

The Best Christmas Gifts

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

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

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

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

Simple reminders. The best gift I have ever received came from my grandmother and consists of two items:

a pillowcase and a necklace with a locket. Although they are simple items, they mean a lot to me. My name is written on the pillowcase with glow-in-the-dark letters, and below my name it reads, "Did you think to pray?" Whenever I have jumped into bed without praying, the glow-in-the-dark words remind me to kneel and pray. The locket holds two pictures: one of me and one of the Savior. While the pillowcase reminds me to pray at home, the locket reminds me to be like the Savior at school and other places I go.

Paige I., Utah

First Presidency devotional.

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

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

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

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

Alvaro M., Uruguay

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

Cassie W., Washington

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

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

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

Faye H., Virginia

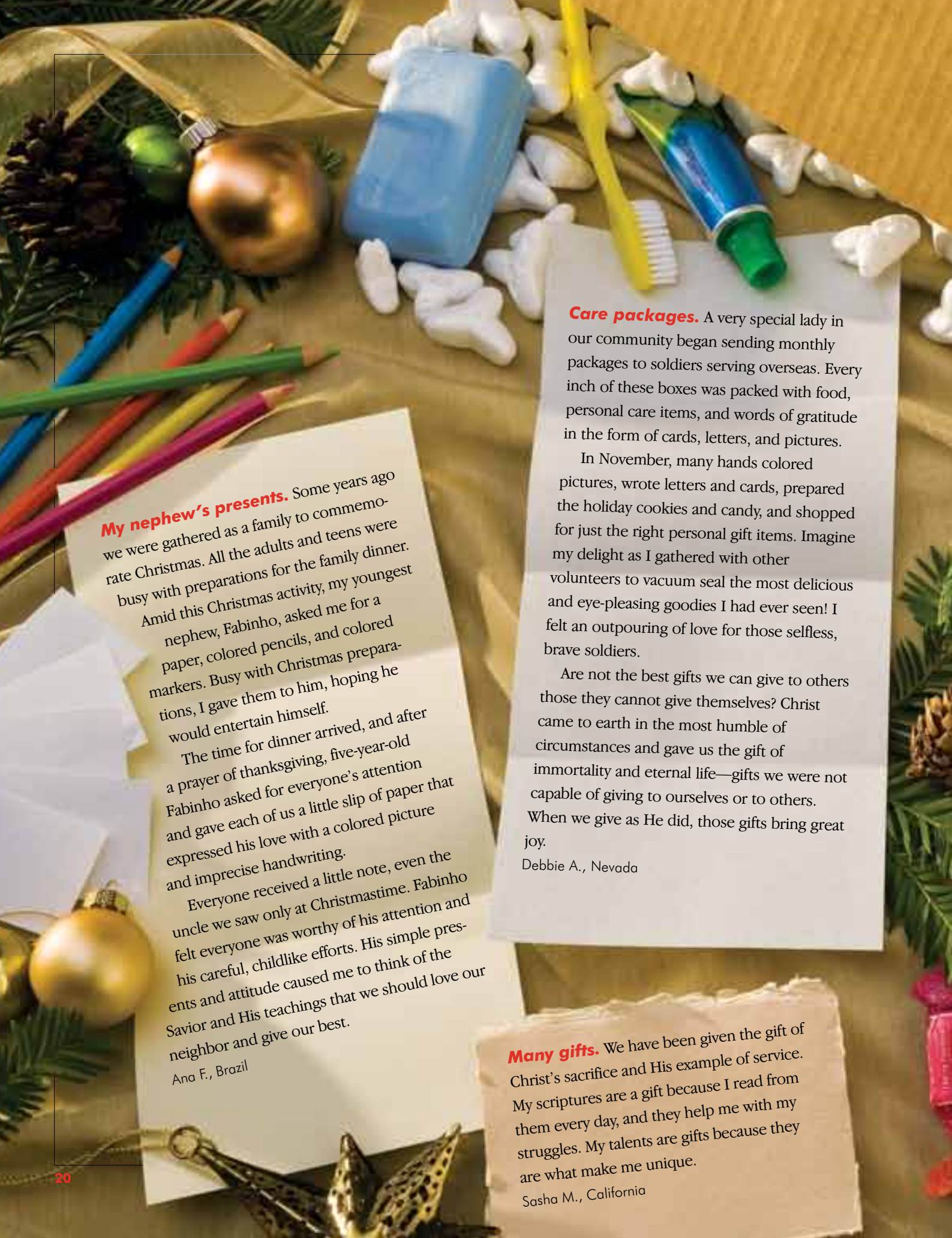
Christmas as a family.

