

A woman wearing a blue headscarf and a blue robe is looking down at a baby lying in a manger. The baby is wrapped in white cloth. The scene is set in a rustic, dimly lit environment, likely a stable or a manger. Other people are visible in the background, but they are out of focus.

THE New Era

DECEMBER

2004

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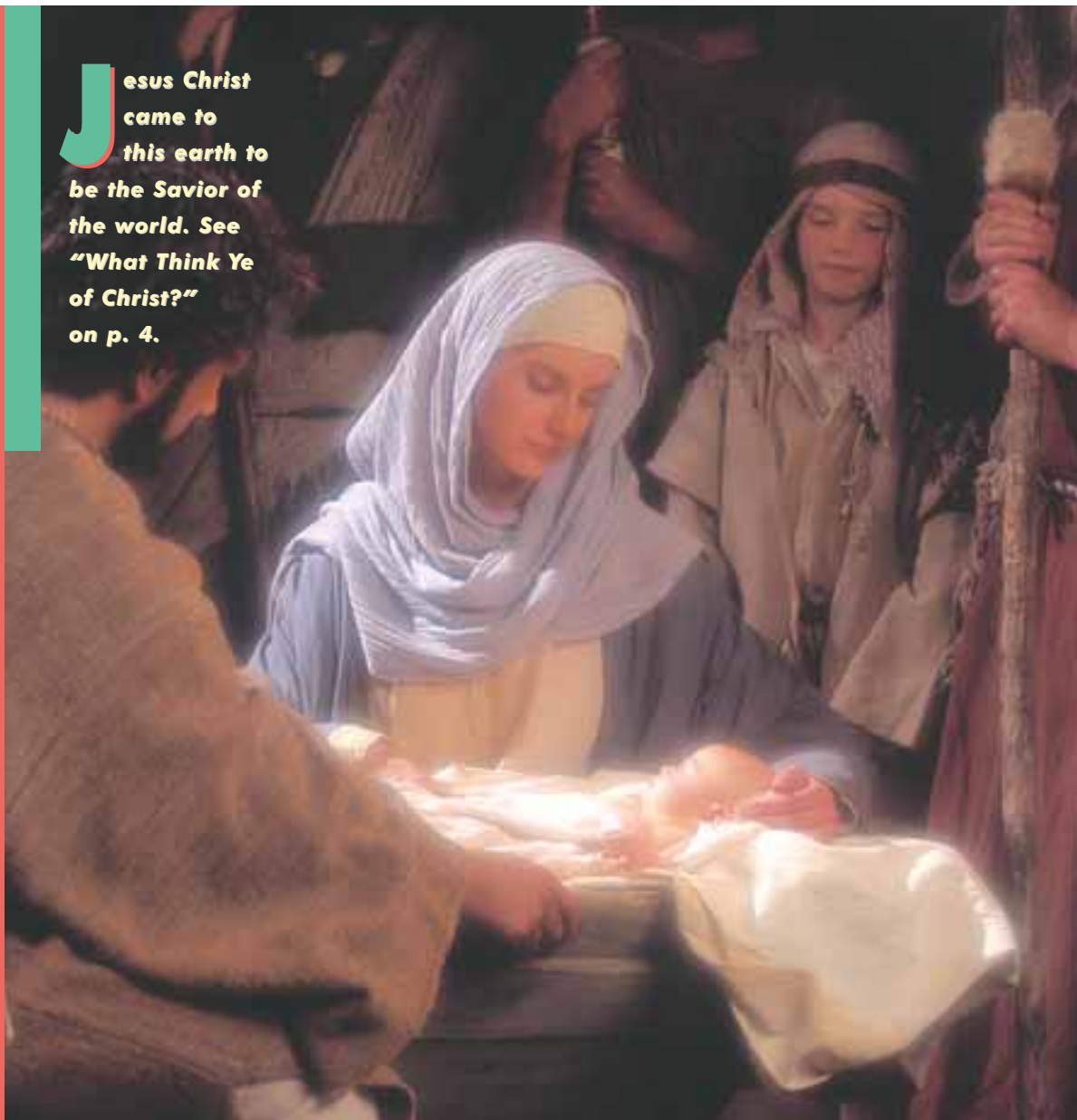
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Jesus Christ
came to
this earth to
be the Savior of
the world. See
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What Think Ye of Christ?

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

He is the Son of God, the Messiah, and much more.

Every person in the world at some point in his or her eternal progression is one day going to have to come to the moment of truth when he or she must answer the question, “What think ye of Christ?” (Matthew 22:42). Think of that. We are told that every eye shall see, every ear shall hear, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (see Philippians 2:10–11; D&C 88:104).

On one occasion Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom do men say that I . . . am?”

“And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

“And Simon Peter [the senior member of the Twelve Apostles] answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13–16).

What think ye of Christ and whom say ye that He is? Many Christians profess to follow Jesus Christ but do not know Him: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the

only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent” (John 17:3).

Many profess to be Christians and yet do not believe that Jesus Christ is the literal Son of God, indeed, the eldest son of God the Father. Men are willing to follow some of His teachings but do not recognize the divine, eternal purpose and the significance of His life to all mankind.

“What think ye of Christ?” and “Whom say ye that I am?” These were questions asked by Jesus to make people think, so that He might teach them who He was, that they might use their own agency, come to their own conclusions and commitments, follow Him, and gain a testimony that He is the Son of God, our Redeemer.

Who Is He?

Using the sacred scriptures, we can know Jesus Christ. He is more than a great teacher. He is the Messiah. He was willing to lay down His life for us; He is the only one who could, as these scriptures testify:

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).



Using the sacred scriptures, we can know Jesus Christ. He is more than a great teacher. He is the Creator, the Savior, the Redeemer, the Mediator, and the leader of His Church today. That knowledge is available to all who seek it.

*Jesus Christ
challenged
each of us
to “come and follow
me” (Matthew 19:21).*

“I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment—that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord” (D&C 132:12).

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

From the scriptures we learn more about Him: First, the Light of Christ is in all men. It leads men to accept the gospel and gain a testimony of Him. It is because of the Light of Christ that all men know good from evil—the guidance of a conscience. (See Moroni 7:12–19.)

Jesus Christ is a god; He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Savior of the New Testament (see Abraham 2:8).

Jesus Christ dwelt in the heavens with His Father, and we dwelt with them as spirit children of God the Father (see John 1:1–2; Abraham 3:22–24).

Jesus Christ confirmed His Father’s eternal plan, that plan of which we are all part. We come to this earth to undergo testing for a probationary period and to experience opposition in all things. Through the eternal principle of agency, we are free to choose liberty and eternal life and return to God’s presence if we live righteous lives, or to choose captivity and spiritual death (see 2 Nephi 2:11, 27).

We took a mortal body upon us. We will taste death and be resurrected because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We can inherit the celestial kingdom if we are worthy. We can dwell once again with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ throughout all the eternities.

Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things on

earth, under the direction of His Father (see Moses 1:33; Ephesians 3:9).

“The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Jesus Christ came to this earth, born of Mary, a mortal mother. His Father is Almighty God. (See Luke 1:26–35.)

Jesus Christ was baptized by immersion by John the Baptist, and the Holy Ghost was manifest in “the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.” And His Father spoke: “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:10–11).

Jesus Christ organized His Church and selected Twelve Apostles, and also prophets, sevens, and evangelists (see Luke 6:13, 10:1; Ephesians 4:11).

Jesus Christ’s message is unique. He stands between us and His Father; He is the Mediator (see D&C 76:41–43; John 3:17). Through Him and by Him shall all mankind be saved.

Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, our Savior; only He with a mortal mother and an immortal Father could fulfill the Atonement and die to save all mankind. He did so of His own choice and free will (see Matthew 26:39).

Jesus Christ was resurrected and appeared to many after His Resurrection (see Luke 24:13–44; John 20:11–18, 24–30). He taught us the physical characteristics of a resurrected being and told us that we could follow His example and that we would be able to progress and be like Him.

Jesus Christ’s Ascension into heaven before the eyes of His disciples was accompanied by the promise that in like manner He would come again (see Acts 1:9–11). The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is nigh at hand, as the signs of the Second Coming are

being fulfilled this very day.

Jesus Christ appeared with His Father and restored the same organization He established during His ministry through Joseph Smith the Prophet in these latter days. In addition to the Bible, the Book of Mormon was revealed to the world as another witness to testify of His divine calling and ministry.

Jesus Christ leads and guides His Church today through revelation to a prophet and counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles, the same organization that He established when He was here on earth (see D&C 102:23; Articles of Faith 1:9).

Jesus Christ's admonition to "come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21) is the challenge that He gave to each of us. He lived in the pre-mortal existence in the spirit world; He dwelt with God, His Father. He is the Son, Jesus Christ.

During this season, this is my personal witness and testimony. Oh, if only I had the voice and trump of an angel that I could say to all mankind that He is risen and that He lives; that He is the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father, the promised Messiah, our Redeemer and Savior; that He came into this world to teach the gospel by example. His divine mission is directed to you and me to come unto Him, and He will lead us into life eternal. **NE**

From an article printed in the April 1987 New Era.



COME FOLLOW ME, BY JAMES T. HARWOOD



BY DEBBIE FRAMPTON

Revising our wish list brought us the best Christmas present ever.

My family had problems, and we didn't have much for Christmas that year. But, somehow, sharing what little we had with others made me happy.

Not even a week until Christmas and still no sign of snow. But that was the least of my worries. My mom and dad had separated, and divorce was looming in the wings. I suspected they would announce it as soon as the tinsel was put away so as not to put a damper on the holidays.

Too late.

And now my mom had informed me that I would have to make some heavy revisions to my Christmas wish list. My brothers and sister and I would get only a few presents.

I was sulking over my list when Mrs. Rollins [names have been changed] and her four children appeared on our doorstep. Why were they standing on our porch? They were in our ward but had never been to church. We were mere acquaintances.

The oldest boy, Gary, and I were in the same grade, but I carefully avoided him and his tough-guy buddies. He didn't look so tough now as he stared at his shoelaces. Brett and Allison, both in elementary school, didn't make eye contact with me either. But

Robbie, four, looked straight at me with wide, clear eyes.

