SON OF GOD, LOVE'S PURE LIGHT
The Second Coming

Joseph Smith taught about the Savior's Second Coming and millennial reign.

Mormonad:

God So Loves You

Advent Calendar:

Prophecies of Christ's Coming

Use this calendar to learn about the prophecies of Christ's coming.

Let There Be Praise

Jill B. Adair

Dancers in Arizona use their talents to praise the Savior.

Energy Drinks:

The Lift That Lets You Down

Russell Wilcox

Just because they're not mentioned in the Word of Wisdom doesn't mean there are no consequences.

Only a Phone Call Away

Hillary Holbrook

Teens in the Gustavus Alaska Branch go to seminary and church by phone.

The Message:

Amazed at the Love Jesus Offers Me

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

We stand all amazed to know Jesus cast out and defeated the forces of evil everywhere.

The Star, the Savior, and Your Heart

Sue Clark

The light of the Savior can glow within us if the Savior is in our hearts.

The Light before Christmas

Rhett Wilkinson

I found something great to read on the night before Christmas.

The Gift Box

Scott Luebke

This small gift became a family tradition.

Questions and Answers

“What can I do to make my prayers less repetitive and more meaningful?”

In Tune:

Little Baby

Traci Law

Hear this song performed online at newera.lds.org.
Family Pistachios 38
Celeste Green
The best family times are sometimes ones that just happen.

The Extra Smile 39

From the Field: A Christmas Miracle 40
Ryan Campbell
As missionaries, we brought the Christmas spirit to people on a train.

New Era Index 2008 43

Poem: Snow 49
Stacey Marie Penman

Photo 49
Brady Hubbard

LET THERE BE PRAISE p. 26

Text and visual material in the New Era may be copied for incidental, noncommercial church or home use. Visual material may not be copied if restrictions are indicated in the credit line with the artwork. Copyright questions should be addressed to Intellectual Property Office, 50 E. North Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT 84150, USA, e-mail: cor-intellectualproperty@ldschurch.org.

The New Era Magazine Volume 38, Number 12 December 2008
Official monthly publication for youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Editorial Offices: New Era
50 E. North Temple St.
Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA
E-mail Address: newera@ldschurch.org

To Change Address: Send old and new address information to: Distribution Services P.O. Box 26368 Salt Lake City, UT 84126-0368, USA. Please allow 60 days for changes to take effect.

Cover: L’Innocence by William Bouguereau.

Cover art and photography: L’Innocence by William Bouguereau (front) and Hillary Holbrook (back)

TO SUBMIT MATERIAL: Please e-mail or send stories, articles, photos, poems, and ideas to the Editorial Offices address above. For return, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

TO SUBSCRIBE: By phone: Call 1-800-537-5971 to order using Visa, MasterCard, Discover Card, or American Express Online: Go to www.ldscatalog.com. By mail: Send $8 U.S. check or money order to Distribution Services, P.O. Box 26368, Salt Lake City, UT 84126-0368, USA.

Visit us online at www.NewEra.lds.org.
AMAZED AT THE

Love

JESUS OFFERS ME

BY ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

On one of our favorite hymns begins with the words “I stand all amazed.” As we think about Christ’s life, we are amazed in every way. We are amazed at His premortal role as the great Jehovah, agent of His Father, Creator of the earth, guardian of the entire family of man. We are amazed at His coming to earth and the circumstances surrounding His advent.

We are amazed that at only 12 years of age He was already about His Father’s business. We are amazed at the formal beginning of His ministry, His baptism and spiritual gifts.

We stand all amazed to know Jesus cast out and defeated the forces of evil everywhere He went, even as He made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the infirm to stand. When I consider the Savior’s ministry, I wonder, “How did He do it?”

He Is Forgiving

I am most amazed at the moment when Jesus, after staggering under His load to the crest of Calvary, said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

If ever there is a moment when I indeed stand all amazed, it is this one. When I consider Him bearing the weight of all our sins and forgiving those who would nail Him to the cross, I ask not “How did He do it?” but “Why did He do it?” As I examine my life against the mercifulness of His, I find how I fail to do as much as I should in following the Master.

