, we share principles of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to hear and understand the promptings that come to them is critical to their spiritual development. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) counseled us: “[Your children] 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.”⁴

Receiving guidance and direction from our Heavenly Father through the Holy Ghost is a great blessing in our lives. As we teach our children how to receive and pay attention to these promptings, feelings, and instructions, they will be able to gain personal testimonies that will give them strength in the future. The Holy Ghost can be their constant companion, and they will be able to hear Him more fully. As parents we can help with this process and help bless our children. ■

The author lives in California, USA.

NOTES

1. Gérald Caussé, “Even a Child Can Understand,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 32.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Eight Reasons for Revelation,” *Liahona*, Sept. 2004, 8; “Eight Ways God Can Speak to You,” *New Era*, Sept. 2004, 4.
3. Jay E. Jensen, “Have I Received an Answer from the Spirit?” *Ensign*, Apr. 1989, 21–22.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “These, Our Little Ones,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2007, 9; *Liahona*, Dec. 2007, 7.

REPENTANCE

The Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ makes repentance possible, and every one of us must repent.

Sometimes we become afraid when the serious nature of a sin requires confession to a bishop or branch president, explains Elder Bradley D. Foster of the Seventy in an article on pages 54–55 of this month’s issue. However, “those who have traveled the repentance road will tell you that not only is the journey possible but that when you have been there and look back, this is what you are going to see:

“You can do this. And when you do, everything will be better. . . .

“As soon as you start, you will feel relief. . . .

“Your bishop will help you through this. You will love him and never forget him.”

Suggestions for Teaching Youth

Read with your teens the section about repentance in *For the Strength of Youth*. Discuss the blessings we can receive through the Atonement and how repentance makes these possible.

You could also share your testimony of repentance and the Atonement and what they mean in

your life. You may also want to ask your teens to share their testimony of repentance with you. And as appropriate, you could invite teenage children to help younger brothers and sisters with the activity described below.

Suggestions for Teaching Children

To demonstrate what it means to stay on the path the Lord has commanded us to follow, consider using a toy car (or an airplane, boat, or wagon) in an object lesson. Use a map and ask the child to move the car from one point on the map to another. Ask, “What is necessary if the vehicle starts to stray off course?”

When it is clear that if a vehicle strays, it must be brought back to the right course, ask how this is like repentance. Explain that sometimes as we travel through life, we have to change our direction to make sure we are headed the right way. Sometimes we can do this on our own. But sometimes we need help. Ask the children to tell about times when they have helped themselves, times when others have helped them, and ways in which Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ can help them. As you teach this topic, keep in mind that children under the



SCRIPTURES ABOUT REPENTANCE

Proverbs 28:13

Isaiah 1:16–18

Enos 1:2–8

Mosiah 4:1–3; 26:30–31

Alma 34:32–33

Helaman 12:23

3 Nephi 9:20–22

Doctrine and Covenants

18:10–13; 58:42–43

age of eight are not accountable and do not need to repent, but it is valuable for them to learn about the principle of repentance.

Discuss their answers with them and talk about how repentance is a gift from Heavenly Father and from Jesus Christ that makes it possible for us to return to Them again. ■

NEWS OF THE CHURCH

Visit news.lds.org for more Church news and events.

Elder M. Russell Ballard Addresses Saints in Europe

The faith manifested by early European pioneers is required now if Latter-day Saints are to move the Church and kingdom of God forward, said Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles during a broadcast to Church members in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway.

“What will The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints be 20 years from now here in your countries?” Elder Ballard said. “How will we respond to

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stands among Church members after a meeting in Sweden in June.



the early Scandinavian members of the Church if we cannot report that our faith, our courage, our actions were just like theirs, that we gave our best efforts to strengthen the Church in every ward, branch, stake, and district?”

The broadcast was one portion of Elder Ballard’s recent visit to Stockholm, Sweden; London, England; and Paris, France.

Elder Ballard met with missionaries serving in Sweden and spoke to young single adults in Stockholm. That meeting was broadcast to 402 meetinghouses in the Europe Area. He spoke about the importance of marriage and emphasized that the choices the young adults make about living gospel principles will determine the future of the Church. He challenged them each to either bring one person into the Church or to bring someone back to the Church by the end of the year.

Elder Ballard also addressed Church members in a Nordic conference that was broadcast to all meetinghouses in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway. The Church’s membership in the Nordic countries numbers more than 23,000 in 123 congregations.

In London, England, Elder Ballard and Elder José Teixeira, Europe Area President, met with missionaries serving in the London and London South Missions. Hundreds of missionaries listened to Elder Ballard’s testimony and felt his enthusiasm for missionary work.

In France Elder Ballard met with missionaries in Versailles. He also stopped to visit the site of the future Paris France Temple, which was announced in the October 2011 general conference. ■

From a story by Sarah Jane Weaver, Church News

Book of Mormon Published in Malay

The Church has announced the publication of the Book of Mormon in Malay, making it the 109th language for this book of scripture. The Slovak Book of Mormon was made available in March of this year. Malay is spoken in the Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and India.

The Malay Book of Mormon is now available through local Church distribution centers and the online store at store.lds.org (item 35607348) and at scriptures.lds.org.

Resources for Teaching Children on LDS.org

For decades, teachers, leaders, and parents have supplemented their gospel teaching with the help of the *Friend* and *Liahona* magazines. Now some of these same resources are available online at LDS.org and organized so you can easily find the lesson helps you're looking for.

You can search for resources by topic, by category, and also by Primary lesson number in English by entering "Resources for Teaching Children" in the search bar on LDS.org. You can also navigate to this page from the Primary manuals page.

The topics portion of Resources for Teaching Children is also available in Spanish and Portuguese and can be accessed both from LDS.org or from the *Liahona* home page in these languages.

Resources include stories, activities, *Liahona* articles, and other Church-approved media for teaching children at home or in church. Additional topics will be added each month.

From a story by Camille West, LDS.org News and Events

Primary Celebrates 135 Years

In Farmington, Utah, USA, 135 years ago, Bishop John W. Hess was concerned about the behavior of the children in his ward. He called the mothers of the ward together and talked about the importance of guiding the minds of young children.

Aurelia Spencer Rogers listened, and then discussed it with Eliza R. Snow, who visited Farmington in the spring of 1878. Sister Snow in turn met with Church President John Taylor, who authorized Bishop Hess to form an organization for children in his

ward. The Farmington Ward Primary Association was formally organized on August 11, 1878, with Sister Rogers as president.

Today, approximately one million children all over the world benefit from Primary each week. Primary leaders and teachers strive to support parents in their role to help children gain testimonies of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the restored gospel. ■

From a story by Rosemary M. Wixom, Jean A. Stevens, and Cheryl A. Esplin, Primary General Presidency



The First Meeting of the Primary Association, by Lynn Fausett and Gordon Cope



Primary leaders and teachers strive to help children gain testimonies of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the restored gospel.





NATIVITY SCENE BY BERNARDINUS, INDISUR FROM ISTOCKPHOTO/THINKSTOCK

By Elder
Bruce D. Porter
Of the Seventy



COME, LET US ADORE HIM

Whatever binds us—sins, circumstances, or past events—the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Immanuel, has come to set us free.

More than 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, Isaiah prophesied of Him in words memorialized by George Frideric Handel in *The Messiah* oratorio: “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).

Handel’s *Messiah* also brings to glorious musical life the following admonition, based on Isaiah 40:9: “O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, . . . O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!”¹

Behold your God, born as a babe in Bethlehem and wrapped in swaddling clothes. Behold your God, born in poverty and simplicity that He might walk among common people as a common man. Behold your God, even the infinite and eternal Redeemer, veiled in flesh and come to live upon the very earth He had created.

Return with me to that sacred first Christmas in Bethlehem to contemplate the birth of our Lord. He came in the quiet of the night, in the meridian of time, He who is Immanuel (see Isaiah 7:14), the Stem of Jesse (see Isaiah 11:1), the Dayspring (see Luke 1:78), the Lord Almighty



(see 2 Corinthians 6:18). His birth marked the promised visitation of the Creator to the earth, the condescension of God to man (see 1 Nephi 11:16–27). As Isaiah wrote of the event, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isaiah 9:2).

We know from modern revelation that the foreordained King of Israel came to earth in the springtime (see D&C 20:1). Micah prophesied that He would be born in Bethlehem—“little among the thousands of Judah” (Micah 5:2). The village of His birth lay in the shadow of mighty Jerusalem, which was five miles (8 km) to the north. Jerusalem was the capital city of Judaea, seat of the temple and bastion of Roman power. Bethlehem, by contrast, was a pastoral town, homespun and agrarian. Its only claim to fame was as the birthplace of David, the ancient king of Israel through whose lineage Christ would be born; hence, the little village was commonly known as the City of David. Its Hebrew name, *Beth Lechem*, meant “house of bread,”² a name that was of no particular significance until He who would be known as the Bread of Life was born.

The fields surrounding Bethlehem were home to numerous flocks of sheep, and early

The Savior knew life from every side and every angle, both above and below. He who was the greatest made Himself the least—the Heavenly Shepherd who became the Lamb.

spring was the traditional birthing season. The shepherds would have stayed up most nights, tending their sheep beneath the crystal night sky; hence, the angels who heralded the Savior’s birth would have had no need to wake them.

The Lamb of God

The boy child who arrived that birthing season is known as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29; 1 Nephi 11:31; D&C 88:106). It is a title of deep significance, for He arrived with the lambs and would someday be “brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). Yet paradoxically, He was also the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11), one who cares for the lambs. Thus, these twin symbols of His life represent both those who serve and those who are served. It was only right that Christ should play both roles, for in life He “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6), and in eternity He “ascended up on high” and is in and through and “round about all things” (D&C 88:6, 41). He knew life from every side and every angle, both above and below. He who was the greatest made Himself the least—the Heavenly Shepherd who became the Lamb.

His coming was more than simply the birth of a great prophet, the advent of a

promised heir to the royal throne, or even the arrival of the only perfect person who would ever walk the earth. It was the coming of the God of heaven “to walk upon his footstool and be like man, almost.”³

Jesus Christ is the Creator of the world and the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament. It was His voice that resounded on Mount Sinai, His power that upheld chosen Israel in its wanderings, and His presence that revealed to Enoch, Isaiah, and all the prophets the glory of things to come. And therein lies the greatest miracle of the Nativity: when the God and Creator of heaven and earth first revealed Himself in person to the world, He chose to do so as an infant—helpless and dependent.

An ancient Hebrew tradition held that the Messiah would be born at Passover. We know that April in the meridian of time indeed fell in the week of the Passover feast—that sacred Jewish commemoration of Israel’s salvation from the destroying angel that brought death to the firstborn sons of Egypt. Each Israelite family that sacrificed a lamb and smeared its blood on the wooden doorposts of their dwelling was spared (see Exodus 12:3–30). Thirty-three years after Christ’s Passover birth, His blood was smeared on the wooden posts of a cross to save His people from the destroying angels of death and sin.

The Passover feast may have been the reason there was no room at the inn for Mary and Joseph. The population of Jerusalem swelled by tens of thousands during Passover, forcing travelers to seek accommodations in outlying towns. Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, the home of Joseph’s forefathers, to fulfill the requirements of an imperial census ordered by

Caesar Augustus. The requirement of the census allowed them to make their appearance in Bethlehem anytime during the year, but they likely chose the Passover season because the Mosaic law required all males to present themselves in Jerusalem at Passover.⁴ Because Bethlehem was virtually next door to the Holy City, the couple from Nazareth could take care of two obligations at once.

The innkeeper has come down in history as somewhat notorious. Yet given the crowding throughout the region during Passover, we can hardly blame him for having no room to offer the couple from Nazareth. While the majority of Passover pilgrims camped out in thousands of tents pitched on the plains around Jerusalem, thousands of others sought refuge in the local inns, known as caravansaries or khans. The Bethlehem inn was no doubt overflowing, and the innkeeper’s offering of the stable was likely an act of genuine kindness.

Even had the couple found room in the inn, it would have offered only primitive accommodations. A typical

An ancient Hebrew tradition held that the Messiah would be born at Passover. We know that April in the meridian of time indeed fell in the week of the Passover feast.



khan of the period was a stone structure consisting of a series of small rooms, each with only three walls and open to public view on one side. The stable, however, was likely a walled courtyard or even a limestone cave, where animals belonging to the guests were kept.⁵ Whether in courtyard, cave, or other refuge, Christ's birth among the animals did have one conspicuous advantage over the crowded interior of an inn: here at least were peace and privacy. In this sense, the offering of the stable was a blessing, allowing the most sacred birth in human history to take place in reverent solitude.

Liberty to the Captives

Seven hundred years before that first Christmas, the prophet Isaiah penned a messianic prophecy that the Savior later read to His fellow villagers of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1; see also Luke 4:18–19).

When we read of Christ's mission to proclaim liberty to the captives and open the prison to those who are bound, we probably think first of His ministry in the spirit world among the dead. *But we are all captive*—captive to the corruption and weakness of mortal bodies and subject to the temptations of the flesh, to infirmity, and, ultimately, to death—*and we all have need to be set free*.

Whatever binds us—sins, circumstances, or past events—the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Immanuel, came to set us free. He proclaims liberty to the captives and freedom from the bonds of death and the prison of sin, ignorance, pride, and error. It was prophesied that He would say to the prisoners, "Go forth" (Isaiah 49:9). The only condition of our freedom is that we come unto Him with broken hearts and contrite spirits, repent, and seek to do His will.

About 30 years ago I met a man whom I will call Thomas. He was 45 years old when I met him. Twenty years earlier his parents had joined the Church. Thomas

had no interest in his parents' new religion. But his parents loved him, and they treasured the hope that someday their son might be brought to know the truth of the restored gospel. As the years passed, they tried many times to persuade him to at least meet with the missionaries and hear their message. He refused again and again, and he mocked his parents for their religious faith.

One day in desperation his mother said, "Thomas, if you will take the missionary discussions one time, then I will never again talk to you about the Church." Thomas decided this was a good bargain and agreed to meet with the missionaries. During the first three discussions, he simply sat there full of pride, occasionally making fun of what the elders were teaching.

During the fourth discussion, about the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the first principles of the gospel, Thomas said nothing but grew unusually silent and listened closely. At the end of the lesson, the elders bore their testimonies of the Savior. One of the missionaries then felt prompted to open his Bible and read these words:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29).

Without warning, Thomas burst into tears. "Are you trying to say that Christ can forgive me of *my* sins?" he asked. "I have lived a terrible life. I am haunted by the memory of my sins. I would do anything to be freed of the guilt I feel."

His pride had been a facade that hid a soul captive to sin and guilt. The elders assured Thomas that Christ would forgive him and free him from the burden of guilt if he would but repent and be baptized and confirmed. Then they bore testimony of the power of the Atonement. From that moment on, everything changed in Thomas's life. He had much to repent of and to overcome, but through the blessings of the Lord, he qualified for baptism.

More than 20 years later, as I sat in the chapel of the Frankfurt Germany Temple, a gray-haired man in front



of me turned around and said, “Aren’t you Elder Porter?” To my great joy, I recognized Thomas—a man freed from bondage by the power of Jesus Christ and still faithful in the Lord’s Church.

Perhaps this Christmas season we might each resolve to approach our Father in Heaven humbly in prayer and petition the power of His Beloved Son to be with us in our daily walk and to free us from our personal forms of captivity, great or small.

O Holy Night

In December 1987, about two weeks before Christmas, I traveled to Israel on business. Unfortunately, it was not a peaceful time in the Holy Land. There were demonstrations in the West Bank, the streets of Old Jerusalem were deserted, and the shops were boarded up. Political tension filled the air, and to make matters worse, a cold rain drizzled most of the week. Fearful of violence, tourists stayed away in droves. Yet as I walked through Jerusalem, peace filled my heart to know that this was the city the Redeemer loved so much.

I returned to the United States late on the Friday before Christmas. When the Sabbath dawned two days later, my alarm woke me to the music of “O Holy Night”:

Perhaps this Christmas season we might each resolve to approach our Father in Heaven humbly in prayer and petition the power of His beloved Son to be with us in our daily walk and to free us from our personal forms of captivity, great or small.

*The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our friend.⁶*

The music and message pierced me deeply, and tears flowed as I contemplated the glorious sacrifice and perfect life of the Redeemer of Israel—He who was born to be the friend of the lowly and the hope of the meek. I thought of my experience in Jerusalem, and love flooded through my whole being for Him who had come to earth and taken upon Himself the burdens of us all. I was overwhelmed to think that He might regard me as a friend. I have never forgotten the tender feelings of that early Sunday morning, which were as pure a witness as I have ever received.