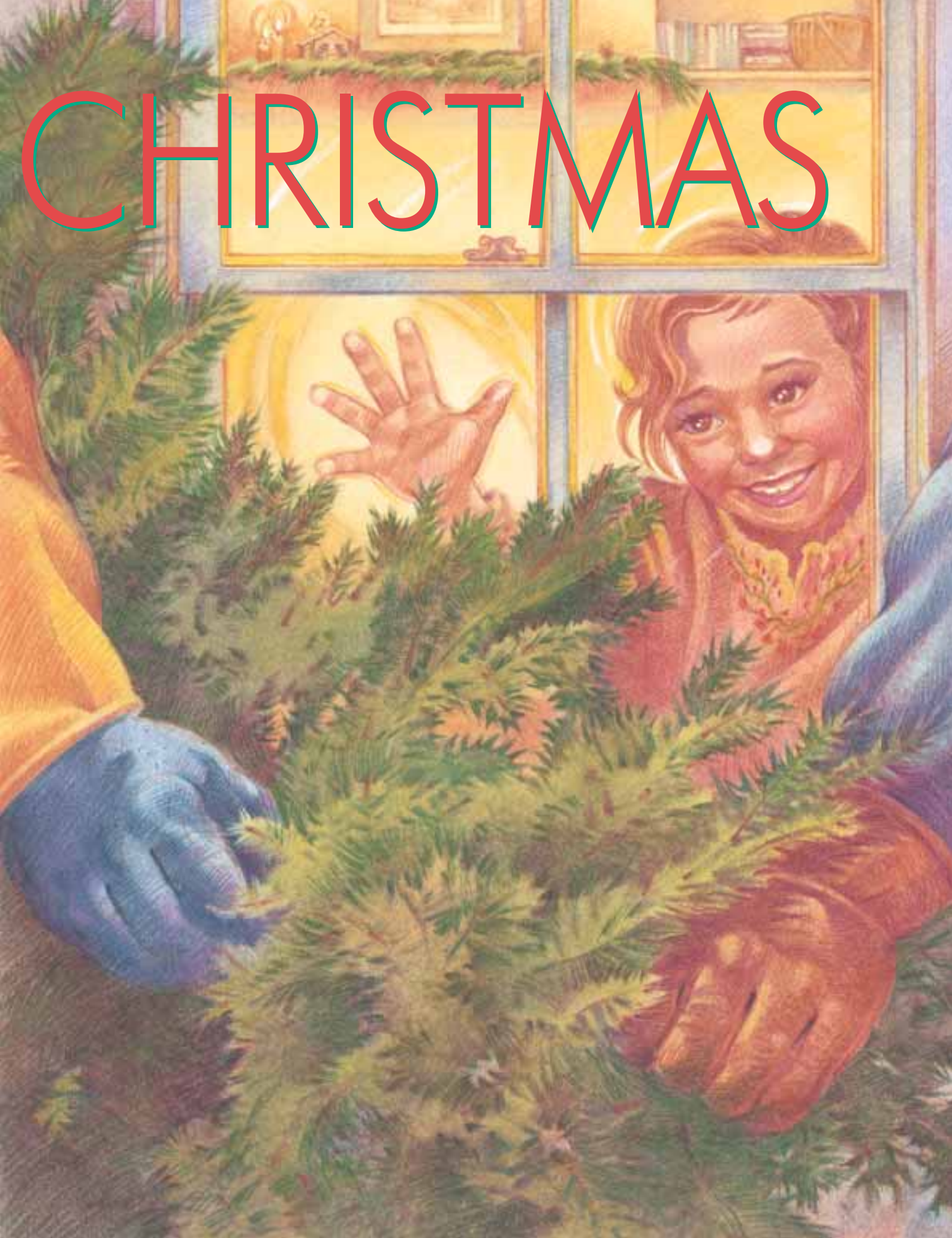
"We ran away," he said.

I ushered them in, and the suspense and drama unfolded right in my living room. Mrs. Rollins had snatched up her kids and left her husband, vowing she'd never let him lay a hand on them again. Her firm jaw testified of her resolve, though her eyes brimmed with tears.

By this time, my mom and brothers and sister were standing at attention in the living room. Mrs. Rollins told my mom that she didn't know where else to go and didn't think her husband would find her and the children at our house. She pleaded with my mom to let her stay for a few days until she could figure something out, but her pleading was unnecessary because already we were caught up in something much bigger than ourselves.

While we played games and ate popcorn with the kids, my mom made some phone calls. She contacted the bishop and the Relief Society president. Meals were brought in, and a deposit and first month's rent were paid on a small rental house in our ward boundaries. The only catch was that the house needed some work.

CHRISTMAS



Despite my troubles, Christmas was illuminated with the warm glow of giving.

“Some work!” I gasped, when I saw the house a few days later with my brothers. The whole place was grimy and filthy. For three days my mom loaded us up with cleansers, disinfectants, and scrubbing brushes. Together with Mrs. Rollins’s four children, we scrubbed toilets, floors, windows, and walls. But we also laughed as we worked. And we marveled as ward members poured in bearing food and secondhand furniture and clothing.

On December 23, we were just finishing our cleaning when we heard screams of delight from the living room. We all rushed in to find Allison’s nose pressed against the living room window. Outside three men were lifting a Christmas tree from the back of a truck. Their wives followed them into the house with decorations for the tree.

“I didn’t think we were going to get a Christmas tree this year,” Allison beamed.

Back at our house that night we spread sleeping bags and pillows all around the lighted Christmas tree in the family room. For our last night together, we watched the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Mrs. Rollins’s family had never seen it.

Mrs. Rollins kept thanking my mom for all we had done and saying the Lord must have sent her to us. I remember thinking that we hadn’t done much. It was the whole ward who had

given of their time and money and belongings. And then I thought of what Mrs. Rollins and her children had given all of us. A purpose. A sense of unity and usefulness. They had helped us forget our own problems and focus outside ourselves. Maybe the Lord had sent *them* to *us*.

Before we dropped off to sleep, my mom gathered us together and asked if we would be willing to give up half our Christmas money so Mrs. Rollins and her children would have gifts to open on Christmas morning. None of us had to think twice. We gave Mom our re-revised lists and set out shopping with her the next day. My mom wandered off looking for our gifts, while my siblings and I scattered throughout the store to find just the right presents for our new friends. It was amazing to witness my younger brothers and sister hunting down gifts and comparing prices, asking each other for opinions. How had this happened? Weren’t we supposed to be complaining and moping about how unfortunate we were?

That night was Christmas Eve. With our ward, we filled small paper bags with sand and lighted candles and placed them along the sidewalks of our neighborhood, illuminating the dark, nippy night with a toasty glow. To me that Christmas was outlined with that same warm glow. It should have been impossible. My parents were on the verge of divorce, and I received so few gifts. And yet it didn’t bother me at all when I returned to school after Christmas vacation wearing the same old clothes. I’ll always remember what I received for Christmas that year. It’s something I now put on my Christmas wish list every year—the spirit of Christmas. **NE**

Debbie Frampton is a member of Laie First Ward, Laie Hawaii North Stake.

MAKE YOUR *Holiday Happy*



*G*o online for great ideas on making the most of Christmas. At www.lds.org click the Gospel Library link and check out some of the past December *New Era* magazines. Here are a few examples of holiday ideas you'll find that will help you and your family find joy in the season:

- ◆ A scripture, quote, and activity for every day of December leading up to Christmas. "Oh, Come, All

Ye Faithful: An Advent Calendar" (Dec. 1998).

- ◆ Sixteen things you can do to help center your holiday celebrations on the Savior. "Idea List: Make Your Christmas Christ Centered" (Dec. 1998).

- ◆ Fourteen gifts from the heart you can give to others. "Idea List: Priceless Gifts" (Dec. 2002).

- ◆ Ten ideas on using the Christmas season to share the gospel. "Idea List: Gospel Gifts" (Dec. 2003).



BIG THINK

BY LACEY MCMURRY
Church Magazines

A young woman in Waco, Texas, has discovered that a tiny idea can quickly turn into something big—something that can bless the lives of many.

Stephanie David has made quite an impression on the people of Waco, Texas. In fact, the mayor of Waco was so impressed that she officially named March 2, 2004, Stephanie David Day.

So what did Stephanie, 17, do to get her very own day named after her? “It all started with Personal Progress,” Stephanie says. “I wanted to do something for my Good Works Value Project that really would be a *good* work. I wanted to make a difference.”

A Growing Idea

The seed for Stephanie’s Value Project was planted as she browsed through items at a rummage sale. She remembers looking at the clothes and thinking they were in great shape. Then she asked a question that set everything in motion: “Who could benefit from having these clothes?”

Stephanie’s question was answered a few days later as she talked to a foster mother in her ward. She found out that children who were removed from their homes and



placed in foster care usually weren't able to bring personal belongings with them. Often, they needed more clothes.

So Stephanie decided to organize a nonprofit clothing center in Waco. Her idea was to gather gently used clothing at garage sales and encourage community members to donate clothes. She would then wash, organize, and store the clothes until foster children needed them.

Although her idea was a good one, Stephanie had to wait four months to get her project approved by officials of Child Protective Services. Eventually, Stephanie



was given the go-ahead, and she named the clothing center Kind-er Closet, which is a fitting name because Kind-er Closet is just that—a closet in Stephanie's house.

Stephanie and her family operate Kind-er Closet all by themselves. When foster children need clothing, case workers call an automated phone number and leave messages for Stephanie that tell how many children need clothing and what sizes they wear. After listening to the messages, Stephanie searches through the stash of clothes and finds 6 to 10 outfits per child. Then she wraps each child's clothing and delivers it to the Child Protective Services office in Waco.

The Rewards of Service

Even though Stephanie has long since met the requirements to complete her Personal Progress project, she plans to keep Kind-er Closet going for several more years. Over the past year, Stephanie has spent about 600 hours on the project. Thanks to her, more than 100 children have received the clothing they need.

When she was looking for a Good Works Value Project, Stephanie David asked a small question and came up with a big answer: Kind-er Closet. In her closet at home, Stephanie collects and organizes clothing for foster children. She then bundles up items of the right size and quantity when they are needed.

WHY PERSONAL PROGRESS?

The Personal Progress program was developed to help young women in the Church "cultivate feminine virtues, grow spiritually, and reach [their] divine potential" (*Young Women Personal Progress*, 1).





Over the past year, Stephanie has spent about 600 hours on the Kind-er Closet. And, thanks to her, more than 100 children have received the clothing they need.



My plea is this— if we want joy in our hearts, if we want the Spirit of the Lord in our lives, let us forget ourselves and reach out. Let us put in the background our own personal, selfish interests and reach out in service to others.”

—President Gordon B. Hinckley, “Whosoever Will Save His Life,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1982, 6.

Stephanie’s mother, Sarah, says, “At first, when we started telling Child Protective Services officials about the project, they didn’t understand why Stephanie would donate so much time to something she wouldn’t get paid for.”