For me, this is a higher order of amazement. I am startled enough by His ability to heal the sick and raise the dead, but I have had some experience with healing in a limited way. We are all lesser vessels, but we have seen the miracles of the Lord repeated in our own lives and in our own homes and with our own portion of the priesthood. But mercy? Forgiveness? Atonement? Reconciliation? Too often, that is a different matter.

How could He forgive His tormenters at that moment? With all that pain, with blood having fallen from every pore, still He was thinking of others. This is yet one more amazing evidence that He really was perfect and intends us to be also. In the Sermon on the Mount, before He stated that perfection is

As we think about Christ’s life, we are amazed in every way. He was the purest and only perfect person who ever lived.
our goal, He gave something of a last requirement. He said all must “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

This is one of the most difficult things to do.

Jesus Christ was the purest and only perfect person who ever lived. He is the one person in all the world from Adam to this present hour who deserved adoration and respect and admiration and love, and yet He was persecuted, abandoned, and put to death. Through it all, He would not condemn those who persecuted Him.

**He Is the Perfect Sacrifice**

When our first parents, Adam and Eve, had been cast out of the Garden of Eden, the Lord commanded them to “worship the Lord their God, and . . . offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5). The angel told Adam, “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7).

Sacrifice served as a constant reminder of the humiliation and suffering the Son would pay to ransom us. It was a constant reminder of the meekness and mercy and gentleness—yes, the forgiveness—that was to mark every Christian life. For all these reasons and more, those firstborn lambs, clean and unblemished, perfect in every way, were offered on those stone altars year after year, pointing us toward the great Lamb of God, His Only Begotten Son, His Firstborn, perfect and without blemish.

In our dispensation, we are to partake of the sacrament—a symbolic offering that reflects our broken heart and contrite spirit (see D&C 59:8). As we partake, we promise to “always remember him and keep his commandments . . . ; that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77).

The symbols of the Lord’s sacrifice, in Adam’s day or our own, are to help us remember to live peacefully and obediently and mercifully. These ordinances are to help us remember to demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in our long-suffering and human kindness one for another, as He demonstrated it for us on that cross.

But over the centuries, too few have used these ordinances in the proper way. Cain was the first to offer an unacceptable sacrifice. As the Prophet Joseph Smith noted: “Abel offered to God a sacrifice that was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted, because he . . . could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for man, for this was the plan of redemption, and without the shedding of blood was no remission. And as the sacrifice was instituted for a type by which man was to discern the great Sacrifice which God had prepared, to offer a sacrifice contrary to that, no faith could be exercised, because redemption was not purchased in that way, nor the power of atonement instituted after that order. . . . Certainly, the shedding of the blood of a beast could be beneficial to no man, except it was done in imitation, or as a type, or explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself.”

And so others in our day, a little Cain-like, return home after partaking of the sacrament to argue with a family member or lie or cheat or be angry with a neighbor.

Samuel, a prophet in Israel, commented on how futile it is to offer a sacrifice without honoring the meaning of the sacrifice. When Saul, king in Israel, had defied the Lord’s instructions by bringing back from the Amalekites “the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord [his] God,” Samuel cried: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:15, 22).
Saul offered sacrifice without comprehending the meaning of his sacrifice. Latter-day Saints who faithfully go to sacrament meeting but are no more merciful or patient or forgiving as a result are much the same. They go through the motions of the ordinances without an understanding of the purposes for which these ordinances were established. Those purposes are to help us be obedient and gentle in our search for forgiveness of our sins.

**Remembering His Sacrifice**

Many years ago, Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) taught that God “is a jealous God—jealous lest we should [ever] ignore and forget and consider as unimportant His greatest gift unto us”—the life of His Firstborn Son.

So how do we make sure that we never ignore or slight or forget His greatest of all gifts unto us?

We do so by showing our desire for a remission of our sins and our eternal gratitude for that most courageous of all prayers: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” We do so by joining in the work of forgiving sins.

“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2) [Paul commands us]. . . . The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfill, is the bearing of the cross. My brother's burden which I must bear is not only his outward situation [and circumstance], . . . but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it. . . . Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian's duty to bear.”

Surely the reason Christ said, “Father, forgive them,” was because even in that terrible hour He knew that this was the message He had come through all eternity to deliver. The entire plan of salvation would have been lost had He forgotten that not in spite of injustice and brutality and unkindness and disobedience but precisely because of them He had come to extend forgiveness to the family of man. Anyone can be
pleasant and patient and forgiving on a good day. A Christian has to be pleasant and patient and forgiving on all days.