I bear my witness of the Savior of the world. I know that He lives. I know that He was foreordained before the Creation of the world to proclaim liberty to the captives. Of His birth and life I say, “Oh, come, let us adore him.”⁷ ■

From a devotional address, “A Child Is Born,” delivered on December 9, 2008, at Brigham Young University. For the full text in English, go to speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. *The Messiah*, ed. T. Tertius Noble (1912), vi.
2. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Bethlehem,” scriptures.lds.org.
3. “O God, the Eternal Father,” *Hymns*, no. 175.
4. See Bible Dictionary, “Feasts.”
5. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Peace and Joy of Knowing the Savior Lives,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2011, 19; *Liahona*, Dec. 2011, 21.
6. “Cantique de Noël” (“O Holy Night”), *Recreational Songs* (1949), 143.
7. “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful,” *Hymns*, no. 202.

Indexing IS VITAL

Indexing makes more records accessible online so members can find and take family names to the temple.

By Jennifer Grace Jones

Church Magazines

A small note on the keyboard read, “This computer is reserved for Samuel at 5:00 a.m.” In response to his stake president’s challenge for the stake to index one million names, 14-year-old Samuel B. of Utah started getting up at 5:00 a.m. so that he could index before school. With one computer in the home and six siblings with homework to do, Samuel had to sacrifice some sleep in order to get time on the computer.

But Samuel’s enthusiasm spread to the rest of his family. Soon his brother Nathan sacrificed basketball time and his sister Ivylyn sacrificed reading time in order to index. “I’ve never been challenged as much by my children,” Samuel’s father says. “Until they got involved, I thought indexing was hard. They taught me that it could be easy and fun.” The following New Year’s Eve, the children were rushing to finish their yearly indexing goals before midnight.

Thousands of miles away, the Lanuza family in Guatemala caught the same enthusiasm. This family of nine—five children, Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa—share one computer. With the children using the computer for homework, Mom finishing her studies at the university, and Dad working, the computer is always in high demand, and each family member takes turns indexing. Together, the family indexed more than 37,000 records in 2011.

These children and their families have risen to the challenge Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles extended to the youth of the Church in October 2011:

“Many of you may think family history work is to be performed primarily by older people. But I know of no age limit described in the scriptures or guidelines announced by Church leaders restricting this important service to mature adults. . . .

“I invite the young people of the Church to learn about and experience the Spirit of Elijah.”¹

Quick and Easy Family History

Indexing is an easy way for everyone to get started with family history and experience the Spirit of Elijah. Governments and churches have kept records of people and families for centuries, but these records have been tough to access and time-consuming to sort through. Previously, people who were geographically separated from their ancestral lands had to travel to those places and wade through the records, having no assurance that they would find a single family name.

The introduction of FamilySearch indexing in 2006 accelerated family history research. Names once hidden in handwritten paper records and stored in distant repositories have been transcribed (indexed) and are now instantly searchable by computer. To accomplish this, volunteer indexers download to their home computers “batches” of records containing about 10 to 50 names. They type the names, dates, and other information into the Family Search database, thus enabling the creation of searchable electronic indexes.

Before the launch of FamilySearch indexing, it could take years to create a searchable index for even one set of records using previous name-extraction techniques. Michael Judson, an indexing manager for FamilySearch, says it took 11 years to index the Freedman Bank Records (United States records of freed slaves who set up bank accounts). Now he estimates it would take only months.

Volunteers worldwide have indexed more than one billion records since 2006, but there's a lot more work to do. Billions of additional records are waiting in the Granite Mountain Records Vault in Salt Lake City, Utah. And beyond that are the records found in other archives across the globe, which the Family History Department is photographing at the rate of about 35 million digital images per month.

Specific Situations, Specific Blessings

The First Presidency has stated, "Members are encouraged to participate in FamilySearch indexing which is vital to family history and temple work."² Members from around the world are responding to this counsel and receiving remarkable blessings.



The Saints in Ukraine are working hard to create electronic indexes that will expedite family history research in Eastern Europe. The Rudenko family in Kyiv is setting a powerful example. They sacrifice to pay for the Internet so they and their children can index names. Sister Rudenko leaves the family laptop on the kitchen table so she can index when she has spare moments during the day. She types names with one hand while holding a baby with the other. Their 16-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter have also become regular indexers, and the family sometimes visits the government archives to research family names. The Rudenko family regularly submits names to the temple and performs the ordinances for those names, sometimes going to the temple multiple times a week.

Sister Rudenko speaks of the blessings she has received through family history work: “I believe that indexing and family history work protect us. I am promised in my patriarchal blessing that doing this work will protect me and my children. Their minds will be clean, and they will be able to

withstand the bad influences of this world. . . . [My children] have the power of God from this work.”

Many members are discovering that indexing provides a meaningful service opportunity, regardless of skill or situation. Malinda Perry of Utah, USA, was in a car accident when she was 24 years old that left her paralyzed from the neck down. As she adjusted to this new lifestyle, Sister Perry prayed about ways she could serve. She received her answer when Rayleen Anderson from the stake Relief Society presidency visited her and taught her how to index. Sister Perry now spends time at the computer every day with a stick taped to her hand, moving it just enough to type. She indexes a batch of names daily.

“Instead of focusing on myself, like I used to, my focus has changed to serving others,” Sister Perry says. “I love the Lord, and I love extending His blessings to others through indexing.”

While listening to a presentation on family history, stake president David Pickup in Chorley, England, felt an impression that indexing could help the members of his stake increase their desire to worship in the temple. But



he wondered, how would something that looked like common data entry lead people to the temple?

He decided to try indexing and found that it brought an added measure of the Spirit of Elijah into his life. For him, indexing has become a “refining” work. “You cannot index without thinking about not only the names being indexed but also your own family names,” he says.

President Pickup challenged the members of his stake to use indexing as a way to participate in family history work. Within a short time, he and other stake leaders noticed a significant increase in temple recommend worthiness and sacrament meeting attendance. They noticed that the members who participated in indexing were developing a desire to take their own family names to the temple.

Seventeen-year-old Mackenzie H. took President Pickup’s challenge to heart and began indexing, and she helped her siblings, parents, and grandparents become involved as well. In less than two years, Mackenzie indexed more than 44,000 names. More importantly, Mackenzie and her family felt prompted to seek out their own family names, take them to the temple, and participate in the saving ordinances.

Indexing helped the members of the Chorley stake by bringing an added measure of the Spirit into their lives and by giving them the tools they needed to take their family names to the temple. “You don’t need to be temple worthy to index,” President Pickup says, “but when you index, it will refine you, and you will want to be temple worthy, and you will want to go to the temple, and you will want to do work for your ancestors. . . . I know this because it happened to me.”

Indexing Helps Everyone

The Lord has promised, “Behold, I will hasten my work in its time” (D&C 88:73). Indexing is one way the Lord is fulfilling that promise. It’s possible for people to find their own ancestors and leave others to find theirs, but indexing facilitates and accelerates family history research for everyone. “The Lord has given us the technology for massive improvements in finding names,” Brother Judson says. “You’re not just working on your own family history now; indexing is a collective effort to help all Heavenly Father’s children.” ■

MORE THAN JUST DATA ENTRY

At first indexing may appear similar to mundane data entry, but experienced indexers often testify that indexing is a spiritual pursuit that blesses lives on both sides of the veil.

Below are some suggestions that will help indexing become a spiritually fulfilling experience:

1. Begin with prayer. You may want to pray specifically to experience the Spirit of Elijah so that your heart will turn toward your ancestors.
2. Eliminate distractions, including television or music that could detract from the Spirit.
3. Index with family or friends. Not only will this give you help to read difficult handwriting, but it may also open the door for you to discuss your own family history.
4. Remember that every name you index represents another individual who can be found by living descendants and receive ordinances by proxy in the temple.
5. Remember that the Lord will help you. Through the Savior you can overcome any challenge you may experience with indexing (see 2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Indexing is available in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. For more information, visit familysearch.org/indexing.

NOTES

1. David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 26.
2. First Presidency letter, Feb. 29, 2012.

At the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, Dr. David R. Parker, associate director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring, signs "Let There Be Peace on Earth" while the audience sings. Held in February 2012, this event was under the direction of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable.



BECOMING BETTER SAINTS THROUGH

Interfaith Involvement

*When we serve alongside those of other faiths,
we not only build our communities and improve our
relationships but we also become better disciples ourselves.*

By Betsy VanDenBerghe

Church leaders frequently call on members to participate with the honest in heart—regardless of religious affiliation—in service and in causes on moral issues. And Church leaders often set the example. Recently, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, along with his wife, Harriet, received a Humanitarian of the Year award from Catholic Community Services; he noted the irony of “two Germans, former Lutherans, now committed Mormons being honored by Catholics in the United States of America.”¹

Members around the world have responded commendably to the call to serve shoulder to shoulder with members of other organizations. I have been touched by accounts of LDS wards growing community gardens, holding interfaith conferences on moral values, and doing community cleanups with other congregations.

In serving with those of other faiths, I’ve found the encouragement from Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to be true: Respectful and sincere interfaith service not only builds our communities but also enables us to collectively and individually grow in our love of God and His children.²

Bettering the World

A few years ago, a Presbyterian minister moved into my community wanting to serve all of her neighbors, not just her church congregation. As she reached out in our predominantly LDS neighborhood with friendliness, offers to help, and invitations to neighborhood parties, ward members began participating in her congregation’s service projects; together, she and neighbors of various faiths held



Holladay Matters (in Holladay, Utah, USA) was formed to welcome people of all faiths, or no religious affiliation, into neighborhood projects and activities. Pictured are the founding members, women of various denominations.

a fundraiser that significantly helped an LDS family with dire medical expenses.

Apostle Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931) stated, “God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of his great and marvelous work. . . . It is too vast, too arduous, for any one people.”³ Great things can be accomplished when good people band together. Our neighborhood minister’s efforts led to the formation of a community interfaith committee that, along with our stake Relief Society, put on a women’s conference supplying hygiene kits and books to refugee agencies. These interfaith connections then enabled stake members to help a congregation feed a large refugee gathering and to step in when another church needed additional volunteers at a homeless shelter.

“We have a responsibility . . . to work cooperatively with other churches and organizations,” President Thomas S. Monson has told members,⁴ and this outreach has blessed the world beyond humanitarian service. In an address to Christian leaders in the United States, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described a series of LDS–Evangelical Christian dialogues held at Brigham Young University.⁵ One outcome of these conferences occurred when a prominent theologian apologized for mischaracterizations of the Mormon faith by some in his community.⁶ Of such bridge building Elder Holland said, “I cannot help but believe this to be part of a divine orchestration of events in these troubled times.”⁷



In December 2011, children from the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in New Jersey, USA, perform a Christmas program with children from a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The benefit concert helped collect food for the local food pantry.

Bettering Our Relationships

As we serve with others, certain guidelines can help us make our interactions more meaningful and avoid giving offense. I once lived in a large city and volunteered for a local church’s tutoring program open to the public—only to discover that the person in charge found my membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unacceptable. That experience convinced me to value anyone’s contribution regardless of his or her religious affiliation (or lack thereof). I gratefully follow up on anyone’s interest in learning about the Church, but I also know that we Latter-day Saints take Jesus’s charge seriously to love our neighbor, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and visit the imprisoned (see Matthew 25:34–36) without expecting the conversion of the recipient or those who serve with us. Sincere and respectful interfaith engagement never requires any group, including ours, to disavow its beliefs. Rather, it encourages participants to “contend against no church”



(D&C 18:20) and “clothe [themselves] with the bond of charity” (D&C 88:125).

Another helpful guideline came from a wise stake leader in our heavily LDS neighborhood. He advised members serving with other faiths not to “take over” by dominating in decisions or leadership but to work in councils and allow all to “have an equal privilege” (D&C 88:122). This leader, who had extensive experience engaging with other churches, also encouraged members to develop good relationships. He had discovered that some who had partnered with Latter-day Saints found them hardworking and pleasant but more interested in getting the work done than in developing friendships.

My experiences in community and educational causes have convinced me that the Spirit is strong when diverse people unite in a worthy mission. Brotherly love and pure motives propel service forward even more than the hard work involved.⁸

One LDS speaker at an interfaith academic conference observed that making connections with others helps those outside our faith better understand us.⁹ Another scholar, not of our faith, teaches a seminar on Mormonism at a prominent American university. She discovered that her students wanted to learn about our Church “primarily . . . because they were raised to believe that the religion was a cult, but their experience with Mormon friends and colleagues was not consistent with that stereotype.”¹⁰

Bettering Ourselves

Serving alongside others not only helps them to understand us, but it also motivates us to learn from them and become more aware that God is “no respecter of persons” (D&C 1:35). He assists good people in all faiths and cultures in their efforts to improve the lives of His children.

This recognition of the good in others helps us remain humble—as opposed to the Pharisees Jesus condemned for their spiritual pride (see Matthew 23) or the Zoramites,

DOCTRINAL POINTS

- God uses the honest in heart in all denominations and cultures to further His work on earth.
- Working with others not of our faith to advance good causes enables us to do more good than we could do alone.
- Respectful, friendly interfaith engagement decreases misunderstandings, builds feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood, and draws us closer to the Father of us all.

Participants discuss defending religious freedoms in an interfaith conference held in São Paulo, Brazil, in March 2013.



Below, from left: Bharatanatyam dancers perform in the Salt Lake Tabernacle during an Interfaith Music Tribute in February 2010. An audience member enjoys the tribute. In a Mormon Messages video, young adults from various faiths discuss the importance of sexual purity. Participants at the annual Interfaith Charity Quilting Bee held in Houston, Texas, USA, make quilts for needy families.

whom the Book of Alma portrays as exclusive and arrogant (see Alma 31). Openness to the good in others enables us to become better people.

Our love can expand from a close circle of family to encompass not only our friends but ultimately our neighbors—and even enemies. One Church member serving in the American military in post–World War II Japan told of his struggle with bitterness toward the Japanese people. After being welcomed into a shrine of worship by Japanese townspeople, however, he found that “their spirits touched mine, and I felt an amazing change in my feelings toward them. My bitterness melted. . . . I thought about what had happened in that shrine and the amazing transformation I felt toward the people there.”¹¹

Likewise, when we genuinely welcome others into our midst, they can undergo transformation as well. An Evangelical Christian who graduated from Brigham Young University wrote an article about

her experience and described her initial defensiveness toward the LDS students. But after finally forming meaningful friendships, she came to appreciate “the emphasis I felt Latter-day Saints placed on God’s nearness to humanity. I began recognizing that in an effort to retain God’s transcendence, I had sacrificed God’s imminence—and this realization had a profound effect on me.”¹²

In his address to Christian leaders, Elder Holland acknowledged the “risk associated with learning something new about someone else. New insights always affect old perspectives, and thus some rethinking, rearranging, and restructuring of our worldviews is inevitable.”¹³ In befriending people of other faiths, I often find myself analyzing our differences, trying to distinguish the cultural divides from the doctrinal ones, all the while trying to appreciate everything virtuous and lovely they have to offer. Indeed, the effort sometimes feels risky, but it is always worth it. In the process of





Alan Bachman, chairman of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable, speaks in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in February 2012.



Three Latter-day Saint women attend Faith Feast, an intercultural progressive dinner in Spokane, Washington, USA. They and other attendees visited a local Muslim mosque, a Sikh gurdwara, and a Presbyterian church.

restructuring my paradigm, I find myself shedding more of my superficial cultural tendencies and coming closer to the essence of the gospel.

Several LDS groups invited my minister friend to speak on the topic of “loving our neighbor despite religious differences,” and she experienced a great deal of acceptance from those who attended. In turn, she invited several Latter-day Saints, including me, to speak to different congregations on the same topic. After the services, I found myself surrounded by congregants wanting to talk to me, hug me, and even shed tears of mutual love and understanding. In experiences like these, I have found Elder Holland’s conclusion to be true:

“When we look beyond people’s color, ethnic group, social circle, church, synagogue, mosque, creed, and statement of belief, and when we try our best to see them for who and what they are—children of the same God—something good and worthwhile happens within us, and we are thereby drawn into a closer union with that God who is the Father of us all.”¹⁴ ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

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FROM *Mzungu* TO Friend

A simple act of service from a senior missionary left a lasting impression.

By David Dickson
Church Magazines

A *mzungu* in a tree? What was a *mzungu* doing up in a tree? And what was this tool he was using to cut through branches so quickly?

Such questions ran through the minds of Ugandans watching a foreigner (*mzungu*) using a battery-powered reciprocating saw to trim dead limbs from a massive shade tree. The tool itself was a marvel to the locals. Many of them had never seen anything like it before.

But even more amazing to them was the *mzungu* himself. Elder Roland Harris, a senior missionary from Utah, USA, trimmed branch after branch, cutting dead limbs from lofty perches. The people below were amazed that a foreigner would do such a thing for one of their own.

Ultimately, Elder Harris's simple act of service would mark the beginning of a friendship with someone who had wanted nothing to do with the Church or anyone in it.

Getting to Know Godfrey

Elder Roland Harris and Sister Janet Harris were serving a 23-month mission in the Uganda Kampala Mission. Sister Harris, a registered nurse, was called as medical adviser to the missionaries. Elder Harris, a retired construction superintendent who can fix almost anything in the universe, cared for Church facilities and mission vehicles.

Shortly after arriving in Uganda, Elder and Sister Harris hired a local Church member, Mary, to assist in cleaning their home.