But Stephanie understands there are more important rewards than money. For legal reasons, she never meets the children she collects clothing for. But the good feeling she gets when she finishes a clothing package is the only reward she needs.

“I see all these packages going out, and I can’t really describe the way I feel,” Stephanie says. “It just makes my heart burst open. I don’t get to meet these kids, but deep inside, I know my gift made them happy.”

An Answered Prayer

Stephanie says her experiences with the Kind-er Closet helped her enjoy Personal Progress and strengthened her testimony of service. “Now that I’ve done something that really helps others, I think of service in a whole new way,” Stephanie says. “It’s fun.”

So how did Stephanie come up with such a great idea for her project? She prayed that our Heavenly Father would inspire her, and she knows the idea for the Kind-er Closet was an answer to her prayer.

Stephanie’s advice to other young women trying to come up with meaningful Personal Progress projects of their own is to think big. “If you have a good idea, don’t push it aside,” Stephanie says. “If you really want to make a difference, the Lord will help you.” **NE**



USE *Hymns* TO KNOW HIM

Many of the songs played at Christmastime are about snowmen and mistletoe but have nothing to do with celebrating the Savior's birth. Most of these secular songs are not bad, but sacred music about the Savior can make Christmas more meaningful. Here are some ways you can use music to draw closer to Christ this Christmas.

- * Watch the First Presidency Christmas Devotional broadcast by satellite or at www.lds.org.
- * Study the scriptures listed under a Christmas song in the hymnbook. Ponder the words of that song during the day.
- * Gather a group to go caroling so you can bring the joy of music to others who might need some cheer.
- * Learn a new Christmas hymn, and perform it solo or with one of your siblings at family home evening.
- * Have 12 days of true Christmas music. Listen to and sing songs about Christ for the 12 days leading up to Christmas.
- * Look in the Topics index of the hymnbook under "Jesus Christ," find a favorite hymn about the Savior, and memorize it.
- * Learn the history of one of your favorite Christmas carols. Who wrote it? Why was it written? Share what you learn with your family or a friend.
- * Sing a Christmas hymn when you are trying to have good, positive thoughts.

- * Look for chances to sing in community productions, or check for free Christmas concerts in your area that you can attend.
- * Organize a trio or quartet to learn a Christmas carol people don't hear very often, and offer to sing it for opening exercises at Mutual.
- * If you don't sing or play an instrument, you can still appreciate good music about Christ. Listen to a tape or CD of sacred Christmas music, and then write in your journal about how it made you feel. **NE**

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Try singing or playing these Christmas songs: "Arise and Sing This Christmas Morn" (*New Era*, Dec. 2002), "Let It Come Quietly" (*New Era*, Dec. 2000), "Room in the Inn" (*New Era*, Dec. 1989) and "Little One" (*New Era*, Dec. 1986). You can find them in the Gospel Library at www.lds.org.

To learn more about music, see www.lds.org/churchmusic.

Q & A

*“I’m not attractive. Please don’t tell me that I am.
Why was I born this way?”*

NEW ERA

What do you see when you look in the mirror?

Instead of thinking about your appearance, you might think about your relationships. You are a daughter or son. If you have siblings, you are a sister or brother. You are a cousin, a friend, a ward or branch member. Many people love and appreciate you just as you are.

You might think about your best qualities. Maybe you are a kind person, a hard worker, or a good friend. Whatever your abilities, you are blessed with important talents, a unique personality, and a purpose for your life.

You might want to ask Heavenly Father who you are and how He feels about you. “For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, *but the Lord looketh on the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7; emphasis added). Prayer, scripture study, and keeping the commandments will help you know that you have a noble heritage; you are

■ **Heavenly Father and many others love you.**

■ **“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”**

■ **Don’t compare yourself with others. Focus on becoming your best self.**

■ **You inherited your basic physical traits. But how you speak, dress, and take care of your health is up to you. A smile, a pleasing personality, or a light in your countenance can make you attractive.**

■ **Physical appearance won’t stop anyone from serving God, receiving essential ordinances, or living faithfully to the end.**

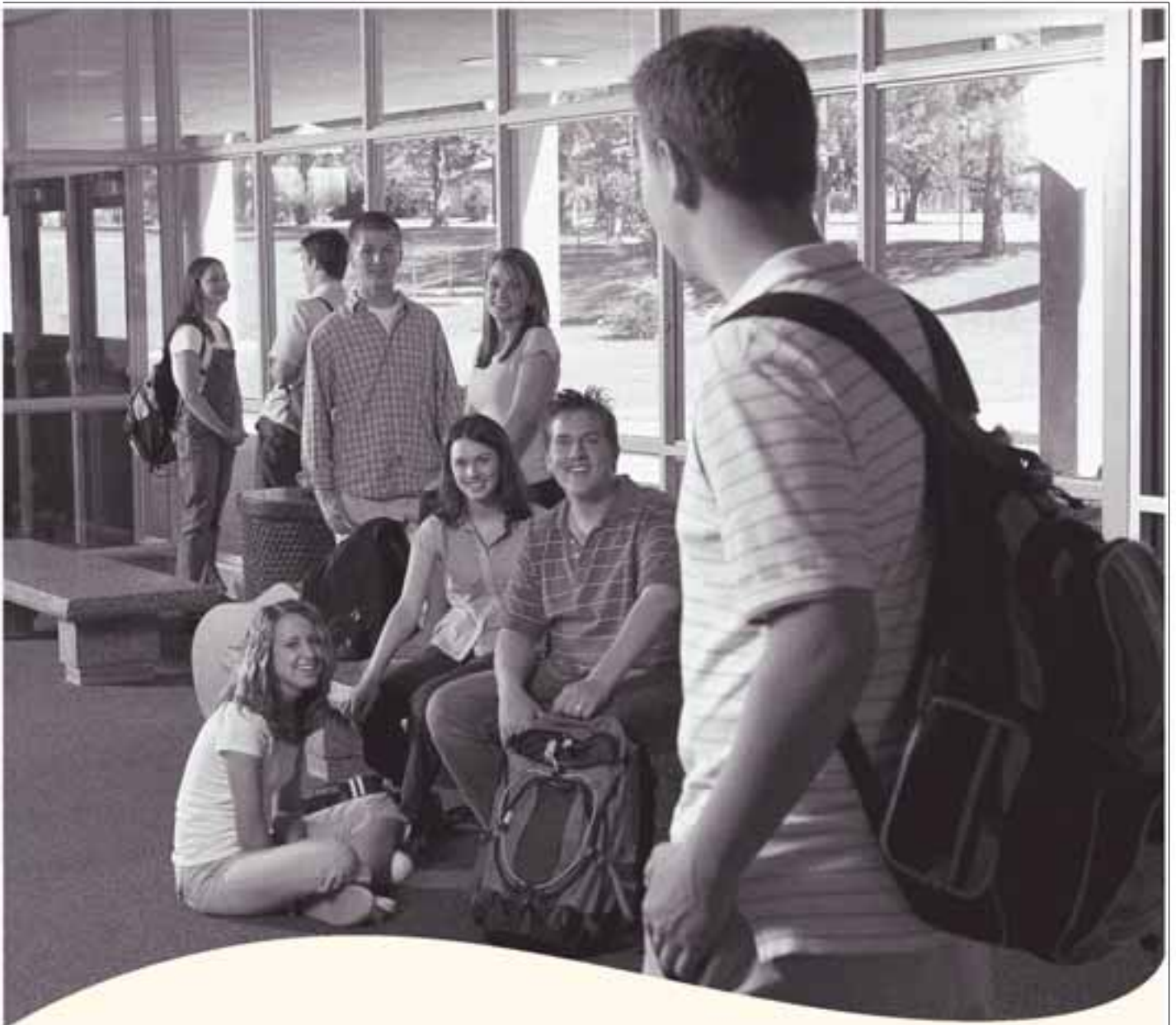
a spirit son or daughter of our Heavenly Father, who loves and cares for you.

Look Inward

You may feel bad about the way you look when you compare yourself to others, based on the world’s view of what is important. People sometimes feel discouraged or envious when they think others are better looking (or smarter or more popular) than they are. Or they might feel prideful when they see others they think are not as good looking (or as smart or popular) as they are. A healthy comparison is comparing who you are now with who you could be—your best self.

Do What’s in Your Control

Some things about your physical appearance aren’t within your control. But other things that can make you more attractive are within your control, such as sharing your talents, improving your personality, being neat and clean, and increasing your spirituality. Working on those things can help you feel better about yourself too.



Look Up

The Savior knows how you feel; He experienced your hurts and pains (see Alma 7:11–12). With His help, you can use this life the way it was intended—to live by faith and learn to do Heavenly Father’s will (see Abraham 3:25).

Developing inner beauty—including a pure, kind, grateful heart—will bring you peace and happiness, and your challenges won’t seem as troubling. **NE**

READERS



God knows that you’re hurting, but sometimes life’s problems will help you to grow spiritually. Heavenly Father wants you to do your

best with the gifts He has given you. If you do your best to help others and help them be happy, they will see your inner beauty, and you will feel better about yourself.

Lynnette Drouin, 18, Whitecourt Branch,
Edmonton Alberta Riverbend Stake



We may not have a perfect body in this life, but just remember the wonderful blessings our Father in Heaven has given us: family, friends, and the gospel.

Ammalyn C. Loterte, 19, Lopez First Ward,
Lopez Philippines Stake

Heavenly Father created us in His image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26–27). We should accept ourselves as we are since He loves us as we are. For Him there are no

favorites, no ugly ones or beautiful ones. He looks on our hearts, and if we have a pure heart and kind feelings, our appearance isn't important.

Alma Iris Sánchez Echeverría, 17, Siguatepeque Ward,
Comayagua Honduras Stake



Heavenly Father knows you have many good qualities, but He wants you to discover them. He wants you to love yourself as much as He loves you. Most teenagers compare themselves to others, but we should simply be the best we can be and choose the right. Others will notice the Light of Christ peeking through.

Nikelle Bird, 16, Shoreline Ward,
Richland Washington Stake

Our physical appearance can stop us from being the most popular in school, but it will never stop Heavenly Father from loving us. Happiness isn't found in appearance. Happiness comes from knowing we are children of God, who wants us to find happiness by loving and helping others.

Elder Moroni Abraham Jiménez Pérez, 20,
Mexico Mexico City West Mission

I considered myself unattractive. But my mom told me I was beautiful because of what I had on the inside. Now I am happily married to a good man who took me to the temple. If you do what is right, the Lord can help you find the person who will see the beauty that others cannot see.