Is there someone in your life who perhaps needs forgiveness? Is there someone in your home, someone in your family, someone in your neighborhood who has done an unjust or an unkind or an unchristian thing? All of us are guilty of such transgressions, so there surely must be someone who yet needs your forgiveness.

And please don’t ask if it is fair that the injured should have to bear the burden of forgiveness for the offender. Don’t ask if “justice” doesn’t demand that it be the other way around. When it comes to our own sins, we don’t ask for justice. What we plead for is mercy—and that is what we must be willing to give.

Can we see the tragic irony of not granting to others what we need so badly ourselves? Perhaps the highest and holiest and purest act would be to say in the face of unkindness and injustice that you do yet more truly “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” That is the demanding pathway of perfection.

Rejoicing in Reunion

I recall a few years ago seeing a drama enacted at the Salt Lake International Airport. On this particular day, I got off an airplane and walked into the terminal. It was immediately obvious that a missionary was coming home because the airport was full of conspicuous-looking missionary friends and missionary relatives.

I tried to pick out the immediate family members. There was a father who did not look particularly comfortable in an awkward-fitting and slightly out-of-fashion suit. He seemed to be
a man of the soil, with a suntan and large, work-scarred hands.

There was a mother who was quite thin, looking as if she had worked very hard in her life. She had in her hand a handkerchief—and I think it must have been a linen handkerchief once, but now it looked like tissue paper. It was nearly shredded from the anticipation only the mother of a returning missionary could know.

Two or three younger brothers and sisters were running around, largely oblivious to the scene that was unfolding.

I found myself wondering as to who would be first to break away from the welcoming group. A look at the mother's handkerchief convinced me that she would probably be the one.

As I sat there, I saw the returning missionary appear. I knew he was the one by the squeals of excitement from the crowd. He looked like Captain Moroni, clean and handsome and straight and tall. Undoubtedly he had known the sacrifice this mission had meant to his father and mother.

As he neared the group, sure enough, someone couldn't wait any longer. It wasn't the mother, and it wasn't any of the children. It was Father. That big, slightly awkward, quiet, and bronzed giant of a man ran out and swept his son into his arms.

The missionary was probably 6'2" (188 cm) or so, but this big father grabbed him, lifted him off the ground, and held him for a long, long time. He just held him and said nothing. The boy put both arms around his dad, and they just held each other very tightly. It seemed like all eternity stood still. It was as if all the world had gone silent out of respect for such a sacred moment.

And then I thought of God the Eternal Father watching His Son go out to serve, to sacrifice when He didn't have to do it, paying His own expenses, so to speak, costing everything He had saved all His life to give. At that precious moment, it was not too difficult to imagine that Father speaking with some emotion to those who could hear, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And it was also possible to imagine that triumphant returning Son saying, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

**Wonderful to Me**

Even in my limited imagination, I can see that reunion in the heavens. And I pray for one like it for you and for me. I pray for reconciliation and for forgiveness, for mercy, and for the Christian growth and Christian character we must develop if we are to enjoy such a moment fully.

I stand all amazed that even for a man like me, there is a chance. If I've heard the "good news" correctly, there really is a chance—for me and for you and for everyone who is willing to keep hoping and to keep trying and to allow others the same privilege.

**I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine**

To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine. . . .

I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the debt! Such mercy, such love, and devotion can I forget?

No, no, I will praise and adore at the mercy seat,

Until at the glorified throne I kneel at his feet. . . .

Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!+

**NOTES**

2. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 48.
Even the wise men of the earth must follow divine direction,
by J. Leo Fairbanks, courtesy Museum of Church History and Art
The STAR, The SAVIOR, and Your HEART

BY SUE CLARK
Sue Clark is the wife of BYU-Idaho president Kim B. Clark.

The light of the Savior can glow within us if He is in our hearts.

During this Christmas season I studied and pondered the Christmas story in the scriptures. The Wise Men knew of the birth of the Savior because they saw a star in the East. That star became their guide:

“And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him” (Matthew 2:9–11).

They found Him because Heavenly Father had prepared for them a star, a new light in the heavens to guide them. They watched and searched and followed the star. Let me tell you what I learned about the star, the Savior, and our hearts.