Mary had been baptized three years earlier. "We just

grew to love her," says Sister Harris. "She helped teach us the ways of Uganda."

The more they got to know Mary, the more their friendship deepened. They learned quickly about her husband, Godfrey—a good man who nevertheless kept his distance from members of the Church, especially missionaries. "He wouldn't let missionaries in his home," explains Sister Harris. However, Mary still wanted Godfrey to meet them.

She invited the Harrises over for a brief visit. "We had no expectations," Sister Harris explains. "We told Godfrey that Mary is our dear friend now, and we want to know her family." Godfrey chatted with them but didn't really warm up to the idea of getting to know them more than as acquaintances.

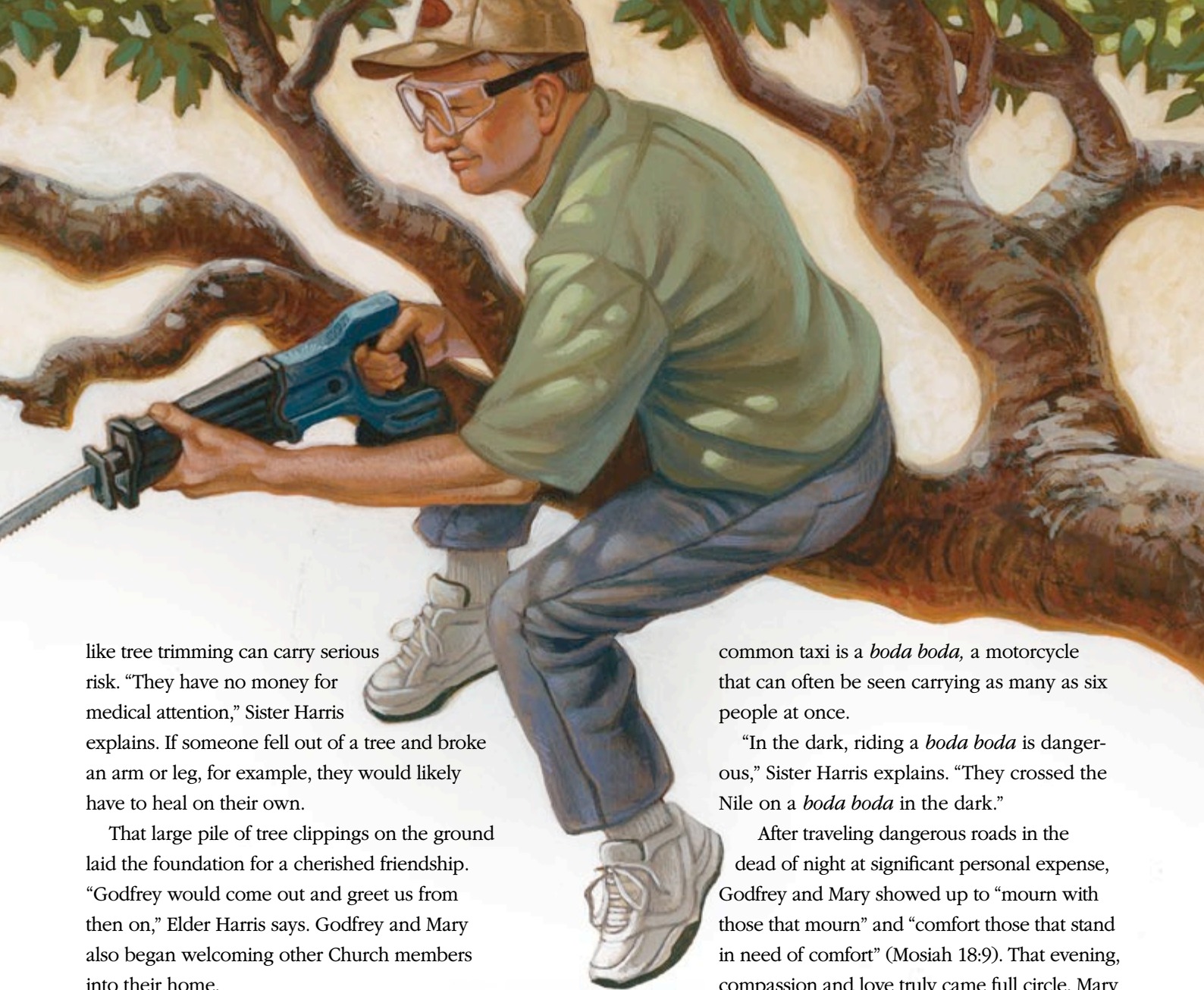
That all changed the day Elder Harris showed up with power tools, a ladder, and an offer to serve.

The Turning Point

Godfrey and Mary's home was surrounded by towering shade trees full of dead branches and overgrown limbs that stretched precariously above their roof.

Elder Harris set to work straightaway. He spent four hours in the treetops lopping off limbs up to 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter. The task was definitely overdue. "I was at least 20 feet (6 m) off the ground," Elder Harris says. As people walked by, they could hardly believe their eyes.

For his part, Godfrey was astounded. "He thanked us profusely," says Sister Harris. Even relatively simple activities



like tree trimming can carry serious risk. “They have no money for medical attention,” Sister Harris explains. If someone fell out of a tree and broke an arm or leg, for example, they would likely have to heal on their own.

That large pile of tree clippings on the ground laid the foundation for a cherished friendship. “Godfrey would come out and greet us from then on,” Elder Harris says. Godfrey and Mary also began welcoming other Church members into their home.

Crossing the Nile

Elder and Sister Harris grew closer to Godfrey and Mary as the months rolled by. Ultimately, this friendship became a strength and support for the Harrises when an unexpected tragedy struck halfway through their mission. They received word that their son Brad had been killed in a freeway accident.

As soon as Mary and Godfrey learned about this, they both put on their best clothes and headed out on a treacherous journey to be at the side of their dear friends.

In Uganda, few people own a vehicle. They either walk or hire a taxi. By far, the most

common taxi is a *boda boda*, a motorcycle that can often be seen carrying as many as six people at once.

“In the dark, riding a *boda boda* is dangerous,” Sister Harris explains. “They crossed the Nile on a *boda boda* in the dark.”

After traveling dangerous roads in the dead of night at significant personal expense, Godfrey and Mary showed up to “mourn with those that mourn” and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). That evening, compassion and love truly came full circle. Mary and Godfrey were the ones providing service. “It was quite remarkable,” says Sister Harris. Mary suggested that they all kneel together in prayer. Godfrey joined without hesitation.

Elder and Sister Harris went to California, USA, to attend Brad’s funeral. Afterward they returned to Uganda to complete their mission. Now back home in Utah, Roland and Janet Harris still remain close with Mary and Godfrey.

Service is a key that can unlock doors otherwise barred to us. As President Thomas S. Monson teaches, “When selfless service eliminates selfish striving, the power of God brings to pass His purposes” (“Willing and Worthy to Serve,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 68). ■





Africa

Continent of Bright Hope



By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

The faith and obedience of Latter-day Saints in Africa and Madagascar set an example for Church members everywhere.

It is easy to love the people of Africa,"¹ said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in Freetown, Sierra Leone, during an assignment that also included visits to Liberia and Ghana.

He said that the faith and obedience of African Latter-day Saints, born of their love for the gospel, set an example for all members of the Church.



The covenant of baptism opens the door to many blessings, and so does faithful study of the gospel.



It is impressive, Elder Holland said, “to see how much the gospel means to them, to see what they have done with it, how they cherish it, to see their faithfulness in tithing and in service, in going to the temple—I think of the temple as the crowning image—and then to see them raising their children in the Church and sending their sons and daughters on missions. It is wonderful evidence of their faithfulness.”²

Before Your Eyes

Elder Holland noted that, with the exception of South Africa (where a stake was organized in 1970), the Church has been in Africa for less than 30 years. Because of that, the Church here has been “born before your eyes, born in a day,” and “Africa is one of those special places where you get to see the glory of the Lord, the wonder and the miracle of the Restoration, quite literally unfold before your eyes.”³

He said he will always remember being in Accra, Ghana, with President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), when he announced that a temple would be built there. “[The people] stood and cheered, wept and danced, held each other,

and cried. And in a way, that spirit still continues. That is my love for the Africans—it is their uncompromised joy in the gospel. Most have had so little in their lives of material goods, but when they got the gospel, they just embraced it. . . . And they still do. They are doing it to this day.”⁴

Prophecies Fulfilled

Other prophets and apostles who have fulfilled assignments in Africa speak of the continent as a place where the prophecies of the Lord are literally being fulfilled.

“The African people are a kind and patient people,” said Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles following a visit with members of the Church in Mozambique and Nigeria. “They don’t have a lot of income or resources that allow them financially to do things, so they just do them out of sheer effort. They will walk miles and miles and miles to accomplish something that they are prompted to do by the Holy Ghost to further the work.”⁵

Elder Scott noted that in 1999, when he dedicated Mozambique for the preaching of the gospel, there were only 40 members there, and the country was part of the South Africa Johannesburg Mission. At the time of his second visit, in January 2011, the Church in Mozambique had grown to more than 5,000 members spread throughout two districts and 19 branches meeting across the

country. Mozambique is also headquarters of the Mozambique Maputo Mission, which includes the country of Angola.⁶

Young but Growing

“We are young here,”⁷ Elder Russell M. Nelson, also of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said while visiting Madagascar, Malawi, and Kenya. “We are watching the Lord move upon this great continent of Africa to bless the people . . . with the truth, the light of the gospel, [including] the ordinances of salvation and exaltation.”⁸ He said he was particularly impressed with the strength of local Church leadership in Africa: “I can’t tell you how grateful we are for these [local] leaders, who give of their time and talent in the service of the Lord to bless the lives of these people.”⁹

Elder Nelson is “very optimistic” about the future of the Church and the people in Africa and Madagascar because their faith is stronger than their challenges. “You truly are children of God, children of the covenant Israel, prepared to meet the Lord Jesus Christ and God, our Eternal Father, and dwell in Their presence with [your] families,”¹⁰ he said at a meeting in Madagascar. Elder Nelson also stated, “These are people of great potential. They have faith. They have a love of the Lord, and they have all that is required to make people really strong.”¹¹





Striving to always remember the Savior, members are strengthened and renewed by partaking of the sacrament.



During an interview in Nairobi, Kenya, Elder Nelson commented, “We’ve got Latter-day Saint chapels. We have a stake here [in] Nairobi. We had a stake conference today. It was a thrill to meet with the people. More than a thousand people gathered, [and they were] so reverent [and had a] beautiful choir, [an] excellent stake presidency, [and a] patriarch on the stand. How can I express my joy when I see such progress?”¹²

Despite Adversity

Elder Holland said the Church in Africa is thriving even in the face of challenges. As an example, he said, “While there was a raging civil war in Côte d’Ivoire [Ivory Coast], the Latter-day Saints . . . just kept coming to the temple. It’s a great tribute to them. I stand in awe.”¹³

Speaking of both Sierra Leone and Liberia, Elder Holland said, “Because they’ve had such a bloody, war-torn, brutal recent past, that’s one of the reasons the gospel is taking hold so dramatically. They’ve seen what life ought *not* to be, and now with the missionaries and the members testifying, they’ve seen what it *can* be. Heaven has been able to turn [their trials] into a blessing, and they’re lifting themselves out

of political disarray and civil strife.”¹⁴

In addition, Elder Holland pointed out that the growth of the Church in Zimbabwe has continued despite difficult times in recent years: “The Church has blossomed. We have growth, we have stakes, we have missions. That’s what’s happening all over Africa.”¹⁵

Preaching the Gospel

One key to the Church’s success in Africa, Elder Holland said, is that “we don’t get involved in conspicuous, sociopolitical issues. We preach the gospel. We are concerned about justice, and we are concerned about social opportunity and equity. But we think [the answers are found in the gospel], so we just preach the gospel. And it has been true elsewhere and it is true in Africa, that people get that insight, blessing, and light in their lives, and suddenly things start to change and their lives are blessed.”¹⁶

The Lord’s Promise

Elder Holland quoted the Savior, who said, “The last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).

“In some ways,” he said, “the gospel is late in coming to Africa, at least as we could do it on the Lord’s timetable—and it was the Lord’s timetable, I’m quick to affirm. It is only comparatively recently that the Africans have begun to get missions and missionaries, the blessings of the priesthood, and so forth. It’s a big continent, and we still have a long way to go. But I

believe the growth we are now seeing in Africa is part of the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise. African Latter-day Saints are emerging with faith. They are on the move. They are meeting the challenge of receiving the gospel and making it obvious in their lives.”¹⁷ ■

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17. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”



AFRICA SOUTHEAST AND WEST AREAS*

Members: 381,417

Stakes: 70

Wards: 508

Missions: 22

Districts: 60

Branches: 646

Headquarters: Johannesburg, South Africa, and Accra, Ghana

*As of April 2013.

TEMPLES

Operating

Aba Nigeria, dedicated August 7, 2005

Accra Ghana, dedicated January 11, 2004

Johannesburg South Africa, dedicated August 24–25, 1985

Announced

Durban South Africa

Kinshasa Democratic Republic of Congo

THE GREATEST MIRACLE

On a bright September day our youngest daughter, Erica, was in a serious car accident. She was flown to the hospital, and after hours of emergency surgery, we received the terrible news: our beautiful, vivacious, 17-year-old daughter had died.

The next few months were agony for us. We endured her birthday and Thanksgiving and braced ourselves for our first Christmas without her. People warned us that the holidays would be difficult, but no amount of warning could have prepared us.

Besides feeling overwhelming sorrow and despair, I was jealous of other families who were together and happily celebrating. I bitterly wondered, “Why us? Why weren’t we granted a miracle like the ones others speak about?”

Amid my despair, I remembered a time that our ward held an activity called “Christmas in Bethlehem.” Ward members came dressed up as if they were living at the time Jesus was born. Erica, who was four years old at the time, wore a hand-me-down long, white dress and a scarf wrapped around her head. The culmination of the evening was a reenactment of the Nativity in a mock stable decorated with bales of hay and a manger. A young couple with their newborn played the parts of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.

As we gathered around the nativity, I noticed

that Erica was missing from my side. I panicked until I caught a flash of her white dress near the nativity. Then my panic shifted from fear for her welfare to fear that she would disrupt the scene. I was about to call out to her, but I paused and watched as she made her way to the manger.

Erica quietly knelt next to Mary and looked up at her as if to get her permission. Then Erica reached out and tenderly caressed the sleeping baby. I was not the only one who noticed. Others soon quieted and watched as she knelt close to the baby. A tender feeling permeated the group as they realized that this baby was the Christ child for Erica.

In my grief, this Christmas memory brought feelings of peace and comfort as I recalled my young daughter’s devotion. My mind

had been full of questions about life and death—questions that didn’t seem to matter as much before Erica’s death. As I pondered the Resurrection and the Crucifixion, I identified with Mary. She loved her newborn Son, and she later endured terrible pain and anguish as she witnessed His suffering and death. Christ was not spared the cross, and Mary was not spared her grief.

At Christmas we celebrate the beginning of the Savior’s life on earth, but for me, His birth will now always be wrapped up with His suffering, death, and Resurrection—the Atonement. Because the Savior broke the bands of death, I know that Erica’s death will not be final. That is the miracle to be thankful for—the greatest miracle of all time. ■

Ellen Knell, Utah, USA

A tender feeling permeated the group as they realized that this baby was the Christ child for Erica.



AN ANSWER TO HIS PRAYERS

I was not feeling the Christmas spirit. It was December of my senior year in high school, and college applications and my final Laurel project loomed before me. I hoped to find a volunteer opportunity that would flesh out my college applications and double as my Laurel project. Luckily my student council adviser asked my friend Jessica and me if we would organize a school toy drive for a local charity.

I delegated most of the work to the project committee. I had them create a bulletin board featuring a large thermometer that indicated the number of toys donated. We thought that was enough advertising, and we spent each lunch period collecting donations. Students donated few toys, however, and the thermometer remained low.

Strangely, our adviser began setting aside some toys. When Jessica and I asked what she planned to do with them, she told us that a teacher at the school had recently been diagnosed with cancer. After struggling to teach while going through treatment, he had decided to take a leave from work. With the holidays approaching and medical bills piling up, his family wouldn't have much of a Christmas. Our adviser suggested that we wrap the set-aside presents for them.

My heart was touched. I had been looking at my service project as a means to serve only myself, not others. I decided to triple our goal for donated toys and to start a monetary collection

for the teacher and his family.

Jessica and I visited classrooms and championed our cause. The response was enormous. Teachers, staff, and students gave toys and money to help the family. We soon surpassed our toy goal, which amazed the charity. We also collected more than \$1,000 for the family.

As we carefully wrapped the gifts we had collected and purchased, I realized that the testimony of service I was receiving was just as great as the gifts we were giving. I can't express the thrill I felt as we secretly watched the family discover the gifts we had

As we wrapped the gifts, I realized that the testimony of service I was receiving was just as great as the gifts we were giving.

anonymously left on their porch.