Claudia Alonso, 20, Woodlake Ward,
San Antonio Texas East Stake

In the sight of God, you are a precious jewel. He has blessed you with the gifts you need to live a righteous life. Beauty fades with time, but the values and things you have done won't.

Rex Daniel D. Lomboy, 16, Binalonan Second Branch,
Urdaneta Philippines Stake



I testify that no one of us is less treasured or cherished of God than another. I testify that He loves each of us—insecurities, anxieties, self-image, and all. He doesn't measure our talents or our looks; . . . He cheers on every runner, calling out that the race is against sin, not against each other."

—Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Other Prodigal," *Ensign*, May 2002, 64.



It seems that just about every girl thinks she is unattractive. When I have those thoughts I am forgetting how much Heavenly Father loves me. Each person has beauty and

uniqueness. Most important is to have a beautiful spirit and inner peace.

Svetlana Kopitova, 18, Kolpino Branch,
St. Petersburg Russia District

I believe that the most important thing is a person's spirit. Not being physically attractive doesn't stop you from being a good person. The day will come when our bodies will be perfected.

Angeles Natalia Tissera, 15, Roque Sáenz Peña Branch,
Roque Sáenz Peña Argentina District

Thanks to the teachings of my family, I know that true beauty is not what strikes man but that which pleases God. Let's cultivate more humility, patience, and love to cheer up those around us.

Merirani Johnston, 15, Fautaua Ward, Papeete Tahiti Stake

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

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send your answer to the question below, along with your name, birth date, ward and stake (or branch and district), and a photograph to:

Q&A, New Era

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Or e-mail:

cur-editorial-newera@ldschurch.org

Please respond by 15 January 2005.

QUESTION

"My friend says he would be interested in joining our Church if he just didn't have to believe the Joseph Smith story. How do I answer him?"

GIVE OF YOURSELF



USING YOUR TIME AND TALENTS TO HELP OTHERS IS THE
BEST WAY TO AVOID GETTING TOO WRAPPED UP IN YOURSELF.
(See Acts 20:35.)

A MISSIONARY CHRISTMAS

*Far from home and family,
missionaries discover that Christmases
in the mission field are
among their most memorable.*

Spending Christmas away from home and family in the mission field might sound a little lonely. But missionaries often look back to a Christmas while on their mission as one of the best Christmases of their lives. Here are some experiences that made Christmas in the mission field a season of joy.

A Season for Teaching

My companion and I and four other missionaries were invited to go to Camp Pendleton, a nearby military base, for a special Christmas devotional for the military recruits. This was something very special for them because they



were also away from home for Christmas. We had a devotional at which the speakers testified of Christ's gospel, and we sang hymns.

I was the largest of the missionaries, so I got to play Santa and visit everyone. Even though they knew Santa was just a missionary, they played along and it lifted their spirits.

While the recruits were eating, we missionaries did our job. Each of us had a discussion with about 10 recruits. All six missionaries had recruits who said they would like to join the Church.

Our Christmas day was "white" when three young men joined Christ's fold. The Lord had blessed us with the perfect Christmas!

Tyler Powell served in the California Carlsbad Mission; he is a member of the Lindon 14th Ward, Lindon Utah West Stake.

Coming to Christ

During the weeks before Christmas, my companion and I had been teaching a man of the Jewish faith. Allen already knew a little about the Church. He told us that he wasn't looking to get baptized; he just wanted to see what "the Mormons are all about."

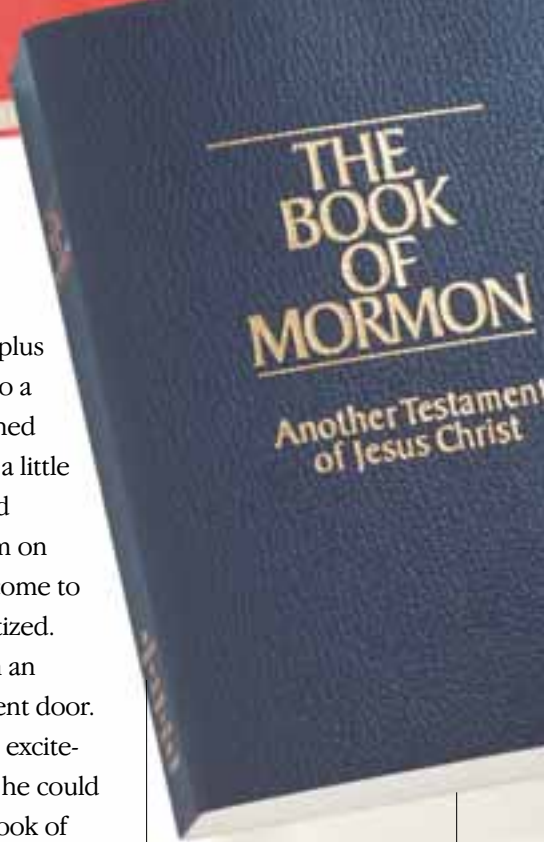
In four discussions we had taught him about the Savior, the Restoration, the Book

of Mormon, the plan of salvation, plus other material to help him come to a knowledge of Christ. He had finished reading the Book of Mormon and a little more than half of the Doctrine and Covenants. We had fasted with him on Christmas Eve, hoping he would come to a knowledge of Christ and be baptized.

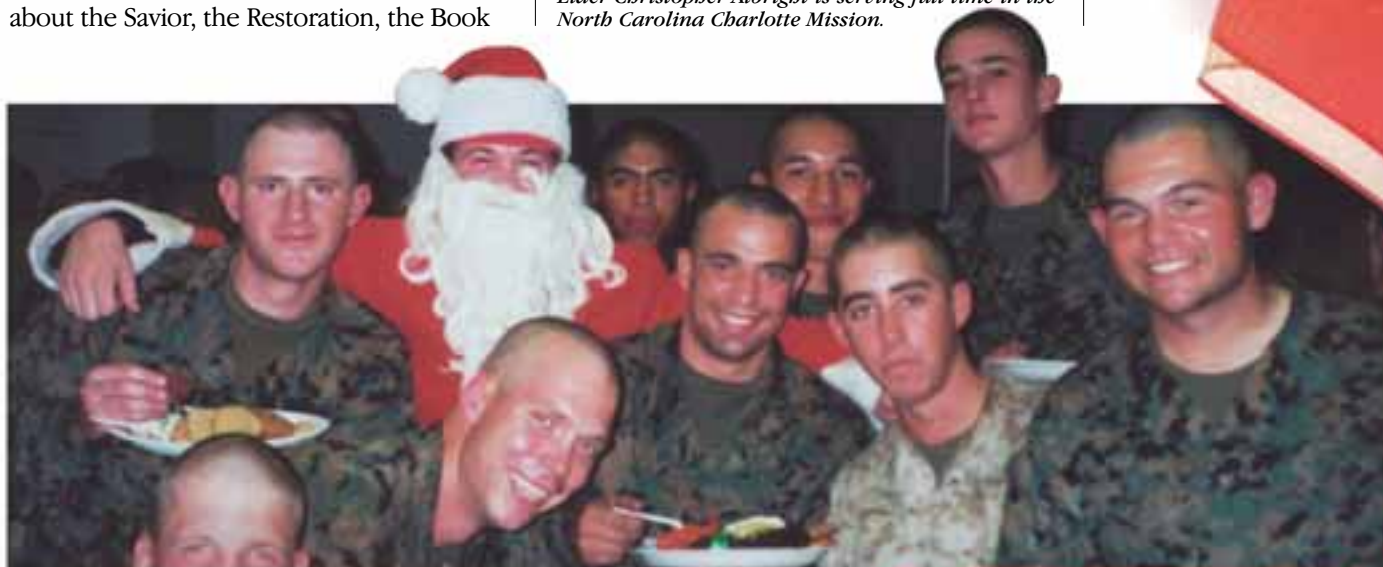
Christmas afternoon came with an unexpected knock on the apartment door. It was Allen. He was beaming with excitement. He had come to tell us that he could testify of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Every expression on his face showed the joy and happiness he was experiencing. He was no longer a man looking for a knowledge of Christ, but one desiring to become a member of the Church.

It was through the Book of Mormon and the Holy Ghost that Allen was able to come to a knowledge of Christ. I was transferred out of the area before Allen was baptized, but being able to see his conversion and be a part of it truly was the best Christmas present ever.

Elder Christopher Albright is serving full time in the North Carolina Charlotte Mission.



Missionaries in California (opposite page) shared a gospel message at a Christmas devotional for recruits at a nearby military base (below).





Singing in the Bronx

During Christmastime on my mission, I was undergoing some health problems, and my companion was a new missionary. She was not happy and wanted to go home. We were walking 8 to 10 miles (13–16 km) every day, and both of us had painful blisters.

I soon became depressed and discouraged, believing that I was a bad missionary and that all of my companion's problems were my fault. We were a miserable pair. I had been so excited about the upcoming holiday, but now I dreaded it. It loomed before me dark, cold, and lonely.

My district leader saw my struggles and offered this advice: "Keep your mind off the pain. Do whatever it takes to give your companion the Christmas spirit." I trusted my district leader and knew he was right, so I determined that I would try to get the right spirit in both of our hearts.

I remember one dark, cold evening. We were walking down the road, and my companion began to cry. Immediately, I felt as if I had been swallowed by darkness, and I wanted to give up. But I remembered my promise and asked the Lord what I could do to help this sister. The answer that came was unexpected, but I acted promptly. I began to sing Christmas carols as loudly as I could. People kept staring at me, but I felt a strange lightness in my heart that couldn't be subdued. My companion begged me to stop. But I told her I would not until she joined me. So she did, and we sang several songs. My companion smiled at me and seemed to enjoy the rest of the evening.

That experience was the start of an amazing holiday. It was still hard at times, but whenever the mood began to turn dismal, I

threatened to start singing. That always seemed to lighten the mood.

I do not have a great singing voice, and I hate singing in front of people. But that night I was singing at the top of my lungs for all of the Bronx to hear. That Christmas I learned that we celebrate the birth of a Savior who lives today and still works for our salvation. He knows what each of us needs and how to give it to us. I will never forget the Christmas that He let me sing in His personal choir. It changed Christmas for me!

Christie Mobley served in the New York New York North Mission; she is a member of the Snowflake Seventh (YSA) Branch, Snowflake Arizona Stake.

More Blessed to Give

It was turning out to be the worst Christmas Eve a missionary could have. All three of our baptisms scheduled for Christmas day had just fallen through. Instead of the "white" Christmas my companion and I were hoping for, it was going to be just another hot day in Chile.