The star that led the Wise Men to the Savior was real. But it also was symbolic of the light that came into the world with the Savior's birth. As I searched the scriptures to understand the star, I found two wonderful passages. The first is Revelation 22:16:

“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things. . . . I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”

The Savior is the Light of the World. He is the sure
guide for each of us. His light is the guide each one of us may have. I learned that in the second passage, found in 2 Peter 1:16, 19. Here is Peter’s powerful testimony:

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . .

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

The Savior’s life and His teachings are like light that shines in a dark world. “He marked the path and [leads] the way” (Hymns, no. 195). Clearly, if you do as Peter said and “take heed” and follow that light, the Light of Christ that is in you from birth will grow and Heavenly Father will bless you with more light (see D&C 131:5). And as Peter teaches us, the light can grow so bright within you that the day star, the “bright and morning star,” arises in your heart.

When I first read this scripture, I thought, “What a beautiful idea: the Savior arising in our hearts.” And then I remembered a song I sang as a little girl. The song is called Star Bright. The chorus from the song goes like this:

Oh, star bright—the world is pining
For you to turn night into the day;
Oh, star bright—in Heaven shining
Come glow within me
On Christmas day.

This is an application of what Peter taught. The light of the Savior can glow within us if the Savior is in our hearts.

These are beautiful ideas, and I was grateful to find them. But I was not finished. One night during the holidays I woke up with a thought running through my mind. I had been thinking about the light of the Christmas star and about the day star arising in our hearts. The thought in my mind when I woke up was this: “The day star, the bright and morning star, can only rise in hearts that are pure.” This thought guided me to further reading, and I found another scripture that teaches us that it is only with the Savior’s help that our hearts can be purified in order for Him to dwell there.

In Mosiah 4:2–3 King Benjamin has addressed the people, teaching them of Jesus Christ. They recognize this principle:

“And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified. . . .

“And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come.”

The people believed the words of King Benjamin, who prophesied of the coming of Jesus Christ. With faith they asked for mercy and the application of the atoning blood upon them that their “hearts might be purified.” And the star arose in their hearts, filling them with joy.

Believe in Christ and in His power to purify your hearts through the application of the Atonement to forgive you of sin so that the day star, the Savior of the world, the bright and morning star, may arise in your hearts and be your guide as you walk the path of life. If you do that, you will begin this year with much, much more than New Year’s resolutions. You will walk the true path. NE

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on January 10, 2006.
It was the last day of school before the lengthy holiday break, so the students at my high school attended a special seminary session at a chapel right across the street. At the end of the session, a few kids were asked to bear testimonies before we concluded the program.

One senior boy told us about his tradition of reading 3 Nephi 11 early on Christmas morning, before anybody else in his family woke up and tore into presents. His testimony of the understanding it gave him of everything the Savior means in his life inspired me to do the same thing. I decided to read the chapter the night before, on Christmas Eve, before I went to bed.

I knew that this chapter was about Christ appearing to the people in the Americas, and Heavenly Father testifying of His Son. What I didn’t know or understand was the impact the Spirit would have on my heart that night as I felt a simple but completely powerful feeling of love.

This feeling came through well-known scriptures. In verse 7 I read, “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.”

And in verses 10 and 11 I read: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into this world... I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.”

Indeed, these are very simple verses, but I felt an incredible feeling of love that night. I understood that I am important as an individual to Him, just as each one of us is. There may be billions of us on earth, but the Father and Jesus Christ are infinitely concerned about each one of us. We can all realize this because of the Savior’s Atonement.
THE GIFT BOX
When I was seven, I thought I had the true meaning of Christmas all figured out. Christmas was more than just receiving gifts. You had to be willing to give a gift if you expected to receive one in return. Each year our gifts to friends and neighbors were Mom’s holiday cookies and candies. Her walnut divinity was famous. My sisters and I would pitch in to help deliver plates of treats around the neighborhood. The neighbors would reciprocate by delivering their own favorite treats to our house—completing the exchange program.

That year the last of the neighbors came by with their gift on Christmas Eve. However, instead of a plate of cookies, they gave us a small, beautifully wrapped present. They instructed us not to open it until we had opened all the other gifts under the tree the next day. I used my best detective skills to try to determine what was inside. But the only clue I could find was a gift tag that merely added to my curiosity: “To the Luebke Family—the Greatest Gift of All.” That was quite a promise for such a small box—especially when all we had given them was homemade cookies and candy.