A few months later, Jessica and I were asked to teach a seminar on service projects. We explained what we had done without mentioning the teacher's name. A girl raised her hand and stood. Tears flowed as she spoke. The teacher was her uncle, and she described how much our service had meant to him. She said it was an answer to his prayers.

What a joy it was that holiday season to come together in heartfelt service and know we had made a difference. ■

Lindsey Leavitt, Nevada, USA



I CAN DO THIS!

It was evening during the Christmas season, and a heavy blanket of snow lay on the ground. For months my companion and I had braved the cold German weather, knocked on doors, and handed out copies of the Book of Mormon. Even then, 15 years after World War II had ended, many Germans were wary of Americans.

But that night Ingeborg Bienmuller was to be baptized. On the long bus ride to the United States Air Force base, however, she was quiet. I sensed her growing feeling of distress.

As we approached the bus stop, Ingeborg turned to us and said, “Do

you know how difficult this is for me? The Allied forces killed my husband in the war, and bombing raids killed many other family members.”

She touched her leg. “I was hit with shrapnel from a sulfur bomb. My leg will never heal. I don’t know if I can go in there.”

We sat silent as her words sunk in and the bus came to a stop. Ingeborg sat rigid. My heart pounded. I prayed she wouldn’t turn away in fear.

She then rose from her seat and declared, “Heavenly Father has given me a testimony of the truthfulness of the Restoration. I know the Book of

Mormon is true. I can do this! Elder Atkin, please help me walk.”

We made the long walk to the gate, Ingeborg’s breath coming hard as we passed the guards. We changed into our white clothing and found the pool at the base. The pool became a sacred place, and peace settled over us. The distress on Ingeborg’s face changed to joy as she stepped into the water and was baptized a member of the Church.

“The night the elders left a Book of Mormon with me, I was thrilled,” she told us as we rode home. “I stayed up reading until I came to Mosiah 18, where Alma invites the people to be baptized: ‘Behold, here are the waters of Mormon . . . and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, . . . what have you against being baptized?’” (Mosiah 18:8, 10).

She softly continued, “I fell asleep reading those words, and I had a dream. I was standing near a beautiful body of water like the Waters of Mormon. On the other side of the water stood people dressed in white—my family! My husband, who had been killed in the war, was smiling and beckoning me to be baptized.”

That night Sister Bienmuller became a member of the Würzburg Branch and one of the many in Germany who eventually overcame their fears and joined the Church. ■

Roy Atkin, California, USA

Ingeborg turned to us and said, “Do you know how difficult this is for me?”



WE CAME FOR OUR GIFTS

When I was a member of our district presidency, I helped coordinate an activity in which the members of our district donated toys to poor children living in the city of Soacha, Colombia. We had a wonderful response from all the members. Not all the gifts were new, but most were in good condition.

As we finished loading the gifts on the buses that would

take us to the city, a young girl came up to me with a plastic ball that had been heavily used and was scratched. I held the ball in my hand, wondering who would have donated such a beat-up ball. With some disdain I tossed it under the seat.

When we arrived, our youth began singing Christmas hymns. Their music, along with their Christmas hats, attracted a large group of children. When we started handing out the gifts, those children called other children. Soon we had given out all our gifts.

When we were about to leave, I saw a boy about eight years

I silently hoped that I would be as eager to bless others as the older boy was to bless his brother.

old running toward us, holding his little brother by the hand. When they arrived, the older boy said, “We came for our gifts.” His innocence left me without words and touched my heart.

I explained to him that the gifts were gone. He responded, “It doesn’t matter if my gift isn’t here, but my little brother’s must be here.”

Then I thought of the ball I had tossed under my seat. I told the boys I did have one more gift but that it was a humble one.

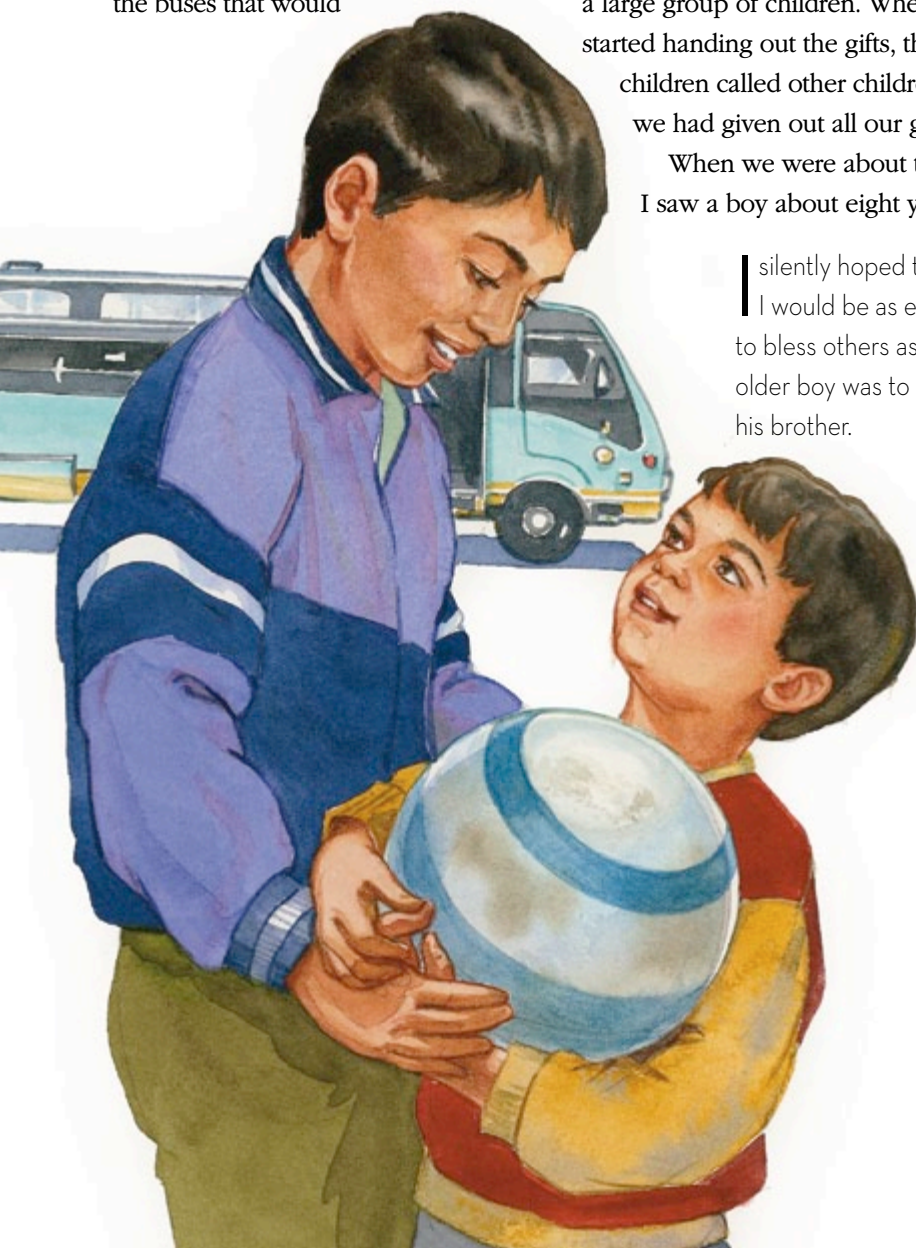
“It doesn’t matter what it is,” he said. “That is the one.”

I got on the bus and found the ball. When I gave it to the little boy, his joy overflowed. Jumping with gratitude, he said, “A ball! That is the present I asked the Christ child to bring me.” He continued to dance around happily as he and his older brother went away with their treasured gift.

I quietly stood there and wept as a warm feeling of peace and gratitude enveloped me. The concern and selfless care the older brother gave to his younger brother touched me, and I silently hoped that I would be as eager to bless others as the older boy was to bless his brother.

As the boys happily walked away, I was reminded of the Savior’s love for us. He did not even forget a little boy on a mountainside who had asked for a simple ball for Christmas. ■

Walter Emilio Posada Rodriguez,
Colombia





By Elder Robert D. Hales

Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles

The PROMISE of CHRISTMAS

*May we take time this Christmas season to
renew our covenants to follow the Savior and
to do His will, just as He did the will of our
Heavenly Father.*

We can't fully understand the meaning of Christmas unless we understand the meaning of the Savior's life, Atonement, and Resurrection.

I cannot think about the birth of the Savior without thinking of His words to Pilate: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37).

As we begin the Christmas season, may we consider the scriptural prophecies about the Savior. They are not just odd statements of coincidence; rather, they are profound statements of purpose and promise about His life and mission and what He means for each of us.

Prophecies of His Coming

Christ's coming was foretold for thousands of years. About 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, Abraham taught about His role in the plan of salvation. About 1,400 years before His birth, Moses taught the same wonderful truths. About 700 years before His birth, Isaiah revealed the circumstances of His birth, life, and death:

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).



“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).

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . .

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . and with his stripes we are healed. . . .

“ . . . He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

“He was taken from prison and from judgment. . . .

“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:3–5, 7–9).

Not long after Isaiah’s prophecy, the prophet Lehi had a profound dream and taught his family what he had learned. Nephi recorded: “Six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 10:4).

Lehi also spoke about the great number of prophets who had testified concerning the coming of the Redeemer of the world (see 1 Nephi 10:5).

The Promise of Christmas

The Gospel of Luke records that before the Savior’s birth, His mother traveled with haste to visit her cousin Elisabeth.

“And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

“And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:41–42).

As the Holy Ghost bore record to Elisabeth, He bears record to us that the words of the prophets have been fulfilled. The Savior has come and performed the work His Father sent Him to do.

Of the Savior, Nephi recorded:

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

“And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:20–21).

When the Savior was 12, He taught in the temple. He explained to His anxious parents that He was about His Father’s business (see Luke 2:42–49).

That business was accomplished as He went forward fulfilling His earthly mission. The Savior describes the



Each week as we participate in the ordinance of the sacrament, we renew the promise of the Savior’s birth in our own lives.

culmination of that mission in these stirring words:

“I came unto my own, and my own received me not. And the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled.

“And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons [and daughters] of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:16–17).

His promise that we can become His sons and daughters will be realized as we believe in Him and exercise faith in Him unto obedience. Then we will be prepared to receive the gift of eternal life.

He said: “Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. . . . In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters” (Ether 3:14).

The Meaning of Christmas

Christmas is a time to share our gifts, strengthen others, and do our part in the kingdom of God. Christmas is also a time to express our love to others and to bear our testimony of the Savior.

One way we can share our testimony is to have a nativity in our home so we can spark conversations

about the Lord’s birth. Another way is to relate stories like that of John Weightman in *The Mansion*.

John Weightman was a successful man whose charities brought him attention and renown. One evening, after perusing a pile of newspaper clippings praising him for his generosity, he picked up his Bible. Soon he fell asleep after reading the Savior’s words: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal” (Matthew 6:19).

As he slept, John found himself in “the heavenly city,” traveling with others as they received their mansions. When the Keeper of the Gate stopped in front of a tiny hut built of cast-off materials, he said to John, “This is your mansion.”

John protested, listing his many public contributions. “Were not all these carefully recorded on earth where they would add to your credit?” asked the Keeper of the Gate. “You have had your reward for them. Would you be paid twice?”¹

During this Christmas season, I hope each of us has the opportunity to give anonymously.

Obtaining the Promise

Each week as we participate in the ordinance of the sacrament, we renew the promise of the Savior’s birth in our own lives. We take His name upon us, and we renew

our covenant of obedience and our promise that we will always remember Him.

The gospel, as recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, is this:

“That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;

“That through him all might be saved” (D&C 76:41–42).

May we take time this Christmas season to renew our covenants to follow the Savior and to do His will, just as He did the will of our Heavenly Father. As we do so, the words of King Benjamin’s people, recorded 125 years before the Savior’s birth, will be fulfilled for us today: “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 4:2).

I testify that the Savior came down in the meridian of time and that He will come again. I bear witness that His Church, restored in this last dispensation before His Second Coming, is the “marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 25:17) in which we as Latter-day Saints are engaged. ■

NOTE

1. Henry Van Dyke, “The Mansion,” in *Inspirational Classics for Latter-day Saints*, comp. Jack M. Lyon (2000), 54–57, 62–63.



**By Elder
Jeffrey R. Holland**
Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles

Preparing for the **SECOND COMING**

Great men and women in ages past were able to keep going, to keep testifying, to keep trying to do their best, not because they knew that they would succeed but because they knew that you would.

We are making our appearance on the stage of mortality in the greatest dispensation of the gospel ever given to mankind, and we need to make the most of it.

I love a line from the Prophet Joseph Smith saying that earlier prophets, priests, and kings “have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day.”¹ Note this similar affirmation from President Wilford Woodruff: “The eyes of God and all the holy prophets are watching us. This is the great dispensation that has been spoken of ever since the world began.”²

I have a theory about those earlier dispensations and the leaders, families, and people who lived then. I have thought often about them and the destructive circumstances that confronted them. They faced terribly difficult times and, for the most part, did not succeed in their dispensations. Indeed, the whole point of the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days is that the gospel had not been able to survive in earlier times and therefore had to be pursued in one last, triumphant age.

A Dispensation That Will Not Fail

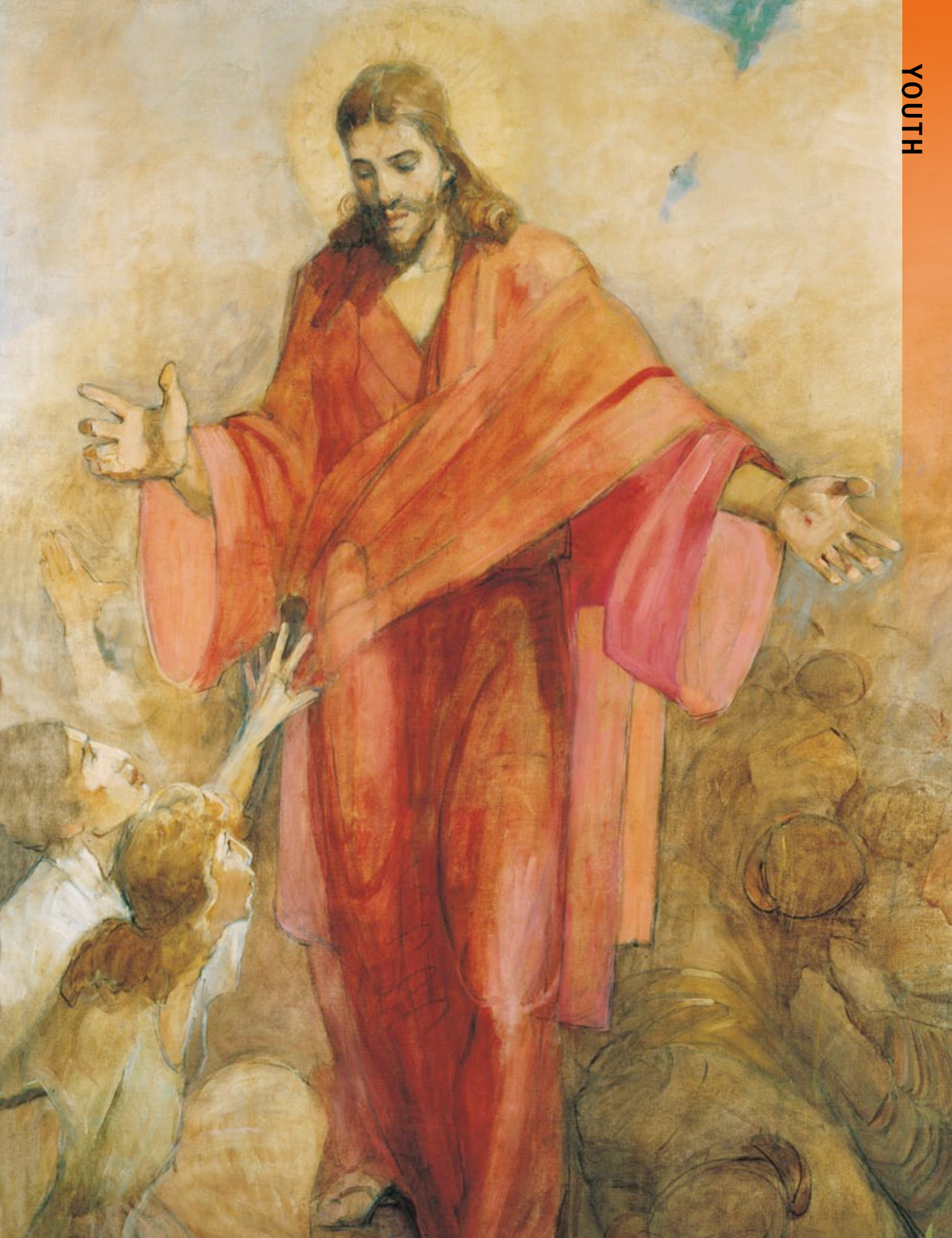
In short, apostasy and destruction of one kind or another was the ultimate fate of every general dispensation we have ever had down through time. But here’s my theory. My theory is that those great men and women, the leaders in those ages past, were able to keep going, to keep testifying, to keep trying to do their best, not because they knew that *they* would succeed but because they knew that *you* would. I believe they took courage and hope not so much from their own circumstances as from yours—a magnificent congregation of young people gathered by the hundreds of thousands around the world in a determined effort to see the gospel prevail and triumph.