To top it off, our Christmas Eve dinner invitation was cancelled. Chileans hold their big celebration on Christmas Eve, so it was like missing out on Christmas dinner.

As my companion and I walked dejectedly past the small, fenced-in chapel, the branch president stopped us and asked where we were spending Christmas Eve. We told him we had no plans. He then invited us to his home that evening for dinner.

That night we went to the branch president's house, a small structure covered with a tin roof. At the table, my companion and I were invited to sit in the chairs usually reserved for the branch president and his wife. They graciously shared their meal with us. It must have been a sacrifice for them to feed two hungry missionaries, especially with only a few hours' notice. Then this kind family gave my companion and me

each a wonderful gift of a white handkerchief.

We didn't get our "white" Christmas with lots of baptisms. Instead, we learned from a young, humble branch president that it is, indeed, "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Lester Dimit served in the Chile Santiago South Mission; he is a member of the Reedville Ward, Cedar Mill Oregon Stake.

The Feeling of Giving

This past Christmas was one of the most selfless Christmases I've ever experienced. One week before Christmas at the ward Christmas party, the members were invited to bring clothes, toys, furniture, and other items to donate to needy families. And if that wasn't enough, the Cub Scouts offered to give us all the food from their food drive.

Boy, did we get a response! Three classrooms were packed full. It was a beautiful and overwhelming sight! During that week, we probably spent 7 to 10 hours just sorting and separating all that had been donated.

In the end, home teachers delivered 48 boxes as Christmas

presents the night of December 23rd.

This experience reminded me of Jacob 2:19: "After ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted."

We not only had the opportunity to help Church members, but we were involved in helping the community as well. Another 30 boxes of food were distributed to other families in need. What a way to spend Christmas! No gifts or decorated tree can ever compare to the feeling of giving.

As we continued to visit the families who received these gifts of love, we saw the homes brighten and hearts open. These are my most prized memories—giving all that I have and am to the service of my Lord.

Nicole Cox served in the Washington Spokane Mission; she is a member of the El Segundo Ward, Inglewood California Stake.

After helping with a food and clothing drive in their ward, missionaries in the Washington Spokane Mission know nothing compares to the feeling of giving to others.





Encore!

Our missionary district went caroling to our investigators for Christmas (and we made and delivered cookies too). When we finished singing at one house, which we thought would be the last house, a woman two or three houses down started clapping and said, “Encore! Encore!”

We were tired, and our voices could no longer be considered harmonious, but we went and sang two songs for her. It was the best performance of the night. She was truly touched and told us no one had caroled at her house for many years. A week later we went back, and because of what she felt when we sang, she agreed to listen to the discussions.

I know that we can influence more people than we ever realize if we'll just open our mouths and let the Spirit guide us.

Elder Justin Cooper is serving full time in the Georgia Atlanta Mission.

Gift Return

I was a little curious when my mission president announced we were going to have a white Christmas. In Chile,

December is the hottest time of year. President Wilcox explained that some families of missionaries in our mission had donated enough money that every missionary companionship could give a set of white temple clothes to a worthy, but needy, member for Christmas.

My companion

and I immediately thought of the same person. This brother came from a tough background. He had made some big changes to be able to be baptized and later receive his own endowment. He remained faithful and active even when most of his family had not.

The day we visited him and entered his humble home we could feel hopelessness and despair. A recent death in the family, along with the usual economic problems that filled their lives, had left the home void of the Christmas spirit. We had brought the temple clothes with us but didn't want to give them to him in front of the rest of his family. I silently prayed for a chance to give him our gift in private. Almost instantly the family began to disperse, leaving us alone.

I said, "*Hermano*, we have a special gift for you."

He said, "Elders, you are kind, but I do not need charity."

I explained how some families of missionaries had donated funds so that we could give him his own set of temple clothing. My companion held out the package. The brother didn't say a word. His breathing became a little louder, and tears began to fall from his eyes.

After a while he lifted his head and said, "How can anyone tell me the Church is not true? I've been saving a little money for quite a while so I could buy my own temple clothes. When I finally had enough, my cousin told me he was going to the temple, and he is even poorer than I am. I decided he needed temple clothing more than I did, so I recently gave him a set. Now here are you two missionaries giving me the very gift I just sacrificed to give to my cousin. How can anyone tell me the Church is not true?"

He stood and gave my companion

and me heartfelt hugs. What an amazing feeling. I think we floated home that evening. We also floated off our seats the following Sunday when this brother came to church with five of his inactive family members.

December 25 was a hot summer day in Chile, but we had a white Christmas I will never forget.

Treagan White served in the Chile Santiago East Mission; he is a member of the Dillingham Alaska Branch, Anchorage Alaska Bush District.

Christmas in the Philippines

I was anticipating a great Christmas on my mission when I began decorating a small Christmas tree with a few lights and other homemade paper decorations. But the decorations were not important to me. I really felt the reason for the season was Jesus Christ. All of the month of December filled me with love for Jesus Christ and also for the Filipinos.

I will never forget that Christmas, as I truly felt great love for all people and wished to declare, "Peace on earth, good will towards all men" (see Luke 2:14). **NE**

Adrienne Woolley served in the Philippines Ilagan Mission; she is a member of the Orem Seventh Ward, Orem Utah Stake.

A Christmas song,
a special gift,
and a heart
full of love made
Christmas
unforgettable for
these missionaries
in Atlanta, Georgia
(opposite page);
Santiago, Chile
(not pictured);
and Ilagan,
Philippines
(below).



What's it like to experience Christmas without a tree or presents? I found out a few years ago with my three older sisters when, through unusual circumstances, we had none of the traditional trappings come December 25.

Our family lived in a small Wyoming community, and we decided to spend Christmas at my grandparents' condominium in Salt Lake City while they were on a mission in New Zealand. They had left us a key and encouraged us to stay there while they were gone.

We intended to arrive in Salt Lake early on the day before Christmas, buy a tree and presents, and decorate and wrap them that night. But snow and ice on the roads made our travel slow and tedious. When we got to Salt Lake, we found ourselves unable to get cash at any of the banks since they had closed early on Christmas Eve, and the stores wouldn't take an out-of-state check.

We couldn't even buy a tree, so we went back to the condo, where we decided to write a letter to our grandma and grandpa, thanking them for letting us use their home. We looked at pictures they had sent us and talked about their mission. Then we each wrote them letters asking how they were doing and telling them about our lives at home.

We made fudge and some other



RIS TMAAS



concoctions with the nonperishable foods Grandma and Grandpa kept on hand. We played some games, sang songs, and then read and discussed scriptures about the first Christmas. Pretty soon, it was time for bed. For the sake of tradition we each hung up a sock (one we would wear later in the week) and went to sleep.

On Christmas day, we found the treats that we made the night before in the socks, but we had no presents to open. So my sisters found pencils and paper and began writing IOUs. Some were for gifts, but some were just promises for helping do things like washing dishes when it was someone else's turn. They seemed to have a good time doing it, so I joined in and wrote an IOU to my parents promising I'd try to do a better job of keeping my stuff out of the front room each day. They later said they couldn't have asked for a better present.

Looking back on it, I would not necessarily plan another

Christmas like that one, but it has turned out to be one of

my more enjoyable Christmases. My

sisters agree. We've never had more fun.

That day I learned that Christmas is more than trees and presents. Those are nice, but not essential. Celebrating the birth of Christ with my family is what made it truly special. **NE**

Kam Wixom is a member of Harvest Hills Second Ward, Saratoga Springs Utah Stake.

BIRTHPLACE *of the* PROPHET



Born nearly 200 years ago, on 23 December 1805, in Sharon, Vermont, the Prophet Joseph Smith became the leader of the great Restoration of the gospel in the latter days. His birthplace is a place of peace.

BY JANET THOMAS
Church Magazines

About in the middle, from top to bottom, of the small New England state of Vermont are the little towns of Sharon and South Royalton. Most cars and trucks on the freeway whiz by these small towns. But every year groups of tourists, intent on learning more about events in Church history, get off Highway 89 on Exit 2 and drive slowly through the town of Sharon, past the country store, where authentic maple syrup is sold, following the river, until they come to an intersection with a brass sign. The sign tells these travelers where to turn to go up Dairy Hill, past little farms on wooded hills, until they come to a lane lined with sugar maple trees. Another sign announces that this is the place where the Prophet Joseph Smith was born. It's the entrance to a memorial that was built nearly a hundred years ago to a great event and a great man.

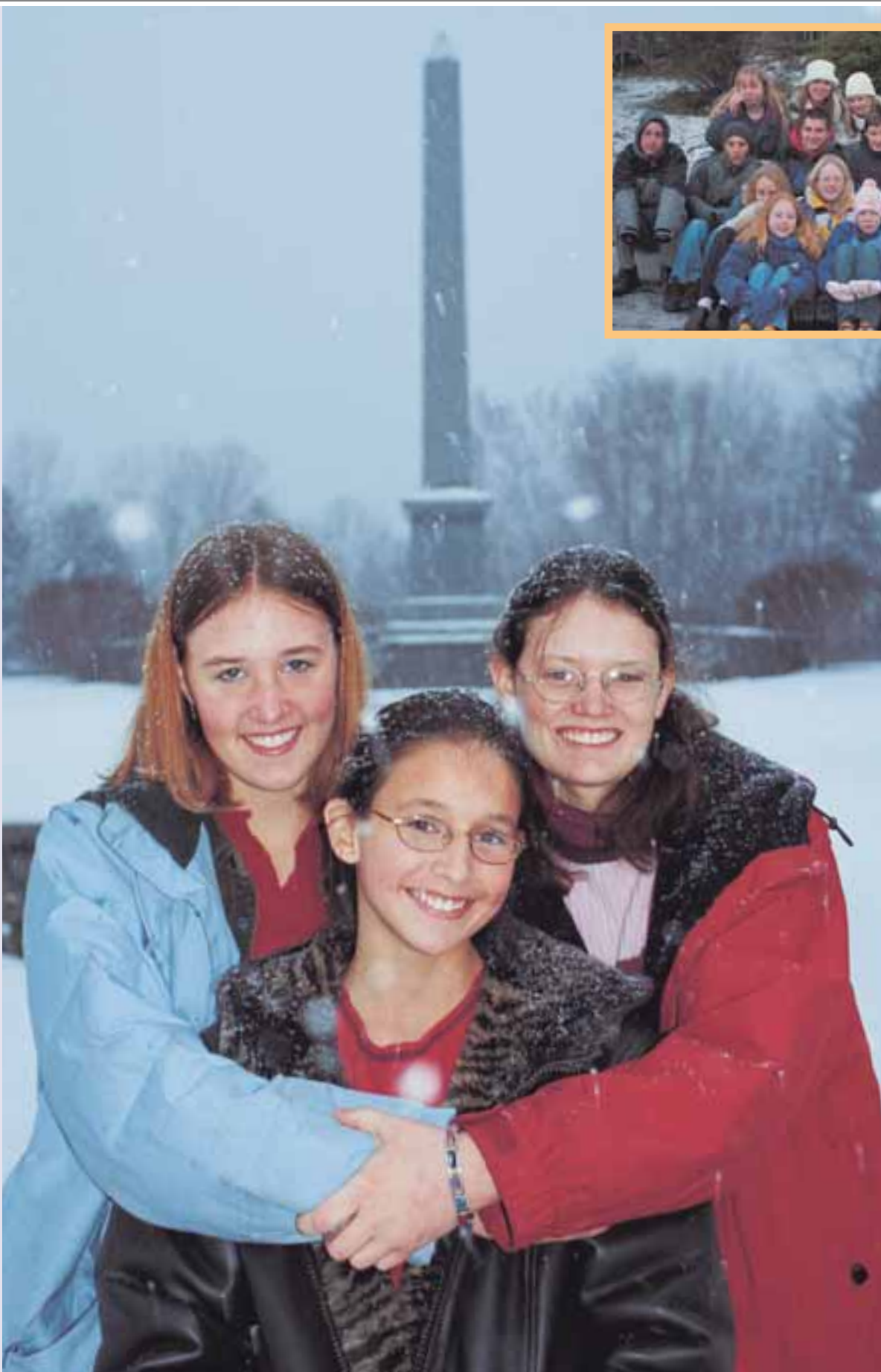
After visitors turn onto the lane, the first thing they see is a beautiful white Latter-day Saint chapel with a sloping meadow of