Christmas morning finally came, and we opened all our presents. Then, as we sat in the carnage of torn wrapping paper and opened boxes, Mom brought out the mysterious gift and read the tag. My sister and I fought over who would open it. I don’t recall who won, but I clearly remember my disappointment when I saw what was inside the box—nothing except a card. I had been skeptical that this gift would really be “the Greatest Gift of All,” but I had certainly expected more than a handwritten card. Mom, on the other hand, was visibly touched by the card.

The next year when the Christmas decorations went up, the little present was back under the tree, like an unwanted fruitcake. I lifted the lid, hoping that I had missed something the year before. But it proved again to be an empty box with a simple card in it.

As the years went by, that little gift became a family tradition. Every year it was the first present under the tree and the last one opened on Christmas morning. In my teenage years my attitude began to soften toward the little gift.

The first Christmas after my mission, I headed home for the holidays after a semester at college. As I walked through the door, the memory of many Christmases at home came flooding back. As I looked in the living room, I saw it, that unusual little present, alone under the tree. It showed the wear of having many heavy packages piled on top of it over the years. I picked it up with a reverence I had never shown it before. The tag was still attached: “To the Luebke Family—the Greatest Gift of All.” As I lifted the lid and read the card inside, I now had a testimony that it truly did represent the greatest gift our family could ever be given. It read, “From Jesus Christ—The Gift of Eternal Life.”

I am grateful for the family who gave us this family tradition that has blessed our Christmases by reminding us of the greatest gift of all. NE
The scriptures clarify that vain repetition is the problem (see Matthew 6:7). Sometimes you will need to repeat important things in your prayers. But if you repeat words without thinking, you’re not really communicating with Heavenly Father. To avoid vain repetition, learn to pray with “real intent” (see 2 Nephi 31:13; Moroni 7:9; 10:4)—that is, pray with sincerity and with the intent to act in faith.

In 3 Nephi the Savior’s disciples prayed “without ceasing,” yet “they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray” (3 Nephi 19:24). The Holy Ghost can guide your prayers and make them more meaningful (see Romans 8:26). It also helps to make time to pray in a quiet place when you are not hurried.

Finally, think of the many different things you can pray about. You enjoy many blessings each day, and you need heavenly help in many situations. Thank Heavenly Father for your blessings, and pray for things you need. You can pray for forgiveness, help in trials, a stronger testimony, and protection against temptation. NE

Unselfish Prayers
Sometimes when we pray, I think we are selfish—just thinking of ourselves and what we want. Think of others and their needs too. Count every blessing, and thank Heavenly Father for them. Prayer is not just for Heavenly Father to listen to our wants and complaints but also for us to listen to Him. How are we to receive revelation if we just quickly say what we want and then hop into bed? Ask Him what He would want you to do. You will become a better person.

Rebecah W., 16, Idaho, USA

Let the Holy Ghost Guide You
Take time to ponder which things you are most grateful for and which things are of greatest need in your life. The Spirit will guide you and will give you answers and suggestions that will come as ideas, thoughts, or promptings. You might also keep a journal in which you can record these thoughts and ideas for future reference.

Elder Sebo, 21, Texas Houston Mission

Responses are intended for help and perspective, not as pronouncements of Church doctrine.
Reflect on Your Day
When I pray at night, I think of what I read in the scriptures. I try to remember what I was able to do right and what I need to improve on. I can ask Heavenly Father to help me with that day’s difficulties. I ask Him to always help me remember His counsel and give me strength to follow it. Since every day is different, even if we have a routine, different things will always happen. That being the case, upon reflecting about our day, we will always have different things to ask for and be thankful for.
Kêria F., 20, Palmas, Brazil

Pray Aloud
Find a time and place where you can be alone and pray out loud. When you pray vocally, it feels so much more personal and meaningful. It’s easier to avoid vain repetitions and to prevent your mind from wandering. It’s really like a conversation with Heavenly Father.
Elder Marra, 20, Colorado Colorado Springs Mission