Moroni said once, speaking to those of us who would receive his record in the last days:

“Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.

“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:34–35).

One way or another, I think virtually *all* of the prophets



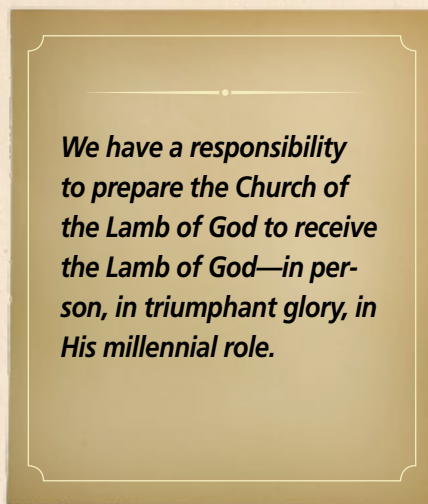
and early apostles had their visionary moments of our time—a view that gave them courage in their own less-successful eras. Those early brethren knew an amazing amount about us. Prophets such as Moses, Nephi, and the brother of Jared saw the latter days in tremendously detailed vision. Some of what they saw wasn't pleasing, but surely all those earlier generations took heart from knowing that there would finally be one dispensation that would not fail.

Ours, not theirs, was the day that gave them “heavenly and joyful anticipations” and caused them to sing and prophesy of victory. Ours is the day, collectively speaking, toward which the prophets have been looking from the beginning of time, and those earlier brethren are over there still cheering us on! In a very real way, their chance to consider themselves fully successful depends on our faithfulness and our victory. I love the idea of going into the battle of the last days representing Alma and Abinadi and what they pled for and representing Peter and Paul and the sacrifices they made. If you can't get excited about that kind of assignment in the drama of history, you can't get excited!

Preparing Christ's Church for His Coming

Let me add another element to this view of the dispensation that I think follows automatically. Because ours is the last and greatest of all dispensations, because all things will eventually culminate and be fulfilled in our

era, there is, therefore, one particular, very specific responsibility that falls to those of us in the Church now that did not rest quite the same way on the shoulders of Church members in any earlier time. Unlike the Church in the days of Abraham or Moses, Isaiah or Ezekiel, or even in the New Testament days of James and John, *we have a responsibility to prepare the Church of the Lamb of God to receive*



the Lamb of God—in person, in triumphant glory, in His millennial role as Lord of lords and King of kings. No other dispensation ever had that duty.

In the language of the scriptures, we are the ones designated in all of history who must prepare the bride for the advent of the Bridegroom and be worthy of an invitation to the wedding feast (see Matthew 25:1–12; 22:2–14; D&C 88:92, 96). Collectively speaking—whether it is in our lifetime or our children's or our grandchildren's or whenever—we nevertheless have the responsibility as a Church and as individual members of that

Church to be worthy to have Christ come to us, to be worthy to have Him greet us, and to have Him accept and receive and embrace us. The lives we present to Him in that sacred hour *must* be worthy of Him!

We Must Be Acceptable to Him

I am filled with awe, with an overwhelming sense of duty to prepare my life (and to the extent that I can, to help prepare the lives of the members of the Church) for that long-prophesied day, for that transfer of authority, for the time when we will make a presentation of the Church to Him whose Church it is.

When Christ comes, the members of His Church must look and act like members of His Church are supposed to look and act if we are to be acceptable to Him. We must be doing His work, and we must be living His teachings. He must recognize us quickly and easily as truly being His disciples. As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961), former First Counselor in the First Presidency, once advised: our faith must *not* be difficult to detect.³

Yes, if in that great, final hour we say we are believers, then we had surely better be demonstrating it. The Shepherd knows His sheep, and we must be known in that great day as His followers in deed as well as in word.

My beloved young friends, these are the latter days, and you and I are to be the best Latter-day *Saints* we can. Put an emphasis on *saints*, please.

When will all of this finish? When



I love the idea of going into the battle of the last days representing Alma and Abinadi and what they pled for and representing Peter and Paul and the sacrifices they made. If you can't get excited about that kind of assignment in the drama of history, you can't get excited!

shall Christ appear publicly, triumphantly, and the Millennium begin? I don't know. What I do know is that the initial moments of that event began 193 years ago. I do know that as a result of that First Vision and what has followed it, we live in a time of unprecedented blessings—blessings given to us for the purpose of living faithfully and purely so when the Bridegroom finally and triumphantly arrives, He can personally, justifiably bid us to the wedding feast.

My beloved young brothers and sisters, I leave you my love and my testimony that God not only lives; He loves us. He loves *you*. Everything He does is for our good and our protection. There is evil and sorrow in the world,

but there is no evil or harm in Him. He is our Father—a perfect father—and He will shelter us from the storm.

Indeed, the only concern I would have us entertain is a very personal one: How can we live more fully, more faithfully, so that all the blessings of this great dispensation can be showered upon each one of us and upon those whose lives we touch?

“Fear not, little flock. . . . Look [to Christ] in every thought; doubt not, fear not.” “Ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath . . . prepared for you” (D&C 6:34, 36; 78:17).

I leave you my blessing, my love, and an apostolic witness of the truthfulness of these things, that our

dispensation will not fail and that those who live the teachings of Christ and do His work will be worthy of an invitation to the wedding feast when the Bridegroom comes. ■

From a Church Educational System fireside for young adults, “Terror, Triumph, and a Wedding Feast,” given on September 12, 2004. For the full text in English, go to speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:609–10.
2. Wilford Woodruff, in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 3:258; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 83.
3. See J. Reuben Clark Jr., *The Charted Course of the Church in Education*, rev. ed. (1994), 7.

“How do I resist temptation?”

Strange as it sounds, temptation is necessary for our spiritual growth. If we weren’t tempted, we wouldn’t be able to choose between good and evil (see D&C 29:39). And if we couldn’t choose good when offered an alternative, we couldn’t grow spiritually (see 2 Nephi 2:11–30).

One key to resisting temptation is consistent obedience. If you give in sometimes, the temptation is harder to resist in the future. If you resist consistently, you get stronger and it is easier to resist in the future. Much of the strength to resist comes from the Savior’s Atonement working in your life. As you do your best to learn the Savior’s teachings and follow them, the Lord strengthens you to withstand temptation.

The scriptures teach other ways to resist temptation:

“Pray always, that you may come off conqueror; yea, that you may conquer Satan” (D&C 10:5).

“Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them” (1 Nephi 15:24).

“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:7–8).

Also, it’s important to know that it’s not wrong to be tempted. Even Jesus was tempted. “He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them” (D&C 20:22). You can look to His example—and the examples of many others in the scriptures—to help you.

Pray for Strength



To withstand temptation, we first need the will and the sincere desire to choose the right. It helps me a lot if I imagine a situation in advance and then choose the right. Another thing that helps me is prayer. If we will pray for strength, seek out spiritual nourishment, and choose carefully where we hang out, then the Holy Ghost can be our constant companion to be with us and to warn us.

Esther G., age 18, Lower Saxony, Germany

Support Each Other



I think that by reading the scriptures daily, praying, exercising self-control, and following the words of the prophet, we can

resist temptation. Resisting temptation strengthens your faith and shows your commitment to Heavenly Father to keep the covenants you have made. Having friends in the Church can also help us because we can support each other. It takes a lot of courage to say no. Remember, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). When we overcome temptation, we draw nearer to Jesus Christ and to our Heavenly Father.

Nancy S., age 19, Tultitlán, Mexico

Share Your Beliefs

In high school, most of my classmates invited me to drink alcohol and watch pornography. I always said no because I do what the Savior wants me to do. I remember Him and keep my covenants. Sometimes my friends and classmates do not tempt me because they already know what my religion is. Sharing our beliefs and testimony with others—especially with friends, classmates, neighbors, and family—will lessen the temptation in our surroundings. I know that by living the gospel, we can overcome the temptations in our lives.

Romeo P., age 19, Negros Occidental, Philippines

Listen to the Holy Ghost

I have found that when temptation comes, the Holy Ghost tries to warn me to choose the right. Do things—like praying and reading your scriptures—that keep the Spirit with you and avoid places where the Holy Ghost can't come.

Rachel O., age 13, Pennsylvania, USA

Stand in Holy Places



My older brother always tells me to “stand in holy places.” I found that this means to stand where temptations are less

present or less severe. My stake president said, “Don’t just resist temptation—avoid temptation.” There will be times when you have to resist temptations, but it becomes easier to live the gospel when temptations are not there to tempt you.

Aaron L., age 18, Utah, USA

We Always Get to Decide

The gift of the Holy Ghost helps us tell the difference between good and bad and helps us realize when we are being tempted. We should remember that temptations are tests that help us know when we do right and when we don't; and we should know that if we follow the Lord, He won't allow us to be tempted more than we can withstand (see 1 Corinthians 10:13). We always get to decide whether to choose the right road instead of the wrong one.

Juan T., age 19, Montevideo, Uruguay

Role-play Choosing the Right



I think it is important to make up my mind ahead of time about choices I will be faced with. I was unexpectedly faced with a tricky situation, and the outcome was positive because I had already made up my mind that I would not back down from my standards. Even though I am sometimes uncomfortable, my family practices role-playing so I know what to say or do when faced with temptations.

Emelyne P., age 14, Wyoming, USA

Have Good Friends

Having good friends who choose the right is something you can do to resist temptation. They set a good example. You can call them if you are tempted. They will help you choose the right. Good friends can remind you to pray, read the scriptures, and obey.

Sam E., age 17, Washington, USA



DECIDE EARLY TO EXERCISE FAITH

“It will take unshakable faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to choose the

way to eternal life. . . . It is by acting on that faith we build the strength to do the will of God. And it is by exercising that faith in Jesus Christ that we can resist temptation and gain forgiveness through the Atonement. . . .

“The best time to resist temptation is early. The best time to repent is now. The enemy of our souls will place thoughts in our minds to tempt us. We can decide early to exercise faith, to cast out evil thoughts before we act on them.”

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 38, 40.

UPCOMING QUESTION

“What should I do when I am mocked at school for following Church standards?”

Submit your answer and, if desired, a high-resolution photograph by January 15, 2014, at liahona.lds.org, by email to liahona@ldschurch.org, or by mail (see address on page 3).

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.

The following information and permission must be included in your email or letter: (1) full name, (2) birth date, (3) ward or branch, (4) stake or district, (5) your written permission, and, if you are under age 18, your parent's written permission (email is acceptable) to publish your response and photograph.



By Elder
Bradley D. Foster
Of the Seventy

The View from the **END OF THE ROAD**

The message from the end of the road is clear: “You can do this. And when you do, everything will be better.”

“I will never forget you, bishop. You saved my life.”

The man who makes that statement today didn't feel that way in the beginning. As a teen he was scared. He knew he needed to repent. I was his bishop at the time, and he knew we needed to talk. But he was full of doubts.

“What is the bishop going to think of me?”

“Will he keep this confidential?”

“How will I ever look at him again?”

Such worries can feel overwhelming, making it seem nearly impossible to muster the courage necessary to travel the road to repentance.

Looking Down the Road

But let's take a look at that road. Some parts of repentance are easier than others. One step is recognition. We usually know when we're doing something wrong; the Holy Ghost helps us sense that. We must

change, and the desire to change is usually strong.

Then the steps get harder. The Lord says we must confess and forsake. It seems pretty easy to confess to Heavenly Father in our prayers. We can correct many sins in this way, seeking forgiveness, making restitution, and improving behavior until the Spirit confirms that we have done all we can.

But some confessions require that you talk to your bishop or branch president. And that's where this young man found himself. He needed help beyond his own capacity, and he needed to know the journey was possible.

Hope on the Highway

Those who have traveled the repentance road will tell you that not only is the journey possible but that when you have been there and look back, this is what you are going to see:

You can do this. And when you do, everything will be better.

The Lord commands us to repent because He loves us. Through His Atonement, He paid the price for our sins, and so He knows that repentance sets us free. He will strengthen anyone who turns to Him. Alma taught that to take advantage of the Atonement, we must repent—every one of us (see Alma 5:33–34). The road may be hard,



WE SHOULD SMILE

“Repentance is a divine gift, and there should be a smile on our faces when we speak of it.”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 38.



but a bishop will walk that road with you. There *is* help along the way.

As soon as you start, you will feel relief.

Turn to your bishop. You will find a man who loves you and respects you. The trust you can build with your bishop is profound. It will last forever, and it will help you feel safe with other bishops in the future. You'll be given a different perspective on your predicaments. In his wisdom and experience, and with inspiration from the Lord, the bishop will balance out for you what you thought was the end of the world when it's maybe only a bump in the road.

He will help you to truly understand that the Savior is the Light of the World. By your taking advantage of the Atonement, your life will become bright, your future will be promising, and you will understand that gaining faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the great purposes for coming to live on earth.

Your bishop will help you through this. You will love him and never forget him.

I firmly believe that people who help you in times of crisis become bound to your heart. How much more, then, is a bishop bound to you when he helps you through a spiritual crisis? The Lord can magnify the bishop's kindness and his ability to guide you. Your bishop will be your friend forever.

And for you young men who will one day be bishops or stake presidents yourselves, your experiences with your bishop will train you for that time when you may be on the other side of the desk.


Let me close by telling you a little more about my visit with that young man. "Bishop," he said, "you're going to hate me for what I have to tell you. You'll never be able to look at me again, and if you share what I say with anybody, I'll kill myself."

I said, "I promise I will never betray your confidences. I will take them with me to the grave."

He told me about some minor situations and watched my reaction. When I said, "I know what you're going through. I can help you," he proceeded slowly until he got to what he really wanted to discuss. I reminded him repeatedly that I admired him for confessing and wanting to change. Even though he seemed ready to run at any moment, together we got through what he needed to share.

Was it a big deal? It was to him. But as we talked, he came to better understand the mercy the Lord offers to those who sincerely repent. After that first visit, we worked together, and over time his repentance became complete. Today he still calls me to say hello, and our conversations are happy.

I was privileged to help him learn that we all depend on the Atonement. And I join my voice with his in praise of Jesus Christ, the one who really saved his life. ■



*As a young woman,
I never thought
pornography would
be something
I could struggle with.*

I never thought a pornography addiction could be a girl's problem. I was proved wrong when I was about 16 years old. I came across a video of pornography, and since I was alone and curious, I watched it. After that first time, I felt like I had to watch something every day. I became addicted to pornography.

Viewing pornography made me feel bad. I knew it was wrong, but I didn't

NO LONGER **ADDICTED:** My Journey to Overcome Pornography

Name withheld

do anything to change. I was never happy, and I felt dirty and infected with Satan's tempting filth. But I still found ways to watch it just so I could satisfy my appetite. My addiction led to more and more wrongdoings. I lied to everyone: my brother, my mother, and worst of all, the Lord and myself. I would tell myself that one more movie wasn't going to hurt me, one more dirty story wouldn't be that bad.

I still went to church, Mutual, and seminary, but I didn't have the right attitude or the Spirit with me. I was resentful, so I didn't get anything from the lessons. I stopped paying my tithing, praying, and reading the scriptures. I felt guilty, but I still couldn't bring myself to quit. I was bringing myself down every day.

Eventually, my access to pornography was restricted. At first I felt deprived without pornography, but then I realized things had changed for the better. My routine was different. I didn't watch pornography every day. I still had urges to watch it, but I became better about resisting them. Eventually, after two years of being addicted to pornography, I began praying consistently for strength and stopped watching it completely. But I still felt dirty inside. I knew I needed to talk to the bishop. I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

Finally, after hearing a lot of people talk about going through the repentance process and the trials they overcame, I felt that I really needed to

see my bishop. I also realized I was missing out on a great blessing in the Church: my patriarchal blessing.

I made an appointment to meet with my bishop.

I felt ashamed walking into my bishop's office the night of my interview. I was afraid he was just going to look at me and tell me that my case was hopeless and that I had dug myself a hole that was too deep to escape. I was afraid he would never look at me the same. But as I told him my whole story, he gave me a loving smile and listened intently. He really cared about me. After talking with my bishop and working through things, he finally told me I was clean.

My years addicted to pornography were the roughest of my life, but I felt so good leaving my bishop's office and feeling clean. It was as if a weight I had been carrying for years was lifted off my shoulders. I was glad I could receive my patriarchal blessing and worthily partake of the sacrament and have the Spirit again. I felt like a new person. People even told me how different I seemed and that I had a different glow about me. I was happier all the time and had a better attitude about everything.

I know that with the Lord's help we can change and overcome addictions. And we don't need to worry about talking with the bishop, because he will help us as we repent so we can feel clean once again through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. ■



WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

"Through the Atonement, you can receive forgiveness and be cleansed from your sins when you repent.