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

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

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

Gedalva S., Brazil



My nephew's presents. Some years ago we were gathered as a family to commemorate Christmas. All the adults and teens were busy with preparations for the family dinner.

Amid this Christmas activity, my youngest nephew, Fabinho, asked me for a paper, colored pencils, and colored markers. Busy with Christmas preparations, I gave them to him, hoping he would entertain himself.

The time for dinner arrived, and after a prayer of thanksgiving, five-year-old Fabinho asked for everyone's attention and gave each of us a little slip of paper that expressed his love with a colored picture and imprecise handwriting.

Everyone received a little note, even the uncle we saw only at Christmastime. Fabinho felt everyone was worthy of his attention and his careful, childlike efforts. His simple presents and attitude caused me to think of the Savior and His teachings that we should love our neighbor and give our best.

Ana F., Brazil

Care packages. A very special lady in our community began sending monthly packages to soldiers serving overseas. Every inch of these boxes was packed with food, personal care items, and words of gratitude in the form of cards, letters, and pictures.

In November, many hands colored pictures, wrote letters and cards, prepared the holiday cookies and candy, and shopped for just the right personal gift items. Imagine my delight as I gathered with other volunteers to vacuum seal the most delicious and eye-pleasing goodies I had ever seen! I felt an outpouring of love for those selfless, brave soldiers.

Are not the best gifts we can give to others those they cannot give themselves? Christ came to earth in the most humble of circumstances and gave us the gift of immortality and eternal life—gifts we were not capable of giving to ourselves or to others. When we give as He did, those gifts bring great joy.

Debbie A., Nevada

Many gifts. We have been given the gift of Christ's sacrifice and His example of service. My scriptures are a gift because I read from them every day, and they help me with my struggles. My talents are gifts because they are what make me unique.

Sasha M., California

Gift of memories. My parents were struggling to start a new business the year I was 15, and money was scarce in our family. They believed in making the best of difficult circumstances, so we took a day trip to the land my dad was leasing to cut an evergreen desert bush for our Christmas tree and to enjoy a winter picnic together in the snow with homemade chili and hot chocolate.

My two sisters and I decided to put our money together to buy Mom and Dad something to lift their spirits. We bought a photo album and supplies, went home, and filled it with family pictures, starting with their wedding portrait. We had a wonderful time laughing and reminiscing together as we put our favorite photos in the album. We each had one small present to open on Christmas morning, but it didn't matter when we watched our parents' eyes light up as they opened their gift. It was a memorable Christmas filled with love, laughter, and unity.

Sally O., Utah

Gift on the doorstep. I remember the first Christmas my family had when we moved to Australia. I was only seven or eight years old. When we woke up Christmas morning, we were delighted by the gifts our parents had brought with them to Australia. But we were in for a greater surprise. Outside our house on that Christmas morning was a sack of goodies! To this day we don't know who brought it, and although I don't remember every gift in the sack, I will always remember the feelings of peace and happiness that washed over me and my family. The sweet sack of goodies taught me a precious lesson—anonymous service brings joy to our souls.

Elder Vasu Nephi Chetty, New York New York
South Mission

Adoption. Just before Christmas of 2004 we heard about a little girl who needed to be adopted. All of us children put on our Christmas wish list that we wanted a little sister. On December 11, our wishes came true when my younger sister came to live with us. That is the best Christmas gift I have ever had.

Carolyn R., Arizona



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

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

Living Christmas card.

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

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

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

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

O EVANGELHO SEGUINDO
MATEUS



Gift of baptism.

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

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

Erin B., Utah

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

Heather R., Utah

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

Katie B., Washington **NE**

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