Pray for Specifics
Planning ahead, even if just for a few minutes to compose your thoughts and most sincere desires, ensures that you will focus more on the words you are saying to your Heavenly Father. Think of your family, extended family, and others who may need your prayers. There are so many people who need help, guidance, and protection.
Focusing on specific blessings and praying in detail can change the usual “Please bless me to have a good day” to “Please guide me in my decisions to set a positive example for others.” Those are the prayers you will hold dear to your heart because they are more Christlike—the way they are supposed to be.
Hannah T., 14, Maryland, USA

Next Question
“My parents aren’t members. I’m afraid to talk to them about the Church. How can I share the gospel with them without offending them?”
Send your answer by January 15, 2009, to:
New Era, Questions & Answers 1/09
50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA
Or e-mail: newera@ldschurch.org

The following information and permission must be included in your e-mail or letter:

Full Name
Birth Date
 Ward (or Branch)
 Stake (or District)

I grant permission to print response and photo:
Signature
Parent’s Signature (if you are under 18)

Pray with Sincerity
“As we pray, let us really communicate with our Father in Heaven. It is easy to let our prayers become repetitious, expressing words with little or no thought behind them. When we remember that each of us is literally a spirit son or daughter of God, we will not find it difficult to approach Him in prayer. He knows us; He loves us; He wants what is best for us. Let us pray with sincerity and meaning, offering our thanks and asking for those things we feel we need. Let us listen for His answers, that we may recognize them when they come. As we do, we will be strengthened and blessed.”
Little Baby

Words and music by Traci Law

Like a lullaby \( \text{\textit{\textbf{L}} = 66-80} \)

Little baby in a manger

Come to save both friend and stranger. Little baby in a manger, come and save me.

Heaven's star shines bright with glory.

See the Kings and shepherds lowly. Heaven's star is shining o'er the little baby.
new era  
December 2008  
17  

Photographs by Matthew R. Reier and Welden Andersen

Listen to and download this song at NewEra.LDS.org
The Lord called Joseph Smith to restore the gospel and His Church to the earth in preparation for His Second Coming (see D&C 1). He also revealed to Joseph many of the signs that would precede that day, as well as the glories that will attend it (see, for instance, D&C 29; 45; 133). Here are some of Joseph Smith’s teachings about the Second Coming and Millennium.

THERE ARE SIGNS BUT NO TIMETABLE

“We see that perilous times have truly come. . . . I suppose there will soon be perplexity all over the earth. Do not let our hearts faint when these things come upon us, for they must come, or the word cannot be fulfilled.”

“Jesus Christ never did reveal to any man the precise time that He would come [see Matthew 24:36; D&C 49:7]. Go and read the Scriptures, and you cannot find anything that specifies the exact hour He would come; and all that say so are false teachers.”

WE CAN FIND COMFORT

“Comfort one another, even as ye also do, for perilous times are at hand. . . . Yea, lift up your heads and rejoice, for your redemption draweth nigh. We are the most favored people that ever have been from the foundation of the world, if we remain faithful in keeping the commandments of our God.”

CHRIST WILL REIGN OVER THE EARTH

“It has been the design of Jehovah . . . to regulate the affairs of the world in His own time, to stand as a head of the universe, and take the reins of government in His own hand.”

“That Jesus will be a resident on the earth a thousand [years] with the Saints is not the case, but will reign over the Saints and come down and instruct, as he did the five hundred brethren [see 1 Corinthians 15:6], and those of the first resurrection will also reign with him over the Saints.”

That He Gave His Only Begotten Son. (See John 3:16.)
Prophecies of Christ’s Coming

You can prepare for Christmas now by remembering how others prepared for Him then.

Many prophets in the Bible and Book of Mormon foretold Jesus Christ’s birth and ministry hundreds of years before the actual event. For the 12 days before Christmas, this advent calendar will serve as a reference to scriptures about the birth and life of the Savior and activities you can do to be more Christlike. Read the scripture each day, and if you desire, try the corresponding activity. With your parents’ permission, you could use ideas from this calendar in family home evening.

President Thomas S. Monson has said: “For a few moments, may we set aside the catalogs of Christmas, with their gifts of exotic description. Let’s even turn from the flowers for Mother, the special tie for Father, the cute doll, the train that whistles, the long-awaited bicycle—even the books and videos—and direct our thoughts to God given gifts that endure.”