"Repentance is more than simply acknowledging wrongdoings. . . . It includes turning away from sin and turning to God for forgiveness. . . .

". . . If you have sinned, the sooner you repent, the sooner you begin to make your way back and find the peace and joy that come with forgiveness. . . .

". . . As you strive to repent, seek help and counsel from your parents. Serious sins, such as sexual transgression or use of pornography, need to be confessed to your bishop. Be completely honest with him. He will help you repent."

For the Strength of Youth (booklet, 2011), 28, 29.

MORE THAN a Sidekick

Think you're only a tagalong when it comes to home teaching? Think again.

"I know how to be a friend as well as a home teacher. I love seeing what I can do to help others."



You've seen it in novels or movies dozens of times. There's a big, scary problem hanging like a dark cloud in the distance.

Disaster seems inevitable. Then along comes the hero who beats the odds and saves the day.

Such heroes are often accompanied by a sidekick. This character typically has a few basic skills but mainly exists to toss the hero a weapon when the villains start to swarm.

As a home teaching junior companion, it might be tempting to think of yourself as something of a sidekick in the companionship. After all, your adult companion has been around longer and has more experience than you. So it should be up to him to save the day, right?

Not quite.

When it comes to home teaching, there's no such thing as a superhero

(your older companion) and his sidekick (you)—just two superheroes who can truly change the world together.

No matter who you are and what your background might be, you personally have what it takes to make a big difference in the lives of those you visit.

No Greater Calling

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said, "There is no greater Church calling than that of a home teacher."¹

Home teachers do so much more than share a spiritual message. They help each family to know they have friends they can call on.

President Thomas S. Monson has said: "A friend makes more than a dutiful visit each month. . . . A friend cares. A friend loves. A friend listens. And a friend reaches out."²

Great friendships, of course, can be formed at any age.

Serving as a Friend

Sean C., a 16-year-old from southern Utah, USA, knows how to be a friend as well as a home teacher. Sean has a



JOIN THE CONVERSATION



Throughout December, your Sunday lessons will focus on building the kingdom of God. Home teaching is one way to do this, but everyone can build the kingdom of God through everyday acts of service. As you pray for others, the Spirit may bring to mind something you can do. Remember this counsel from Sister Linda K. Burton, Relief Society general president: “First observe, then serve.”⁴ How have you found ways to observe and then serve in building God’s kingdom? Be prepared to share your experiences in your ward, with your family, or with other youth.

broad range of interests that include competing in rodeo, wrestling, working with cattle, and repairing cars. He also loves cultivating friendships with the people he home teaches.

“I love talking to people and seeing what I can do to help them,” Sean says.

His home teaching companion is the bishop of their ward. In one home they visit, the wife is a member of the Church and the husband is not. Sean connected with the husband, Floyd, on their very first visit. As Floyd began talking about his Jeep, Sean perked up. “We just clicked,” says Sean.

In the year that Sean and the bishop have visited Floyd and his wife, Sean has strengthened those friendships—including helping Floyd work on engines from time to time.

One of Sean’s favorite scriptures is about service: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Sean explains, “Everybody needs to be looking out to find ways to serve.”

Your Spiritual Gifts

We all have spiritual gifts and talents. In addition, we have unique interests and hobbies. Each of us has something special to offer that nobody else can do in quite the same way.

“Every person is different and has a different contribution to make,” teaches President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency.

“No one is destined to fail.”³ Home teaching can be an opportunity for you to use those gifts to benefit others.

For example, when it’s your turn to share a spiritual message, you might consider praying ahead of time about what you can say that will be most helpful to the people you visit.

Often, you will have a personal experience with a given topic that you can mention with the family. Let your light shine! Share what you know.

You can also find creative and meaningful ways to serve the families you visit. Pretend, for example, that someone in one of your home teaching families wants to learn the guitar. As it happens, you’ve been playing guitar for years. In this situation, a few music tips from time to time might be as helpful as shoveling snow off their driveway or trimming their trees.

When it comes to home teaching, your senior companion might indeed be a spiritual powerhouse. But make no mistake. You’re a child of God and equal to your responsibility as home teacher.

You’ll always have something incredible to add. ■

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Home Teachers of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 50.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “Home Teaching—a Divine Service,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 47.
3. Henry B. Eyring, “Help Them Aim High,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 60.
4. Linda K. Burton, “First Observe, Then Serve,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 78.

STANDING IN HOLY PLACES



1

This year Church magazines invited youth from all over the world to send in pictures that show how they stand in holy places. Take a look at some of the pictures sent in and see what youth did to live the 2013 Mutual theme.

1 Anytime I'm involved in wholesome activities, especially with my family, I'm standing in holy places.

LaRae R., age 16, British Columbia, Canada

2 I stand in holy places when I value things that have eternal worth over the things of the world.

Kirck M., age 18, Negros Occidental, Philippines

3 To me, standing in a holy place means doing service. My favorite way to do service is in the temple. I can feel such a strong spirit when I am doing the Lord's work in the Lord's house.

Kiana B., age 15, Utah, USA



2



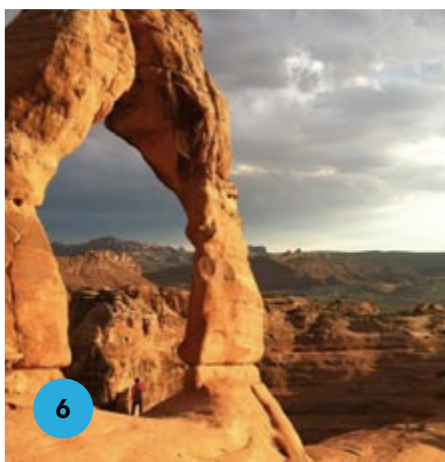
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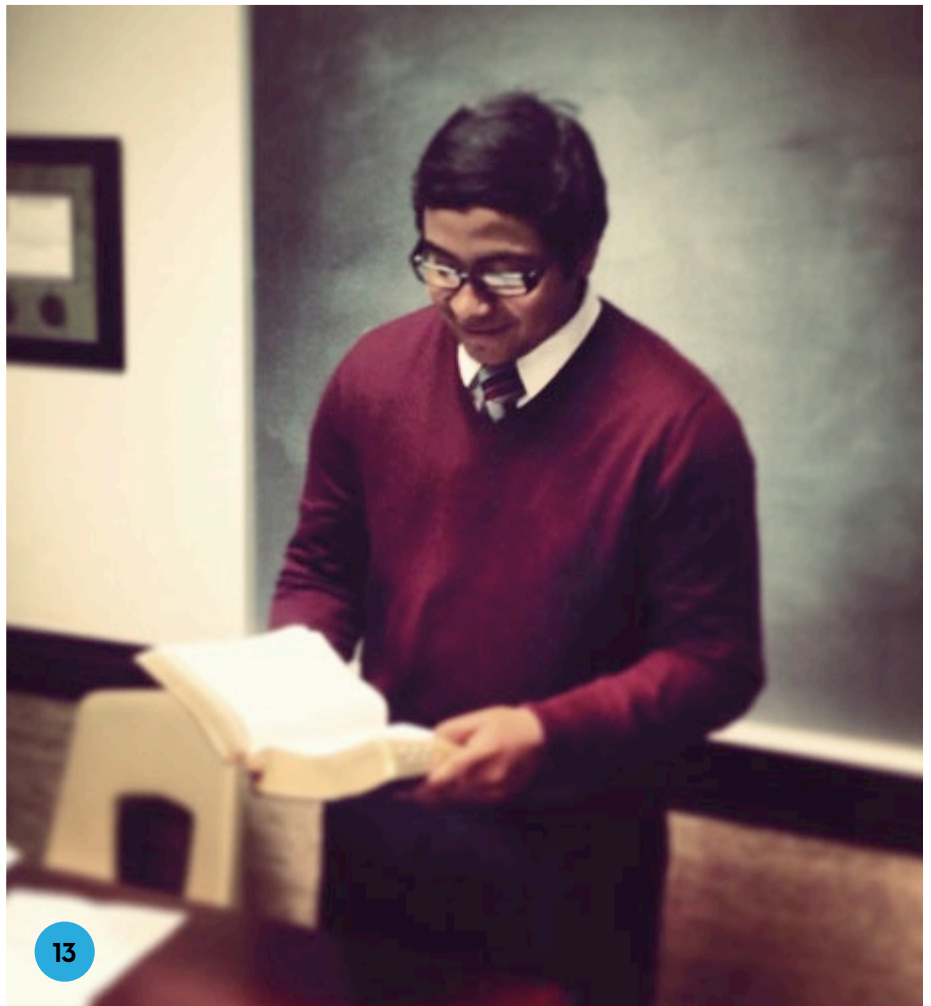
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4 I'm standing next to the baptismal font where I was baptized. I consider this font to be a holy place because it's where people make covenants with God and are made new.
Joe-Smith E., age 17, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria

5 Whenever I go up to the mountains and am separated from the world, I realize that they can be holy and peaceful places.
Emma P., age 17, Oregon, USA

6 I love the outdoors, and whenever I'm in a place like this (Delicate Arch in Moab, Utah), I feel more connected with my Heavenly Father. Being able to see the amazing things Heavenly Father created for us helps me feel the Spirit.
John T., age 18, Utah, USA

7 My home is a holy, sacred place because I feel very happy and peaceful there. And when I read the Book of Mormon, I feel a quiet peace through the Holy Ghost.
Melisa D., age 13, Kosovo



8 This is a picture from New Beginnings. For me, the church building is a holy place where I learn the Young Women values and the principles of the gospel. At church, I also strengthen the friendships I have with young women who share the same faith.

Luize S., age 12, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

9 I stand in a holy place when I help people and have fun with good friends.

James R., age 17, North Carolina, USA

10 I stand in a holy place when I'm with friends who live the gospel. They help me stay connected to our Heavenly Father and be in greater harmony with the Holy Ghost.

Jonathan N., age 17, Buenos Aires, Argentina

11 I stand in holy places when I play the piano in sacrament meeting. The melodies and lyrics of the hymns strengthen my faith and testimony.

Chelsea A., age 13, Banten, Indonesia

12 I stand in holy places when I lead the songs in sacrament meeting because I am touched by the beautiful singing of the congregation.

Geovani W., age 15, Banten, Indonesia

13 I stand in holy places when I teach my quorum on Sundays. I love sharing the gospel.

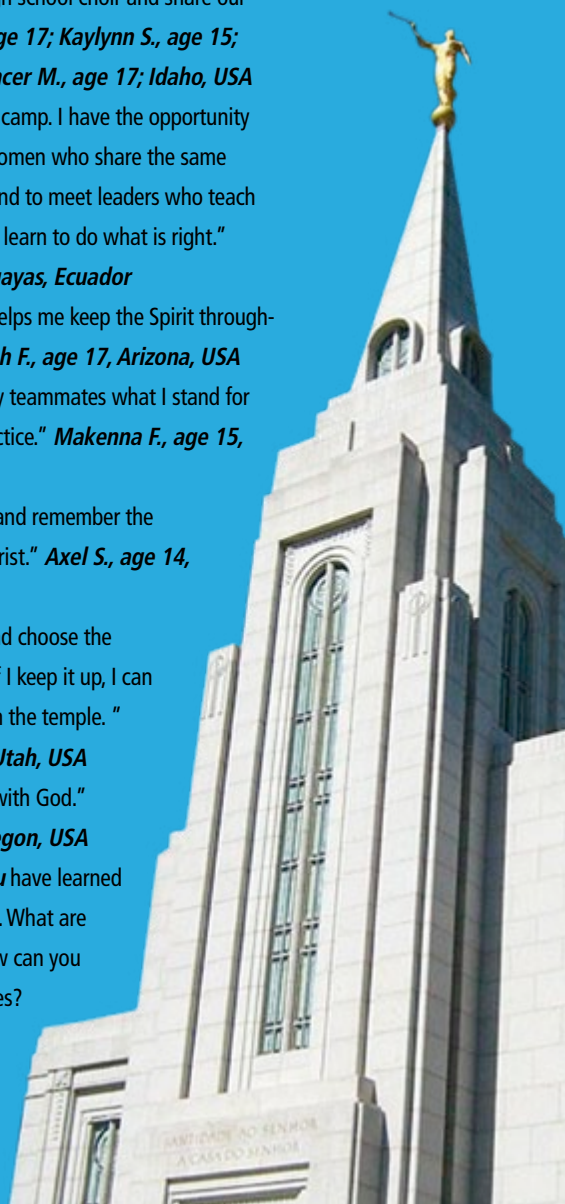
Ramón M., age 16, California, USA

OTHER HOLY PLACES

Here's how other youth completed the sentence "I stand in holy places when . . ."

- "I share the gospel with my friends." *John B., age 17, Ceará, Brazil*
- "I stand with the missionaries, because working with them gives me more experience sharing the gospel, and soon I will be a full-time missionary." *Joseph H., age 18, Jakarta, Indonesia*
- "I'm on the basketball court and am helpful to my teammates and show good sportsmanship to the players, even to the other team." *Emily C., age 12, Utah, USA*
- "We perform in our high school choir and share our talents." *Tanner M., age 17; Kaylynn S., age 15; Lexie J., age 17; Spencer M., age 17; Idaho, USA*
- "I go to Young Women camp. I have the opportunity to meet other young women who share the same standards and values and to meet leaders who teach us principles so we can learn to do what is right." *Norma V., age 17, Guayas, Ecuador*
- "I attend seminary. It helps me keep the Spirit throughout my day!" *Savannah F., age 17, Arizona, USA*
- "I make it known to my teammates what I stand for at my school cheer practice." *Makenna F., age 15, California, USA*
- "I pass the sacrament and remember the Atonement of Jesus Christ." *Axel S., age 14, Jakarta, Indonesia*
- "I keep myself clean and choose the right, because I know if I keep it up, I can someday get married in the temple." *Whitney H., age 15, Utah, USA*
- "I keep my covenants with God." *Mark M., age 17, Oregon, USA*

Now think about what **you** have learned from this year's Mutual theme. What are some of your holy places? How can you continue to stand in holy places? Consider recording your thoughts in your journal.





A Favorite Christmas Song

By C. G. Lindstrom

I remember it was your typical ward Christmas party: tables covered with red and green butcher paper, dinner served on paper plates, little children running around, and the happy sound of ward members chatting. Somehow, someone had managed to quiet things down to give a blessing on the food, and then everyone ate. The program was about to start.

It wasn't my ward. I had gone with a friend to her ward party, so I didn't know many people. We had wanted to leave early, but her mom convinced us to stay for the program.

The first number on the program was by the Primary children, who walked onto the stage wearing gold-tinsel halos on their heads. They sang a song then bumped and giggled their way offstage, leaving a trail of gold tinsel in their wake.

Two pianists then played joyous songs. The first pianist played "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful" (*Hymns*, no. 202) without missing a note. The other, a young boy, sat down at the piano and looked mournfully over his shoulder at his mom, who began to quietly count the beat. The boy sighed, turned to the instrument, and played his best version of "Up on the Housetop."

Next on the program was one of my favorite songs—"C-h-r-i-s-t-m-a-s."

I looked up to see a sister with stooped shoulders and one hand held close to her body, walking with an awkward stride to stand beside the piano. She stood with one hip lower than the other and offered a lopsided smile before she began. I admit I wrongfully wondered if the song would be any good.

"When I was but a youngster, Christmas meant one thing," she sang. The song went on to tell how a child learns how to spell *Christmas* and discovers what the holiday is really about.

"*C* is for the Christ child born upon this day; *H* is for herald angels."

Her mouth was slack on one side, and she had difficulty forming the words.