grass in front. But as they drive up the lane, between the sugar maples, they notice a change. There comes a great feeling of calm and peace.

They won't be the first or the last to notice this change. Kevin Burkholder of the Middlebury Branch remembers his family bringing his aunt to visit the birthplace. As soon as their car pulled onto the property, Kevin remembers her asking, "What happened here? Why does this place feel like this?" Kevin says they tried to explain: "It's not any different in appearance than any other place, but it really has a special spirit. If you have any doubt about the Church, it will be erased. It seems your thoughts are so much clearer here."

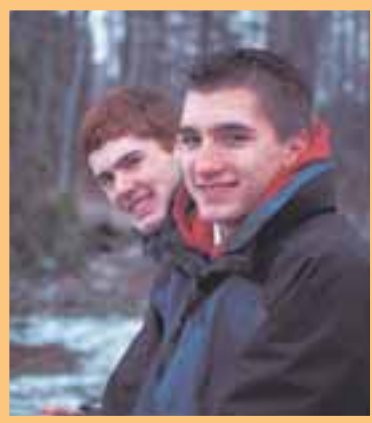
Teens like Caitlin Shamp of the Essex Ward, Montpelier Vermont Stake, get to go often to the Joseph Smith Memorial Birthplace. She also comments on the feeling of the place: "I feel it is holy. It is so peaceful and calm."

As visitors drive past the chapel, the lane



Left: Lisa, Kim, and Michelle Francis don't let the snow bother them as they stand in front of the monument at the Prophet Joseph's birthplace. Above: The Essex Ward youth from nearby Burlington enjoy visiting the birthplace often. Below: Meghan Tracy reads the plaque that marks where the cabin stood when Joseph was born.





Above right: *Katelynn Peck stands by the hearth from the original cabin.*
 Above, from top: *The South Royalton Ward building; the visitors' center at the birthplace; Stephen Brown and Andrew Lords of the Essex Ward.*

dips a little and approaches two low brick buildings with porches that are mirror images of each other.

One is the visitors' center, and the other houses the offices for the missionaries who serve at the birthplace. The buildings are on both sides of the stairway leading to the monument.

Smooth Polished Granite

The monument is set upon a small hill. It is a polished granite shaft, 38 ½ feet (11.7 m) high, each foot representing a year of Joseph's life. The shaft is mounted on a large square block. When it was cut in 1905, it was the largest spire in America cut from a single piece of rock, the unblemished stone representing the outstanding qualities of the man it honors. Kristin Simmons of the Burlington Ward says: "I thought it was a very good symbol of what the Prophet

Joseph stood for. The monument is pure stone, a foundation. It's an example of who he was." Allishia Adams of the South Royalton Ward explains in a similar way, "I think the memorial is a symbol of the Church being grounded."

In the afternoon the sun hits the front of the shaft and makes it blaze, as if a spotlight has suddenly been turned on. In the summer the monument is surrounded by flowers and gardens, but in the winter the hill is covered in bright, white snow, appropriate to the

EXTRA! EXTRA!

For a map to Joseph Smith's birthplace and more information, go to www.lds.org. Click on "Church History," then "Historic Sites." Click on "Places to Visit," then "Northeastern USA." Then select "Joseph Smith Memorial Birthplace."

time of year, 23 December, in which the Prophet Joseph was born. Each December the Montpelier Vermont Stake presents a live nativity at the birthplace, participating with the community in the celebration of the Savior's birth. The site is decorated with thousands of lights.

Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith lived on this farm owned by Solomon Mack, Lucy's father, for only a couple of years. Their son, Joseph Jr., was the only one of their nine children born here. The farmland has remained pristine, with more than 300 acres (120 ha) of land and beautiful trees surrounding the memorial.

It is not difficult to imagine what it must have looked like that chilly December day when Joseph was born. The original cabin collapsed long ago and is now rubble, but the front step and the hearthstone have been saved.

The stone that was used as the cabin's front step is outside by a bench, to the side of the memorial, approximately where the cabin originally stood. The hearthstone is inside the visitors' center, set in front of a fireplace. It is easy to picture a mother holding her newborn boy close to the warmth of the fire while sitting on the hearthstone. Christal Collette and Stephani Wright, both of the Essex Ward, have had similar thoughts. Stephani says, "I like sitting by the hearthstone and just thinking." And Christal says: "He was born right here. His mother must have dressed and changed him right here."

Finding Answers

Carved around the base of the monument is the scripture that meant so much to the Prophet Joseph at age 14. The verse reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). The Prophet said, "Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did . . . to mine" (Joseph Smith—History 1:12). The teens who live in Vermont and have the chance to go often to the birthplace value what Joseph's example has taught them. They have come to know that if they lack wisdom, they can ask for help.

Stephen Brown of the Essex Ward says: "The only way you're going to know for yourself that the Church is true is by asking. It comes only through personal revelation. The way you find out is by praying and listening."

Andrew Lords, also from the Essex Ward, had an experience with asking to know the truth: "I had never really read the Book of Mormon on a regular basis. I picked it up and prayed, 'Please tell



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN CALL

JOSEPH'S PARENTS

Lucy Mack Smith, the Prophet's mother, was born in New Hampshire. When Lucy was still in her teens, her sister Lovina died, which caused Lucy great grief. Her brother Stephen came for a visit and asked their father if Lucy could come to the town of Tunbridge, Vermont, and stay with his family for a while. They thought it would help Lucy recover from the grief over her beloved sister.

While visiting in Tunbridge, Lucy met a young man named Joseph Smith and married him. The marriage took place on 24 January 1796. Lucy was 20 years old and Joseph was 24 at the time. Together they would be the parents of Joseph Smith Jr., the man destined to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ, the very truth Lucy had been searching for most of her life.

The young couple, Lucy and Joseph Sr., had a small farm and ran the country store (illustrated above) in Tunbridge, a store that, although repaired and expanded, is still there today. While the Smiths lived in Tunbridge, the oldest children, Alvin and Hyrum, were born. The young family moved to a farm owned by Lucy's father, outside Sharon, Vermont. The small cabin they built on that property sat on the boundary line between the towns of Sharon and South Royalton. The day after his son Joseph was born on 23 December 1805, Joseph Sr. walked into town and registered his birth in the town of Sharon. (See Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley [1958].)



Above: Kristen Brown and Caitlin Shamp enjoy visiting the birthplace any time of year, but they especially enjoy attending stake Young Women camp at Camp Joseph, held during the summer on a section of the property. The grounds also have a picnic area visitors can use.

me if this is true.’ Then I started reading the introduction. I was overwhelmed with the Spirit. I thought, ‘Wow, and that’s only the introduction.’ That was definitely my answer.”

Searching for Truth

Just as Joseph’s search led him to wonderful answers, the teens in the Essex Ward in Vermont have been led to understand answers to their prayers by searching in ways similar to what Joseph did. Dawn Doney says: “Joseph’s parents supported him in his search for the true Church. If I have a question or something is on my mind, I discuss it with my parents.” Dawn also turns to the scriptures just as Joseph did.

“If something comes to my mind,” Kristen Brown says, “I get a burning feeling. It’s like a key fitting into a lock. I know that it’s the answer to my prayer.”

Caitlin Shamp says, “You should make time, when no one’s around and you don’t have anything else to do, to just think and really pray.”

Autumn Doney adds: “At 14, you’re worrying about if a guy likes you or if you’re popular. Joseph Smith cared about finding the truth and the true gospel. I wish I had that much faith. We need to get down on our knees and pray every morning and night.”

What You’ll Find

Some teens, like those in the South Royalton Ward, come to the birthplace every Sunday for church and every Wednesday for Mutual. Meghan Tracy says: “I’ve taken it for granted living here my whole life. Now that I’ve realized how sacred it is, I can feel the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. It’s comforting to have it this close to where I live.”

Kevin Burkholder has a suggestion for those who visit the Joseph Smith Memorial Birthplace: “Walk around in the woods. Take the trail up the hill that we’ve nicknamed Mount Patriarch. From there, you can look down on the monument. You can sit up there for hours and think about things. A smile will spread across your face. You can’t help it.” **NE**



PHOTOGRAPH BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN

THE PROPHET SAID OF HIMSELF

“I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else. . . . Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty.”

—The Prophet Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:401.

MORE THAN A FARM BOY

BY ELDER MARK E. PETERSEN
(1900–84)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

... testify to the divine calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith and ... declare my faith in the miracle by which the Book of Mormon was translated and published.

Joseph Smith did more for the salvation of men in this world than anyone else who ever lived in it, with the sole exception of our Lord and Savior—our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God.

Joseph was the instrument through whom the true Church and kingdom of God were again restored to earth. He brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he trans-

lated by the gift and power of God. He was the means of having it published in his own day on two continents. He sent the everlasting gospel, now restored, to the four quarters of the earth.