NOTE

When the Christmas season comes to a close, keep what you’ve learned in your mind and heart, and celebrate Christmas all year round by serving others.
December 13

Isaiah, a prophet in the Old Testament, prophesied that a pure woman would give birth to Heavenly Father’s Son. These scriptural accounts were written more than 700 years before His birth.

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14; see also 2 Nephi 17:14).

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6; see also 2 Nephi 19:6).

Prayerfully pick a friend, family member, or ward or branch member. Secretly leave him or her a small gift, like a treat, thought from the scriptures, or a Christmas card.

December 14

Nephi saw in a vision the virgin Mary and baby Jesus:

“And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

“And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

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

“And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:18–21).

Make a Christmas list of things you’d like to give instead of things you’d like to get.

December 15

Prophets testified of Christ’s mission on the earth. The following is an account by the prophet Abinadi, who lived around 150 b.c.:

“And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

“And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, . . .

“. . . he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:5–7).

Make a Christmas treat, and give it to a family in your ward or branch. Giving will help increase ward unity and friendship.
December 16
Alma prophesied the following to the people of Gideon around 83 B.C.:
“The Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. . . .
“And behold, he shall be born of Mary, . . . she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.
“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of the people.
“And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy” (Alma 7:9–12).

Give the gift of service to someone in need. Invite your family to help you in identifying the service you could give.

December 17
Jesus Christ loves each of God’s children and would never forget a single one. Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord would be a shepherd and gather His lost sheep.
“For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.
“As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places. . . .
“And I will bring them out from the people . . . and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel” (Ezekiel 34:11–13).

Spend time with a younger sibling, relative, or friend. Read to him or her the Christmas story in Luke 2.

December 18
Although Jesus Christ was perfect, He still needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. The following is an account of Lehi’s prophecy, recorded by Nephi:
“And my father said he [John the Baptist] should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and he also said he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water.
“And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 10:9–10).

Give the gift of time by spending time with a sick, elderly, or widowed person in your ward or neighborhood. Ask him or her to tell you about a favorite Christmas.
December 19

Samuel the Lamanite prophesied of the signs surrounding the birth of the Savior:

“Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.

“. . . There shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. . . .

“And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you” (Helaman 14:2–3, 5).

Write in your journal what Christmas means to you and what your family’s holiday traditions are.

December 20

Before Christ’s birth, the angel Gabriel visited Mary.

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, “To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

“And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. . . .

“. . . For thou hast found favour with God.

“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus” (Luke 1:26–28, 30–31).

Gather family members and friends to go caroling around the neighborhood, or sing Christmas carols in your own home.

December 21

Nephi, the grandson of Helaman, faithfully waited for the Lord’s coming. But the unbelievers said to him, “The time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain” (3 Nephi 1:6).

Then Nephi “went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to God in behalf of his people” (v. 11).

The Lord told Nephi, “Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets” (v. 13).

In your prayers, express thanks to Heavenly Father for the gift of His Son.
December 22

Finally, the prophecies of Christ's birth were fulfilled.

"And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken. . . .

"And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, . . . for the sign which had been given was already at hand. . . .

"And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was midday. . . .

"And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word" (3 Nephi 1:15–16, 19, 21).

Jesus Christ gave us the greatest gift of all, His life. Show your appreciation to your parents by writing a letter thanking them for the good things they have done for you.

December 23

On the night of Christ's birth, an angel appeared to righteous shepherds in Bethlehem to proclaim the news of Christ's birth.

"And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:7–11).

Make a resolution to be a happier and kinder person.

December 24

We, as Christians, stand as witnesses of Jesus Christ every day of the year through faith and good works. The Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon give this witness:

"And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

"For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

"That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (D&C 76:22–24).

Share your testimony of the Savior at the next appropriate occasion, such as fast and testimony meeting. NE
During the summer of 2001, 17-year-old Tricia Hale had an idea, or a dream as she calls it, to put on a spiritual Christmas dance program that would portray the life of Christ.

She enlisted the help of three friends and fellow dancers (Anna Woolf, 17; Jill Hendrickson, 16; and Donelle Crandell, 16) at her high school in Mesa, Arizona, to turn the dream into reality.