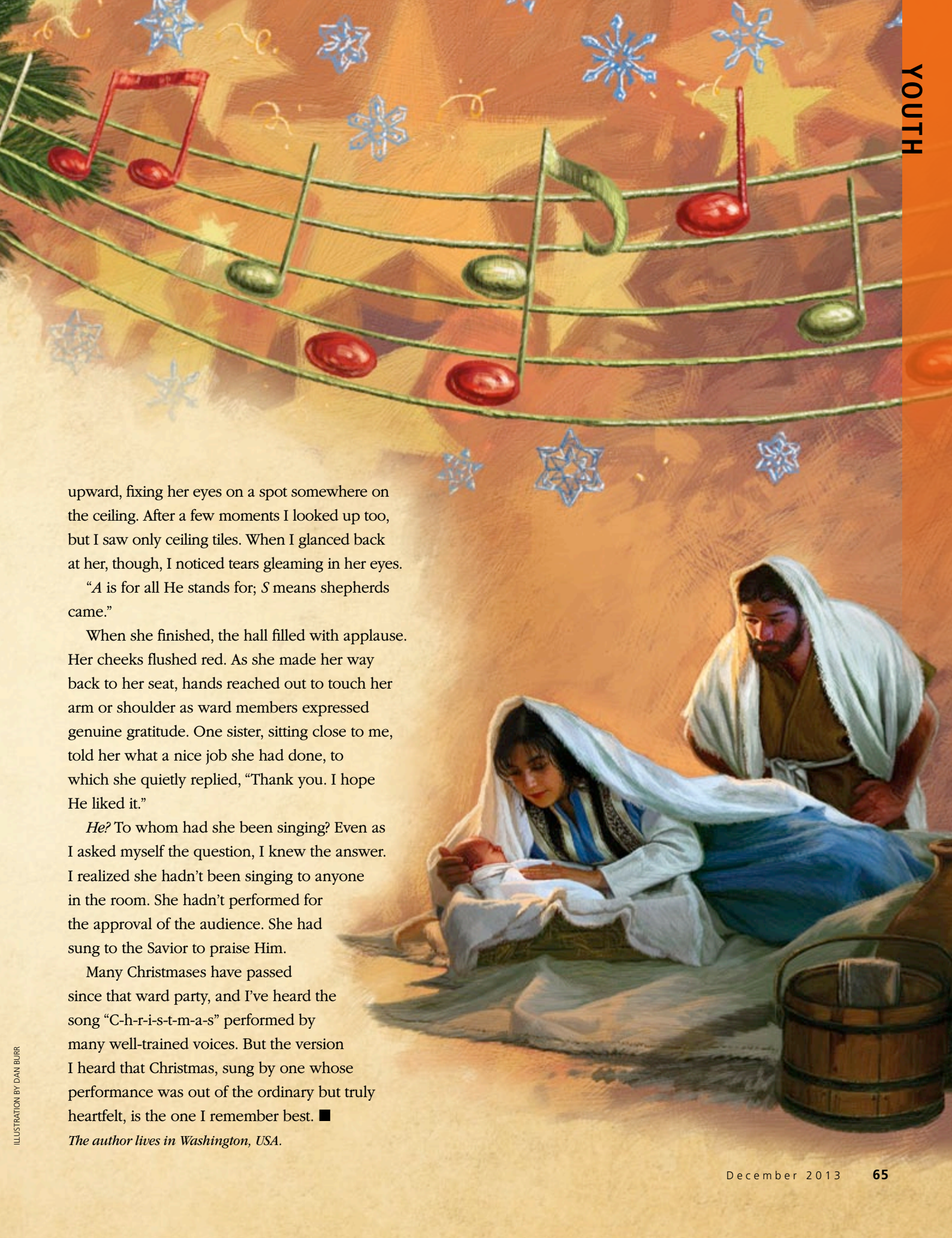
"*R* means our Redeemer; *I* means Israel; *S* is for the star."

Cautiously I looked around the room and studied the faces of her ward members. No one seemed embarrassed. In fact, they sat smiling and listening contentedly.

"*T* is for three wise men . . . ; *M* is for the manger."

She continued singing and turned her face

I didn't appreciate her song until I realized who she was really singing to.



upward, fixing her eyes on a spot somewhere on the ceiling. After a few moments I looked up too, but I saw only ceiling tiles. When I glanced back at her, though, I noticed tears gleaming in her eyes.

“A is for all He stands for; S means shepherds came.”

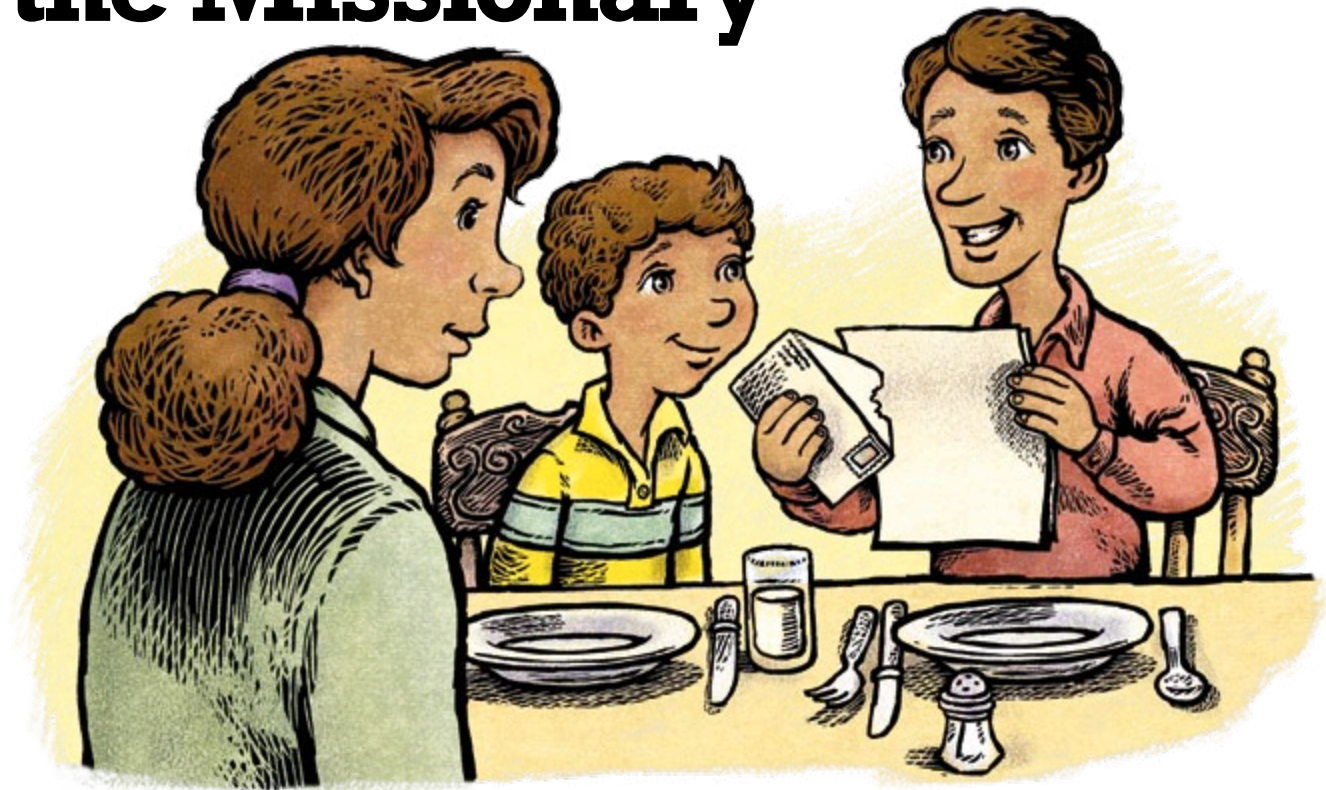
When she finished, the hall filled with applause. Her cheeks flushed red. As she made her way back to her seat, hands reached out to touch her arm or shoulder as ward members expressed genuine gratitude. One sister, sitting close to me, told her what a nice job she had done, to which she quietly replied, “Thank you. I hope He liked it.”

He? To whom had she been singing? Even as I asked myself the question, I knew the answer. I realized she hadn’t been singing to anyone in the room. She hadn’t performed for the approval of the audience. She had sung to the Savior to praise Him.

Many Christmases have passed since that ward party, and I’ve heard the song “C-h-r-i-s-t-m-a-s” performed by many well-trained voices. But the version I heard that Christmas, sung by one whose performance was out of the ordinary but truly heartfelt, is the one I remember best. ■

The author lives in Washington, USA.

My Brother the Missionary



By Kevin V., age 11, Mexico

“I hope that I can share the gospel with those who want to know the truth” (“I Hope They Call Me on a Mission,” Children’s Songbook, 169).

Our family—my parents, my brother, and me—prepared for a long time so that my brother could serve a mission. Whenever we would talk about him being a missionary, I would joke with him, saying I wouldn’t miss him and that I would be glad to be alone.

The day finally came for him to send in his missionary papers. He had tried to do well in school, and we had all worked hard to

save money for his mission.

One day the stake president called us and said the call had arrived. My brother decided to open the letter after dinner at home. He was called to serve in the Mexico City East Mission.

Not long after that we dropped him off at the airport and said good-bye. On the way home my mother could not stop her tears, but I did not cry. But only two hours later, when I was in the room I used to share with my brother, I suddenly realized that I would not see him again for a long time. Then I was the one who could not stop my tears, and I let myself cry and cry.

My parents hugged and comforted me, and we all felt great joy and great sadness at the same time.

Since that day, I pray to Heavenly Father and ask Him to take care of my brother as he serves.

My brother taught me that I must also prepare for a mission. I must be worthy to receive the priesthood, attend seminary, and achieve the goals in *Fulfilling My Duty to God*. He taught me to work and save money, read the scriptures, and obey my leaders.

I want to serve a mission too so that other people can have the blessings of the gospel and know that it is true. ■

SPECIAL WITNESS



Why is it so important to spend time with our families?

By President Boyd K. Packer

President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are special witnesses of Jesus Christ.



Family time is sacred time.

The plan of happiness is a plan for families.

The family is the basic organization in time and in eternity.

We urge our members to show devotion to their families.

I pray that the families of the Church will be blessed, parents and children.

Boyd K. Packer, "And a Little Child Shall Lead Them," Ensign or Liahona, May 2012, 9.

I Know That Jesus Christ Will Come Again

Can you imagine having Jesus hold you in His arms and give you a blessing? That's what He did for the Nephite children in the Book of Mormon after He was resurrected.

"And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought.

"So they brought their little

children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst . . .

". . . And he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them" (3 Nephi 17:11–12, 21).

We know that Jesus will come again and live on the earth with us. He will be our King and Ruler. It will

be a time of peace and happiness for those who are prepared to meet Him.

Jesus loves you just like He loved the Nephite children. You can prepare to see Him when He comes again by being kind to others, by being obedient, by saying your prayers, and by choosing the right. Then you will be ready when He comes again! ■

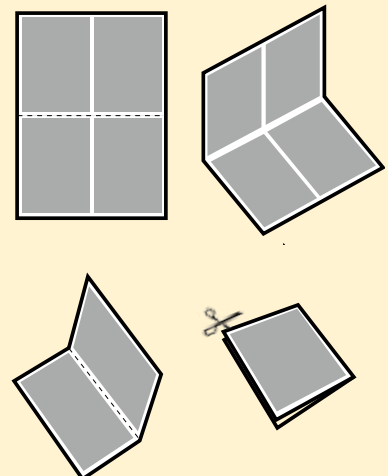
IDEAS FOR FAMILY TALK

Talk with your family about what it will be like on the earth when Jesus is here among us. You could read 2 Nephi 21:6–9. Then you could talk about how people will treat each other, how animals will behave, and how safe the world will be. Give each family member a turn to tell what he or she looks forward to about the time when Jesus comes again.



SONG AND SCRIPTURE

- "When He Comes Again"
(*Children's Songbook*, 82–83)
- Matthew 16:27

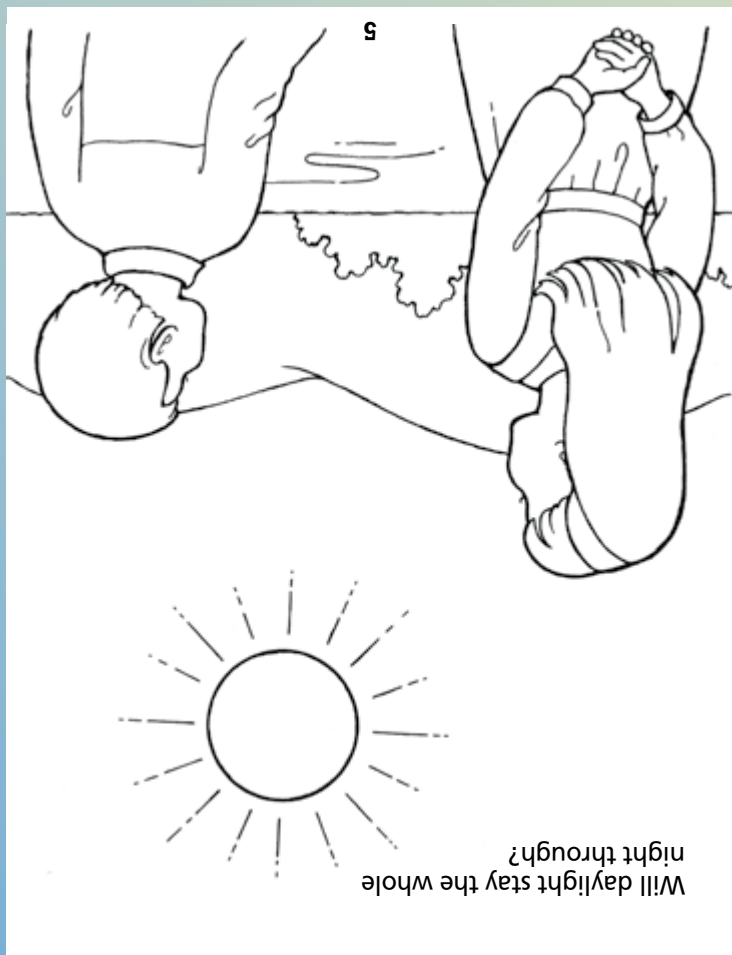
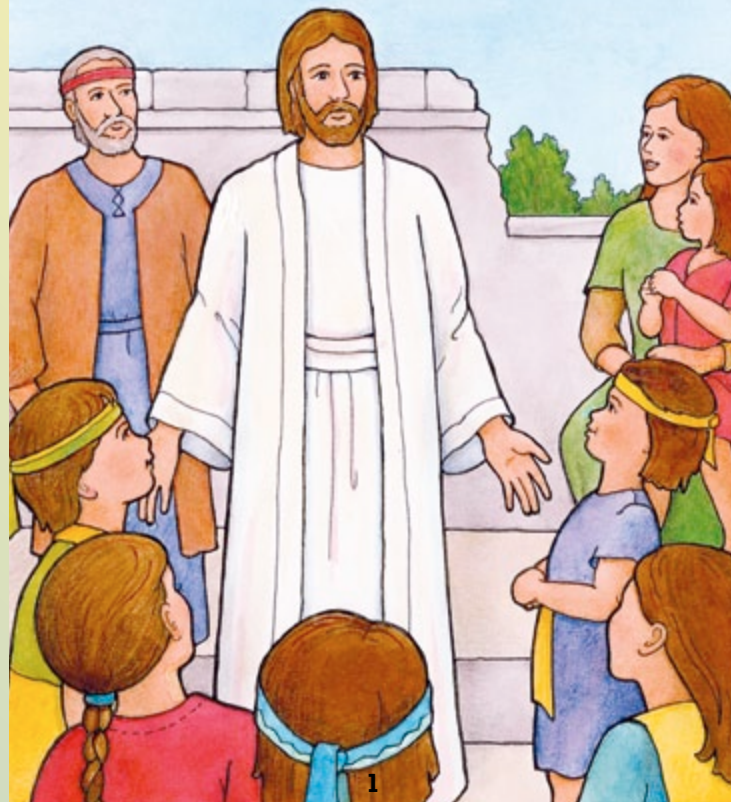


Because He said in days gone by,
"Suffer them to come to me."



WHEN HE COMES AGAIN

By Mirla Greenwood Thayne



Will daylight stay the whole
night through?

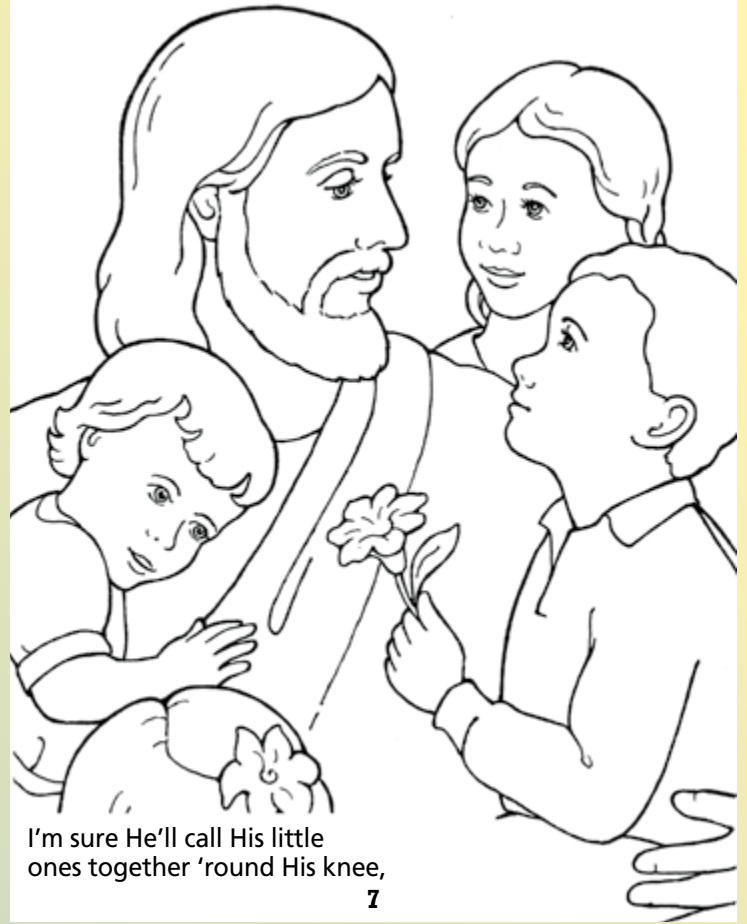


I wonder if one star will shine far
brighter than the rest.