He received numerous revelations from the Lord, which have been published in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and our Church history. . . .

He lived great, and he died great, a martyr to the cause of Christ; and, like most of the Lord's anointed in ancient times, he sealed his mission and his testimony with his life's blood (see D&C 135:3).



Mark E. Petersen was called as an Apostle in 1944. He served in that calling for 40 years, until his death in 1984. Here he teaches that from a humble beginning, Joseph Smith became the mighty prophet of the Restoration.

He left a name and a fame that will never die, and as the years roll on and the Church continues taking the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, his name will be magnified even further, honored and blessed by the millions of faithful who come to know how truly great his calling was. He was foreordained in heaven to this mighty work in latter days. He fulfilled his mission with honor and inspiration, a beacon to all who follow him, giving glory always to God on high, for whom he labored.

But great as this mighty prophet was, he had but a humble beginning. He was raised as a farm boy, with little formal education. His home as a youth was in western New York, then on the frontier of the United States.

The family cleared trees in the forest to make their farm. They were a humble people. They knew poverty and hardship, but by diligent effort and the blessings of heaven they lived successful lives.

Isaiah's Prophecy

The work of Joseph Smith was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, who spoke of [Joseph's] humble beginning and his lack of early education. . . .

As he opens the subject in his 29th chapter, Isaiah describes a nation which would be destroyed suddenly, but which would speak in modern times, literally from the grave, by means of a book. . . .

We testify that Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled and that the book is now available. It is the Book of Mormon. . . .

The Book of Mormon

On the 22nd day of September 1823, near Palmyra, New York, an angel of God revealed [the Book of Mormon's] resting place to a 17-year-old boy named Joseph Smith, at this time as yet an unlearned, uneducated farm laborer, but now called of God to be His modern prophet.

The book was of metal having the appearance of gold.

It consisted of metallic pages as thin as common tin. Each page measured about seven by eight inches [18 by 20 cm], and all were bound together at the back with metal rings which allowed the pages to be turned over easily. The book was about six inches [15 cm] thick. Each page was covered on both sides with ancient writing in small but beautifully engraved characters. The book lay in a stone box which had protected it from the elements for centuries. . . .

Many stone boxes have been found, especially in Mexico and Central America: Some are small, beautifully engraved, and contain jewelry; others are large enough for food storage. The use of stone boxes was common in ancient times.

By the Gift and Power of God

But let us consider . . . the actual translation of this record. Joseph Smith says he did it by the gift and power of God, through the use of the Urim and Thummim. As unlearned as he was at that time in his life, he could have done it in no other way. . . .

. . . Oliver Cowdery, his scribe, said the same thing, adding, "I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet [Joseph Smith] as he translated it by the gift and power of God."¹

Martin Harris, another assistant scribe, bore the same testimony. And Emma Smith, the beloved wife of the Prophet, who . . . assisted at times as a scribe, bore this testimony:

"I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for, when [I acted] as his scribe, [Joseph] would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. . . . It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one



so . . . unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.”² . . .

The Book of Mormon is a literary and a religious masterpiece and is far beyond even the fondest hopes or abilities of any farm boy. It is a modern revelation from end to end. It is God-given. . . .

The whole task of translation was a miracle. The book is “a marvellous work and a wonder,” as Isaiah said (Isaiah 29:14). . . .

From cover to cover the Book of Mormon is a revelation, an inspired translation, the work of God and not of any man. From

cover to cover it is true. . . .

So out of Joseph Smith’s humble beginning came this new volume of scripture, a new revelation from God, a second faithful witness to the divinity of the Savior of the world. **NE**

From an October 1977 general conference address; subheads added; spelling and punctuation modernized.

NOTES

1. Reuben Miller Journals, 1848–49, Family and Church History Department Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 21 Oct. 1848.
2. “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 Oct. 1879, 290.

The angel Moroni revealed the Book of Mormon’s resting place to Joseph Smith, who later translated the book by the gift and power of God.



“STILLE NACHT”

This Christmas carol was written, set to music, and performed for the first time all in one day. On Christmas Eve in 1818, the organ at a small Austrian church was not working. Knowing they needed music for the evening church service, Joseph Mohr, an assistant parish priest in Oberndorf, Austria, wrote the words for a new hymn in a flash of inspiration. He took the lyrics to the church organist, Franz Gruber, who wrote a melody on his guitar. Franz and Joseph performed their beautiful new hymn, “*Stille Nacht*,” or “Silent Night,” that evening. Its popularity spread quickly throughout the world. Today we sing the first, sixth, and second verses of the original hymn (see *Hymns*, no. 204).

TRUE CHRISTMAS STORIES

We know that you’re not kids and that you’ve already figured out that some Christmas stories are not for teenagers. We do hope, though, that you haven’t grown out of the real spirit of Christmas.

Stories about elves and reindeer might be for children, but true giving of yourself should be for everyone, especially for great leaders.

Our perfect leader, Jesus Christ, allows us to qualify for God’s greatest gift—

eternal life (see D&C 14:7). This Christmas when you read the story of the Savior’s birth, also read some of the stories from His earthly ministry. His example of selfless giving can guide you as you seek for ways to serve this Christmas.



WRITE AWAY!

What are you giving for Christmas this year? If you have a great Christmas story to send us, that’s what we’d like for Christmas! Were you

someone’s secret Santa? Did you get something on your Christmas wish list that only Heavenly Father knew about? Did you come closer to the Savior? Whatever your Christmas

story, the *New Era* wants to hear about it. Send your story of no more than 1,000 words to:
New Era, Christmas
50 E. North Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84150, USA



STOCKING STUFFERS

The young men and women of the Folsom Second Ward, Fair Oaks California Stake, filled and donated 50 Christmas stockings for children in need. The young men and young women earned their own money, shopped for the presents, and then got together to fill and decorate the bright red stockings to be given away.

THE REAL SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Giving, not getting, brings to full bloom the Christmas spirit. Enemies are forgiven, friends remembered, and God obeyed. The spirit of Christmas illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world's busy life

and become more interested in people than things. To catch the real meaning of the spirit of Christmas, we need only drop the last syllable and it becomes the Spirit of Christ."

—President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, "Christmas Gifts, Christmas Blessings," *Ensign*, Dec. 1995, 2.



My Sister's SURPRISE

I want you to open the present from me!" my nine-year-old sister told me. She was so excited to share her gift with me. I wondered what it could be.

Christmas

BY AMY L. NIELSEN

Christmas morning in our house came early. Who can stay asleep when there are such exciting things to look forward to? I was awake by 2:00 a.m. I knew I wasn't allowed to wake up my parents then, so I lay in my bed and dreamed. I was eight years old, and my one Christmas wish was for a Molly doll, a doll with dark hair and glasses, which looked a lot like me. I had dreamed about the doll so much that by Christmas morning, I had no doubt I would receive it.

Slowly the minutes ticked by. At 6:00 a.m., just when I thought I couldn't stand it any longer, my two younger brothers and I ran to wake up my parents. Then we stood at the top of the stairs and waited for my dad to say that he was ready with the video camera. My mom held my eight-month-old sister, Anna, in her arms.

My dad called up the stairs, "Okay, I'm ready," and it was as if he had started a race. We all tumbled down the steps at a breakneck speed. I had my eyes trained on the place where I knew Molly would be sitting, but she wasn't there. I stopped in my tracks and took in the whole family room in a single glance. No, she really wasn't there. I was so disappointed I could have sat on the bottom step and just cried, but I didn't. After all, it was Christmas morning. I found the present Santa had left me instead. It was very nice, and I played with it a lot, but I still longed to hold a Molly doll in my arms.

Fast forward nine years. I was 17. The doll-playing phase of my life had passed. It was October, and the whole family was gathered around the table for breakfast. Since that

Christmas when I was 8, my family had added three more kids, with one more on the way.

"I need someone to clean out the flower beds," my dad said amidst the general commotion made by seven kids and two parents. "You know, clean up the dead flowers and then plant tulips for next spring." He was looking directly at my brother, leaving no doubt as to whom he intended that someone to be. "I'll pay whoever will agree to do it."

Ben did not seem fazed by the incentive of money, for he did not volunteer his services. Someone else did.

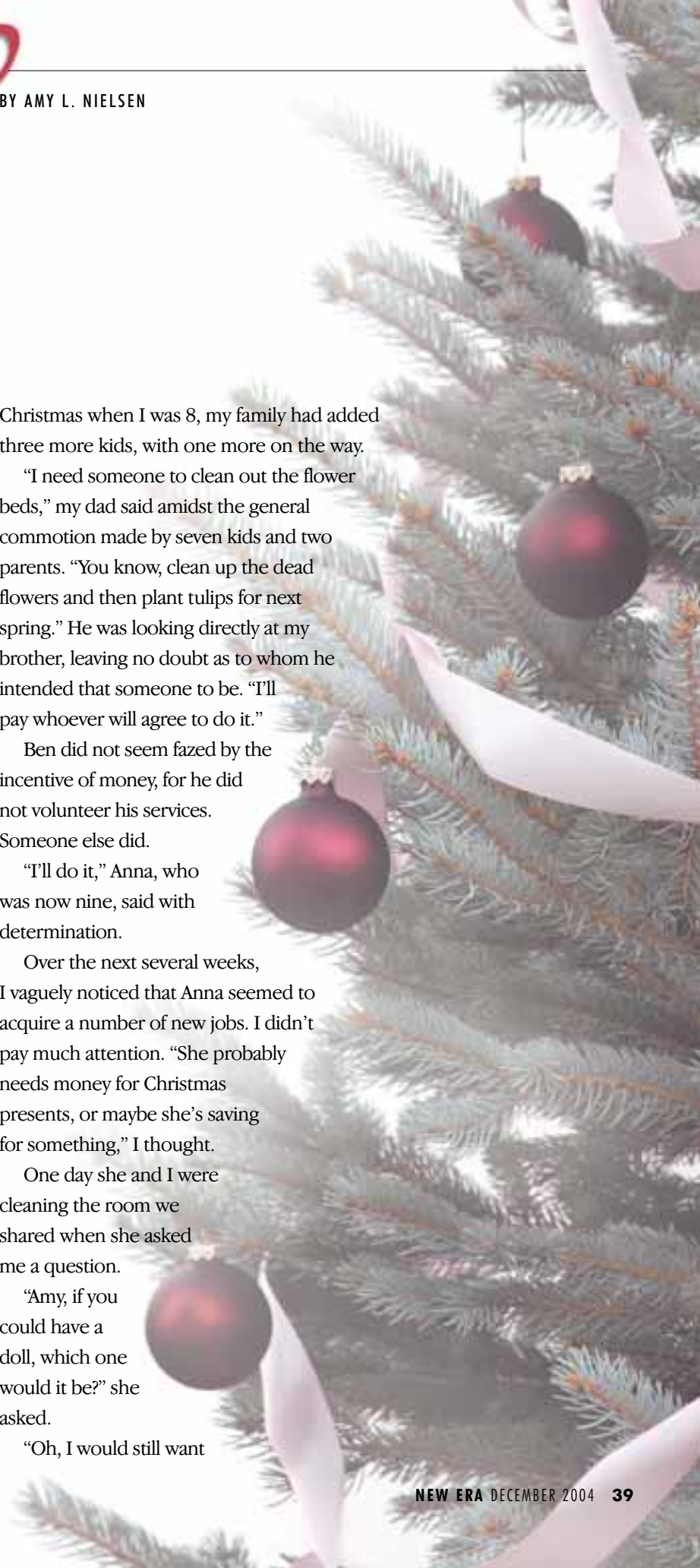
"I'll do it," Anna, who was now nine, said with determination.

