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Without the Savior's birth and Atonement, we would have no Intercessor, no Advocate with the Father, and no Mediator who makes it possible for us to return to the presence of our loving Heavenly Father and live together as eternal families.

THE Reality OF CHRISTMAS

When my father was a boy, he lived in a small town in central Utah near Utah Lake. In the days before the pioneers, Native Americans hunted and fished in the area. Certain locations around the lake became popular for those looking for arrowheads.

At a fathers-and-sons activity when my father was five years old, his ward went to Utah Lake to look for arrowheads. After the group had spent the day searching, my grandfather asked my father whether he had found any arrowheads.

"No, I didn't find any," my father replied. Then he reached into his pocket and said, "But I did find this nice rock that is shaped just like a Christmas tree."

My father had found an arrowhead after all, but he didn't know it. He held the real thing in his hand, but he didn't recognize it.

Recognizing the Redeemer

For many people today, their vision of what is real and most important—Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world—is blurred by things that are not real.

Recently I saw a television program on Jesus Christ that questioned whether He really was born of the Virgin Mary. Even great professors from esteemed institutions of learning speculated about whether this could be.

Responding to such doubters, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said: "The so-called scholars seek to convince us that the divine birth of Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament was not divine at all and that Mary was not a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception. They would have us believe that Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, was His physical father, and that therefore Jesus was human in all attributes and characteristics. They appear generous in their praise of Him when they say that He was a great moral philosopher, perhaps even the greatest. But the import of their effort is to repudiate the divine sonship of Jesus, for on that doctrine rests all other claims of Christianity."¹

I have skied on artificial snow, and I have decorated fake Christmas trees with fake icicles. Sometimes it can be difficult to grasp what is real, especially in a day



FINDING THE SAVIOR



“Sometimes the most precious and sacred things are right in front of us, in plain sight, but we cannot or

will not see them. . . .

“I promise that if we unclutter our lives a little bit and in sincerity and humility seek the pure and gentle Christ with our hearts, we will see Him, we will find Him—on Christmas and throughout the year.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “How to See the Christ in Christmas,” *New Era*, Dec. 2013, 48.

“And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness

“And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld” (Helaman 14:3, 5).

The Jewish people anxiously anticipated this great event. They knew the Messiah would come, and they expected Him to come in glory, liberate

of virtual reality. So how do we know what is real? How do we obtain a testimony of the reality of Jesus Christ?

We gain a testimony of what is real as we read the word of God in the scriptures—both ancient and modern. We learn the reality of the Savior as we listen to and read the testimonies of living prophets and apostles. We find the truth as we pray “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4). We discover “the right way” as we “believe in Christ, and deny him not” and as we “bow down before him, and worship him with all [our] might, mind, and strength, and [our] whole soul” (2 Nephi 25:29).

Prophecies of Christ’s Birth

Scriptures abound that prophesy of the birth of Christ—the first Christmas. We may forget when we read these scriptural prophecies that they were indeed *prophecies*. They offer great detail about what was going to happen but had not yet happened.

Eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah said, “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).

Six hundred years before the Savior was born, Nephi described a vision he

had of the mother of the Son of God:

“I looked and beheld the . . . city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. . . .

“And [the angel] said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God

“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” (1 Nephi 11:13, 18, 20–21).

One hundred twenty-four years before the birth of the Savior, King Benjamin said:

“Behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent . . . shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles

“And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:5, 8).

Eighty-three years before the birth of Christ, Alma said, “And behold, [the Son of God] shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel” (Alma 7:10).

And only six years before the first Christmas, Samuel the Lamanite declared:



them temporally, establish an earthly kingdom, and rule as their King.

Who would know first of the Messiah's birth? Would it not be the Sanhedrin or others in positions of power and influence?

The Bible tells us that it was lowly shepherds sleeping on the ground to whom an angel declared the "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10) and that it was Wise Men from afar who saw "his star in the east, and [came] to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). The powerful and the influential, whose vision was blurred by the philosophies of this world, were not with the Savior at His birth or during His ministry. They had before them the real thing but did not know it or accept it.

Becoming More Christlike

President Benson said that one of the greatest things about Christmastime

is that it increases our sensitivity to things of God:

"It causes us to contemplate our relationship with our Father and the degree of devotion we have for God.

"It prompts us to be more tolerant and giving, more conscious of others, more generous and genuine, more filled with hope and charity and love—all Christlike attributes. No wonder the spirit of Christmas touches the hearts of people the world over. . . . For at least a time, increased attention and devotion are turned toward our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."²

This Christmas, as the spirit of the season permeates our hearts, let us do something that expresses our feelings in an outward way, showing that we understand that the babe born in Bethlehem is the real Redeemer. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) gave some practical advice that helps us do that:

"This Christmas, mend a quarrel. Seek out a forgotten friend. Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust. Write a letter. Give a soft answer. Encourage youth. Manifest your loyalty in word and deed. Keep a promise. Forgo a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Apologize. Try to understand. Examine your demands on others. Think first of someone else. Be kind. Be gentle. Laugh a little more. Express your gratitude. Welcome a stranger. Gladden the heart of a child. Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth. Speak your love and then speak it again."³

Without Christ, there would be no Christmas. Without Christ, there can be no fulness of joy. Without His birth and His Atonement, we would have no Intercessor, no Advocate with the Father, and no Mediator who makes it possible for us to return to the presence of our loving Heavenly Father and live together as eternal families.

I celebrate with you the beautiful and miraculous reality of the birth and mission of the Son of God, and I bear my testimony that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer—the promised Messiah. ■

NOTES

1. *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (1988), 128.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, in Larry C. Porter, "Remembering Christmas Past: Presidents of the Church Celebrate the Birth of the Son of Man and Remember His Servant Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies*, vol. 40, no 3. (2001), 108.
3. Howard W. Hunter, "The Gifts of Christmas," *Ensign*, Dec. 2002, 18–19.