I wonder, when He comes again,
will herald angels sing?

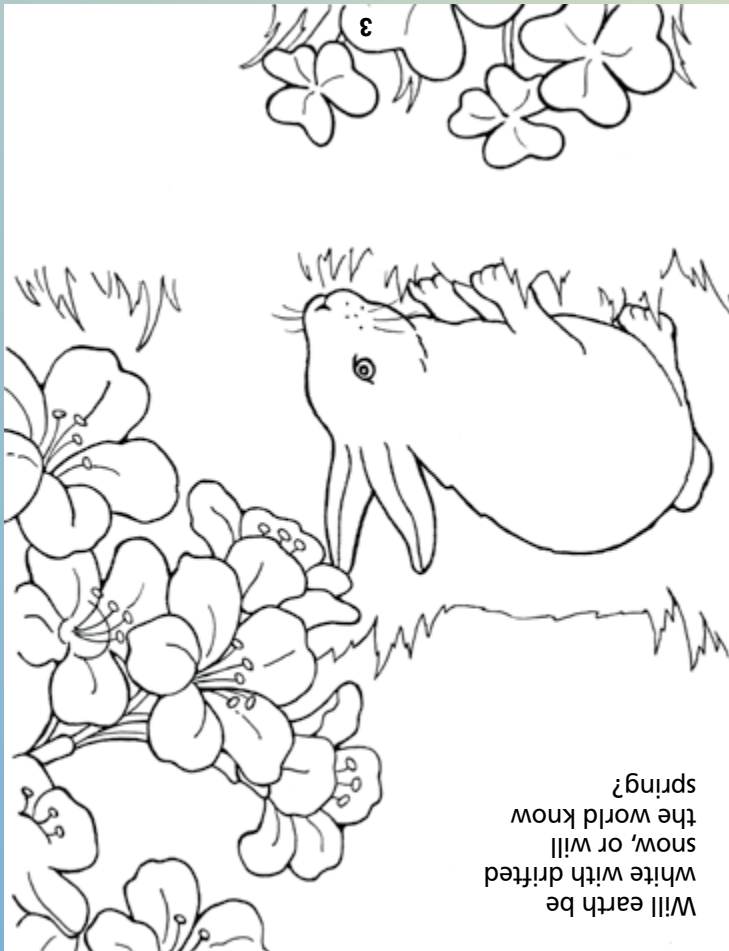


2



I'm sure He'll call His little
ones together 'round His knee,

7



3

Will earth be
white with drifted
snow, or will
the world know
spring?



9

Will songbirds leave
their nests?

OUR PAGE

I love to read the children's pages about the lives of the prophets and Jesus Christ. It strengthens my testimony as I read others' testimonies. The *Liahona* helps me to choose the right and to keep the Church's standards. It also helps me feel closer to Heavenly Father.

Camilla K., age 11, West Malaysia



Ailin C., age 8, Guatemala



One day our Primary visited the São Paulo Brazil Temple. The gardens were more beautiful than any I had ever seen. We learned that through the covenants we make in the temple, we can live with our families for eternity. The president of the temple spoke to us in the waiting room, where we saw beautiful paintings. I had a very warm and happy feeling, and my mother told me it was the Holy Ghost testifying to me that what I was learning was true. I gained a testimony that the temple is the house of the Lord.

Renato B., age 8, Brazil



Renato and his family at his baptism



Mauricio H., age 7, from Mexico, has a desire to be baptized and to be obedient so that one day he may enter the temple. He tries to be a good example for his younger brother, Daniel.



Daniel, age 3, from Hong Kong, is the youngest in his family. He has a great heart and a great smile, and he loves to

serve others. He always volunteers to pray both at church and at home, and he likes to stand with his father and greet the ward members before sacrament meeting. He also likes to pick up hymnbooks and tidy up the chapel after church. One day he set a good example for his mother when he invited a little boy he met on the way to church to come to church with him.



Tima B., age 6, Ukraine

The children of the Cayenne Branch, French Guiana, loved presenting their Primary sacrament meeting. They were happy to read their parts, and they sang very well. They love Primary. One of their favorite songs is "I Am a Child of God" (Hymns, no. 301).



By Matthew D. Flitton
Church Magazines

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels” (Matthew 16:27).

Katie rummaged through the storage box, carefully looking through the crumpled packing paper. She still couldn't find what she was looking for.

She put everything back in the box and went to find Mom.

Katie had looked behind the piano, under the couch, even in Thomas's crib. It was lost. She had to tell Mom.

“Mommy, the baby Jesus is lost.”

Katie led Mom to the nativity set in the living room. Joseph and Mary and the shepherds were there. The

Wise Men—even a camel and a donkey—were there. All of the figures were gathered around the empty manger.

“It looks that way, doesn't it?” Mom said.

“Yes, I can't find Him anywhere. I looked and looked.” The nativity would be ruined without the baby Jesus.

Mom went to the bookshelf. “He isn't lost,” she said as she reached up and took something from the top shelf.

Katie sighed in relief. “There He is!” she said. “I'll go put Him in the manger.”

She reached for the figurine, but Mom put it back on the shelf. “This year we're going to put the baby Jesus in the manger on Christmas morning,” Mom said. “It's a tradition Dad learned in France.”

“Why? Everyone looks so sad.”

“I don't know if they're sad,” Mom said. “To me, it looks more like they're waiting.”

Katie examined the figures. She could see the empty place in the manger where baby Jesus belonged. Some of the figurines were reaching out to the spot.

Waiting for Jesus





“I guess so,” Katie said.

“Remember before Thomas was born how excited you were for him to come?” Mom asked.

Katie smiled at her baby brother, who was playing on a blanket. “Yes, it felt like forever.”

“Did you know that prophets waited for thousands of years for Jesus to come to help us return to live with Heavenly Father?”

Katie remembered seeing a picture in Primary of a prophet writing about the Savior’s birth. “I think so,” she said.

“Prophets like Isaiah thought about and wrote about what the Savior would do when He came,” Mom said. “They spent their whole lives waiting for Him to be born. That’s one of the reasons we set up the nativity like this, to remind us that many people waited a long time for the Savior to come.”

“I would get tired of waiting my whole life,” Katie said, looking at the shepherds who were waiting for Jesus.

“But there’s also another reason we do this,” Mom said.

“What?”

“Do you remember in family home evening when we talked about the Second Coming?”

Katie thought for a minute. “Isn’t that when Jesus comes again?”

“That’s right,” Mom said.

“When will that happen?”

“Well, we don’t know. But we’re waiting for Jesus to come, just like the shepherds in the nativity and just like the ancient prophets. That’s the other reason we’re waiting until Christmas to put the baby Jesus in the nativity—to remind us that we’re waiting for Jesus too.”

“Will He come to a manger again?” Katie asked.

“No, He won’t be a baby again. The next time Jesus comes He’ll be resurrected. But the empty manger in the nativity reminds us that just like you’re waiting for Christmas morning, and just like people waited for Jesus to come to earth, now we’re waiting for Him to come back. We didn’t lose the baby Jesus. This is part of the way our family remembers Him.”

“We just need to wait,” Katie said with a smile.

“That’s right,” Mom said.

“While we’re waiting, can we make some sugar cookies?” ■



“We declare that He will come again to earth, this time in might, majesty, and glory, to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Standing Together for the Cause of Christ,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2012, 48; *Liahona*, Aug. 2012, 28.

Come with us to explore an important place in Church history!

Elise and Kyle H., ages 9 and 6, are strolling through the snowy streets of a replica pioneer village in Salt Lake City, Utah. It looks like they have gone back in time to the mid-1800s. That's when the pioneers were settling in the Salt Lake Valley. Join Elise and Kyle as they explore This Is the Place Heritage Park to find out what it was like to be a pioneer child. ■

This Is the Place!

By Annie Beer



The town barber sent leftover hair from haircuts and shaves to toymakers to use as hair for dolls.





A family of 12 lived in this small pioneer home. The children had to go outside and climb a ladder to get to the sleeping loft.



After their chores, pioneer children played with their toys. Kyle's favorite was a bear you pull up on two ropes. It helped pioneer children learn how to milk a cow!

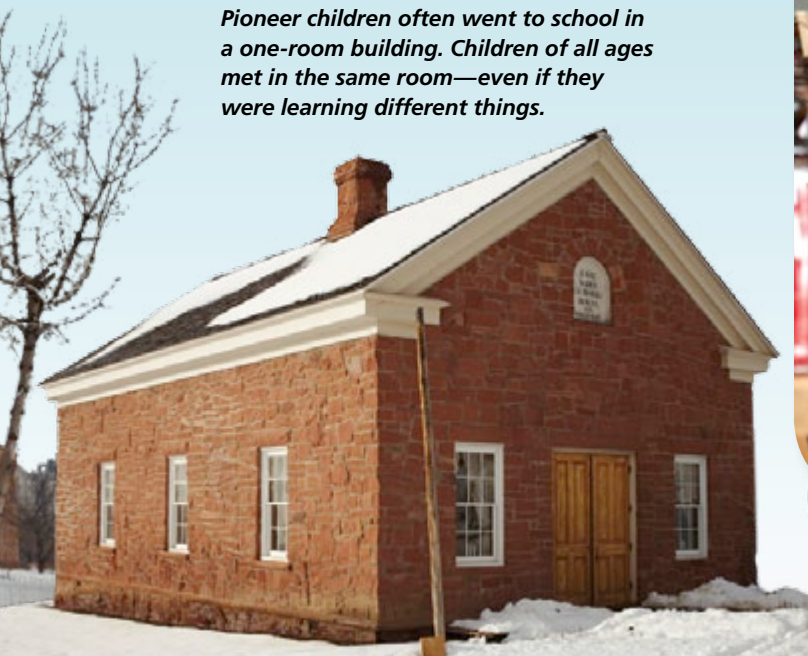


The first pioneers ended their journey west in 1847. When Brigham Young first saw the Salt Lake Valley, he said, "This is the right place." This monument, designed by Brigham Young's grandson, honors those brave pioneers.

Yum! Pioneer children loved candy too!



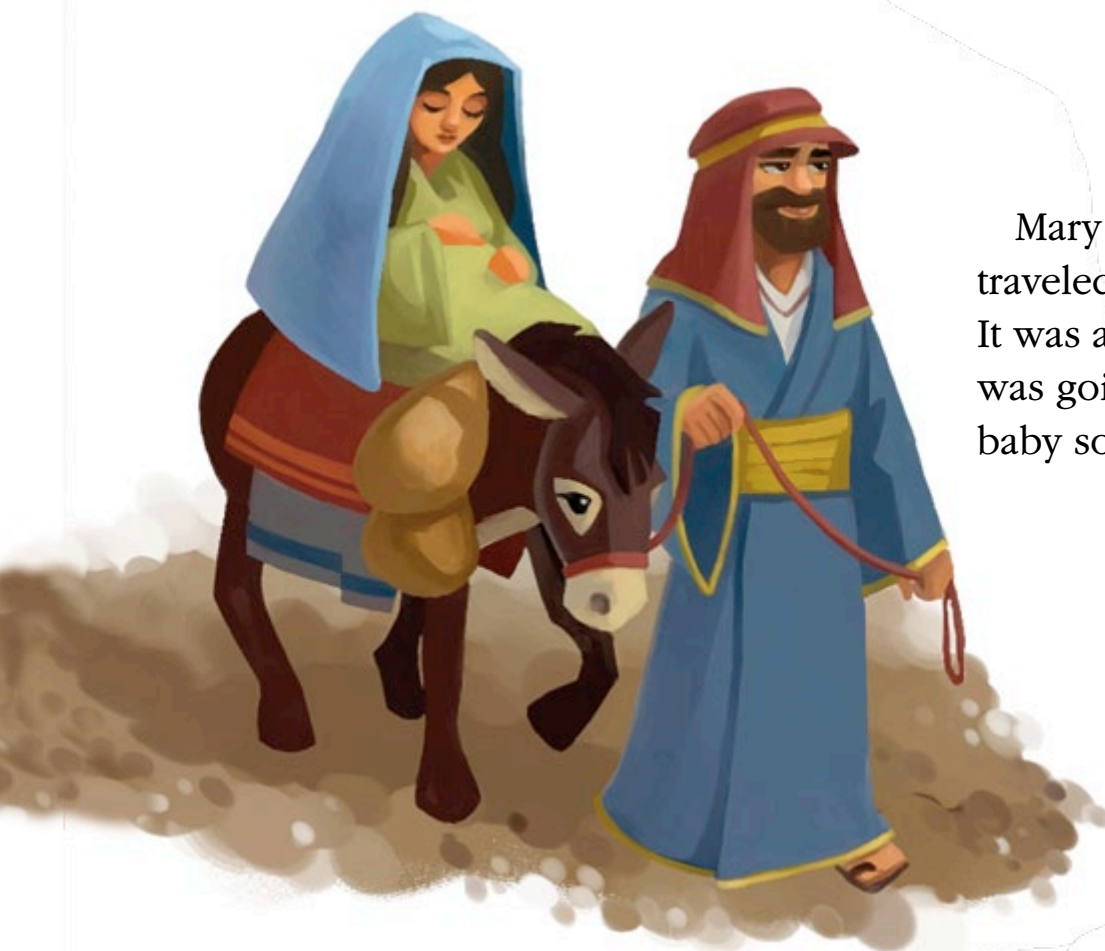
Pioneer children often went to school in a one-room building. Children of all ages met in the same room—even if they were learning different things.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CODY BELL, EXCEPT AS NOTED; PHOTOGRAPH OF THIS IS THE PLACE MONUMENT BY RONDA T. WILLIAMS © IRI

Jesus Is Born

By Charlotte Mae Sheppard



Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. It was a long way. Mary was going to have a baby soon.

All the inns were full. Mary and Joseph stayed in a stable where animals slept. While they were there, Jesus was born.



Nearby, shepherds in the fields were watching their sheep. An angel came and told them to go to Bethlehem to see the new baby.

The shepherds found the stable where Mary and Joseph were. There in a manger was the baby Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes. He would be the Savior of the whole world.



At Christmas our family and friends sometimes give us gifts. But the greatest gift of all is the one Heavenly Father gave us. He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be born on earth. ■



The Reason for the Season

By Val Chadwick Bagley

Find and circle these items hidden in the picture.



RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY VAL CHADWICK BAGLEY

THE JOURNEY HOME

By Heather Whittle Wrigley

My bus ride home from work began like any other. Within five minutes, I had leaned my head against the window and soon the halting and starting of the bus was rocking me to sleep. I was still adjusting to all the new responsibilities that had come with my recent marriage while working and taking classes full-time. Some days I couldn't help but sleep during the entire bus ride to work and back.

As I drifted in and out of sleep, I heard voices calling out directions. Soon I realized that the new bus driver had to be directed around every turn, down each street, and to every bus stop along the 50-mile (80 km) route.

Knowing that it would probably take even longer than the usual hour and a half to reach home, I immediately became irritated. Unkind thoughts about the driver's competence crowded my mind. Voices calling out directions continued to cut into my attempts to sleep.

Before long, however, I noticed the yelling had stopped. I looked up to see a woman gently directing the bus driver from her seat two rows ahead of me. I watched as she sweetly



When we don't know which way to turn, Jesus Christ shows us the way.

and kindly gave the man directions and then, before getting off at her stop, told him about the next few stops down the road. Long after I arrived home, I was troubled by my reaction to criticize compared to this woman's loving guidance.

I realized that I was like the bus driver—I don't know my way through life any better than the bus driver knew his new route. Both of us were on an unfamiliar road. I'm sure he was grateful that someone who had been down that road before was willing to offer patient directions about what lay ahead.

Christ does the same for us. When we don't know which way to turn, His example shows us the way. When we have questions, He lovingly supplies the answers. How many times would He, weary after traveling a long distance, seek to fulfill the needs of others?

Since that day, we've had a few new bus drivers. Occasionally they have needed some direction, and thanks to the example shown me by a loving woman and our Savior, I have been willing to give it. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT T. BARRETT

Joseph Fielding Smith

Joseph Fielding Smith learned to work hard as a young man. His mother took care of women who were giving birth, and Joseph drove her **carriage** when she visited patients. As he grew, Joseph developed a love for the scriptures. He wrote many **books** about the doctrine of the Church. As President of the Church, he wrote the prayer to dedicate the **Provo Utah Temple**.



Angels heralded the Savior's birth to shepherds who were tending their newborn lambs in the fields near Bethlehem. "The boy child who arrived that birthing season is known as 'the Lamb of God,'" writes Elder Bruce D. Porter of the Seventy. "It is a title of deep significance, for He arrived with the lambs and would someday be 'brought as a lamb to the slaughter.' ... He who was the greatest made Himself the least—the Heavenly Shepherd who became the Lamb." See "Come, Let Us Adore Him" on page 16.