Over the next several weeks, I vaguely noticed that Anna seemed to acquire a number of new jobs. I didn't pay much attention. "She probably needs money for Christmas presents, or maybe she's saving for something," I thought.

One day she and I were cleaning the room we shared when she asked me a question.

"Amy, if you could have a doll, which one would it be?" she asked.

"Oh, I would still want



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH LINGE

EXTRA! EXTRA!

For ideas on gifts that share the true spirit of Christmas, read the following articles in the Gospel Library at www.lds.org: “Homemade Christmas” (*New Era*, Dec. 2003), by Elder Gene R. Cook, “Idea List: Priceless Gifts” (*New Era*, Dec. 2002), and “Idea List: Gospel Gifts” (*New Era*, Dec. 2003).

Molly,” I said absently. I didn’t think too much about the question. She asked me questions like that all the time, and I knew she also wanted a Molly doll for Christmas this year.

Christmas morning came. I still got excited about what the day would hold, but I also liked my sleep. I could now see why my parents refused to let us get them up before 6:00 a.m.

When the time came, my little brothers and Anna were so excited they were practically dancing at the top of the stairs. At Dad’s command, we all ran down.

I took in the family room with a sweeping glance, and, wonder of wonders, Anna had received Molly! I was excited for her and surprised that I did not feel even the slightest twinge of jealousy. It didn’t bother me that she had received the doll I had once wanted so much. We shared the joy of her gift.

After an uneventful breakfast, we all wandered out to the living room to open more presents. Anna was jumping up and down and looked as though she were about to burst.

“I want Amy to open the present from me!” she exclaimed. She was so excited she could barely contain herself. I wondered what on earth it could be. “Maybe it’s something she made,” I thought.

From behind the Christmas tree, Anna pulled out a long, oblong box. I was confused.

“Is this from Anna?” I questioned. “Just from Anna?”

“It’s just from Anna,” Mom answered.

As I began to slowly remove the wrapping, I became even more confused. It was a doll box. Anna was enjoying every second of my confusion.



As I pulled off the lid, my breath caught in my throat. There, nestled snugly inside the box, was a Molly doll identical to Anna’s.

“Oh, my goodness,”

I breathed. How could this be from Anna? I looked to my mom for an answer.

“Remember all of the work Anna did?” Mom questioned.

I did remember, and the tears ran down my cheeks. With sudden clarity I remembered all the jobs Anna had been doing that I had barely noticed. Even more than the gift, the impact of how much my sister loved me made me sob.

Anna ran up and threw her arms around me. I held her tight and continued to cry. Soon other family members were crying too. You could feel the love that was in the room. Gently, I lifted the doll out of the box. I had never dreamed that I would actually receive this doll—and from my nine-year-old sister, of all people! Anna’s smile was scattering sunshine all around the room. Everyone was smiling and grinning through their tears.

As I held my doll, I realized I would not have traded this moment for anything. If I had received the doll when I originally wanted it, I never could have shared this Christmas in this way with Anna. Isn’t it funny how things happen? Before, I just couldn’t understand why I didn’t get what I wanted. Now I had received an even more precious gift—my sister’s loving sacrifice for me.

I would think about all these things for years to come. But right now, two sisters were running off to play with their new dolls. **NE**

Amy L. Nielsen is a member of the BYU 50th Ward, Brigham Young University 12th Stake.

"I want a care package from home, a couple of good investigators, a baptism, . . ."



"Do you know 'SILENT Night'?"



"Wow! New scriptures."

"I just rewrapped the ones we gave him last year."





THE DIVINE TOUCH

BY ELDER M. RUSSELL BALLARD

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I have learned firsthand that the wounds of those who suffer spiritually can be healed when you and I put forth the extra personal effort required to reach out to them.

Jesus Christ has the power to heal all manner of illness, whether spiritual or physical. A woman was healed by simply touching the border of His garment, as recorded in the book of Luke:

“And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.

“And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.

“And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (Luke 8:46–48).

Can the Master touch others’ lives through you and me? Oh yes, He can, and He will if we will just do our part.

Doing Her Part

A Young Women teacher had a blind girl in her class whose participation was limited because she could not study in the usual way. The teacher would go to the girl’s home and read out loud while the girl translated her Personal Progress book into braille. The work took two years. The teacher also encouraged the other girls in the class to help. Under her direction, they went to the blind girl’s home and read to her from the manual until it was translated into braille.

The Master’s touch through that teacher reached out and blessed not only this girl but many others who are blind, because the braille translation was made available at the general offices of the Young Women organization.

Little Piece, Big Heart

Sometimes the Savior’s touch can reach others through little bodies with big hearts. A lovely woman had received the missionary discussions but had not made the final commitment to be baptized. One Sunday she



Can the Master touch others’ lives through you and me? Oh yes, He can, and He will if we will just do our part.



As we were leaving the Church offices, we caught a glimpse of President Spencer W. Kimball, and my young friend asked, “Does President Kimball ever talk to someone like me?” The short time with President Kimball was unforgettably impressive. His instructions were eternal, and his love for this young man was unquestionable.

decided to attend sacrament meeting in a ward where she was not acquainted. She wanted a place where she could be alone with her thoughts. She sat beside a little boy. As the sacrament was passed, this little boy noticed that she did not take the sacrament bread. When it came to him, he carefully broke a piece in two and gave half to her. The woman was very impressed that a child would perform such a meaningful act of kindness. That day she contacted the missionaries and said, “If this is what you teach the children in your church, I want to become a member.”

Help Him Understand

The Lord taught the Nephites, “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24). An example of the light of the Lord touching someone who needed it desperately came when I called upon a very close friend shortly after the death of his eternal companion. I asked him, “What can I now do to help?” He answered, “Help my son to understand.” You see, this son loved his mother very much.

When he saw her suffer month after month, he began to feel that the prayers and the priesthood blessings went unanswered. This caused his faith in our Heavenly Father to waver, and he lost the light of the Lord in his life.

The words rang in my ears: “Help my son to understand.” I asked myself, “How? What can I do?” Finally, I invited him to come to Church headquarters to talk with me. When he arrived and we went to the lunchroom, a most unusual circumstance unfolded while we were eating. During our visit, many General Authorities came by our table and greeted us. He shook hands with eight of the Twelve Apostles. Never before or since have I seen that many members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the lunchroom at one time.

As we were leaving the Church offices, another unusual thing happened. We caught a glimpse of President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), and my young friend asked, “Does President Kimball ever talk to someone like me?” Circumstances that would rarely happen again placed us with President Kimball for a few minutes. The short time with him was unforgettably impressive. His instructions were eternal, and his love for this young man was unquestionable. My friend’s heart and mine were touched deeply during those few minutes.

President Kimball’s final statement to this young man, after he gave him a loving embrace, impressed my friend very much. He said, “My boy, when you come home from your mission, you will understand more fully the things we have been talking about.” That day a prophet of God reached out as I suppose only a prophet can. Through him, the Savior touched the life of my friend and

turned him toward the light of the Lord.

As we returned to the parking area, I put my arm around him and said, "I know that your mother knows you are here today. Because of her love and devotion to the Lord and her great love for you, I am sure our Heavenly Father has allowed her influence to be felt here today." Tears flowed, attitudes changed, directions became clear, and commitments were made.

What a thrill it was to report a few months later to President Kimball that this fine young man was serving faithfully and diligently as a full-time missionary!

The Savior's Touch

Finally, may I share how the Lord will touch our personal lives through our own faith and prayers. A beautiful baby girl came to our son's home only to stay with them here on earth for less than five months. The love and care given to her by her parents was deeply touching. The struggle of this infant granddaughter for life was almost more than we could bear. The night before her passing, we went to the hospital, giving what support we could to our children.

Later that evening in my son's home, his mother and I knelt with him and prayed for guidance. When we returned to the hospital and I took my tiny little grandchild's hand and looked at her, I felt the Savior's touch. Into my mind came the words, as though spoken by her to me, "Don't worry, Grandpa; I'll be all right." Peace came into my heart. The Master's touch fell upon all of us. Soon thereafter she was released to go home again to her heavenly parents.

Oh yes, we can feel the Savior's touch, and we can help others feel that divine

touch. We can bless each other by reaching out to the wayward youth, the less-active adult, the widowed, the aged, the sick, and to all of God's children everywhere, whether of our faith or not.

We somehow need to realize the vital importance of feeling the blessings of the gospel and the peace of the Lord in our lives individually. We can bless each other when we administer the Savior's touch to the benefit of our fellowmen.

I realize that many of you are very conscious of the needs of others. I also know that you and I can do much more. Let us make the choice never to let a day pass without striving to touch the life of someone through our service! Then we can cherish and appreciate more the Savior's beautiful admonition: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). **NE**

From an October 1980 general conference address.

When I took my tiny little grandchild's hand and looked at her, I felt the Savior's touch. Into my mind came the words, as though spoken by her to me, "Don't worry, Grandpa; I'll be all right."



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LATE WINTER

BY NANI LII S. FURSE

Soft fire melts into blue
Embers that speak of snow;
Winter breathes its dialogue with
Latent earth, white phrases
Contoured by prisoned shadow—
A slow sweep, a pulse,
Molding the rhythm of
Star and moon as they
Spin towards dawn.



*“Where is he
that is born
King of the Jews?
for we have
seen his star
in the east,
and are come
to worship him”
(Matthew 2:2).*

See “What Think Ye of Christ?” on p. 4.