The dancers were on the school’s dance team but had taken issue in the past with music and costumes they felt were inappropriate or not in keeping with Church standards. They wanted to use their talents to present their testimonies of Christ by dancing to sacred music and wearing modest outfits.

The program that resulted would be an experience that strengthened their testimonies and was well-received by family, friends, and the community. Other young women took over after these girls graduated, making the spiritual experience an annual program.

Other dancers are invited to join them in planning, practicing, and performing. Although some of the dancers are not members of the Church, prayer, devotionals, and sharing testimonies are part of rehearsal time.

The free program, entitled “Let There Be Praise,” portrays the life of Christ from birth to resurrection through scriptures, narration, slides, and lyrical dance to hymns and other spiritual music. It drew more than 500 people the first year, and the audience has since grown.

Clint W. Smith, president of the Mesa Kimball Stake, enjoys the performance.

“Dressed in white, these girls are so modest and pure and are able to share their talents and gifts in a way that is very powerful and appropriate,” he says. “It is a wonderful experience for those who are in it and for those who see it.”

McKenzi Fackrell, one of the group’s past presidents, admits it was a lot of work to organize and head up the program. “But it was so worth it,” she says. “It is such a testimony builder.”
By participating in this special dance program, many girls in the Mesa, Arizona, area have been able to share their talents and their testimonies of Christ—and even complete a Personal Progress project.

After McKenzie graduated, Kelly Allen took over as co-president and chose a younger co-president, Brianna Barba, to work with her.

“I just love it,” says Kelly, who has danced since she was nine years old.

Even though Kelly keeps busy with the school’s dance group and making straight A’s, she’s able to keep her life organized.

“Being involved in this is a big blessing,” she says. “Somewhere there is time for everything.”

Brianna has danced in the program since she was in eighth grade. “It has strengthened my testimony so much,” says the honor student, who is also involved in the school’s dance group and competition cheer squad.

In a devotional she told the dancers, “Christ can turn our shabby gifts into a beautiful miracle and a shining star.”

Brianna has been able to use the program for missionary experiences, inviting a friend to dance as Mary and another to perform a vocal solo for one of the dances.

“I knew they would be able to feel the Spirit and also bring their families so they would be able to share in this, too,” she says.

Brianna’s younger sister, Britney, who performed for the first time as a sophomore, is one of many dancers who uses the experience as a Personal Progress project.

“I chose Individual Worth, because being in this has helped me learn so much about myself,” she says. “When you learn about Christ, you learn more about being a daughter of Heavenly Father and how much He loves you. My testimony has grown so much.”

The program ends with the song “How Great Thou Art,” and the dancers raise their arms in praise.

“The group has never done a curtain call because we want that to be the last thing the audience sees,” says Tricia Hale Campbell, who is now a dance teacher at her own studio and has continued to help the high school students with the program. “This isn’t about the dancers. We feel grateful to use our talents in a spiritual way to focus on the Savior and we give that glory to the Lord.”

Sisters Kelsey, Kali, and Karissa Jarvis say that there are a lot of opportunities to sing or speak your testimony, but not a lot of places to dance your testimony.

“It lets others know that I do have a testimony,” says Kelsey.

Older sister Kali agrees. “You know how you feel bearing your testimony or having a great spiritual experience with someone? It’s the same great feeling, but you get to share it with all these people in dance.”

Kim Hathcock has returned to perform after graduating. “It’s one thing that makes Christmas meaningful for me,” she says.

During high school she performed as Mary. “It really made my testimony grow,” she says. “I also feel like we’re doing service, because so many people who see it comment that this is what gets them into the real Christmas spirit.”

Christy Quintero is a member of a local Christian church. “I thought it would be a good experience to dance to Christian music,” she says. “I really like being with everybody; they are good examples to be around.”

Don Johnson, whose daughter, Aimee, has performed for several years, says he enjoys the “spirit-filled” program. “These girls are so busy themselves, but they sacrifice to put this on so we can feel the Spirit,” he says. “That’s very Christlike.”

Drama teacher Sandy Stones of the Mesa Kimball Stake is the faculty sponsor for the club and is on hand when the girls practice.

“It’s an honor and privilege for me to sponsor the group,” she says. “They are a light to the school and community.”
A stake president was scheduled to meet with a young man to interview him and help him complete his mission application. The young man was a bright student and had saved money for his mission. He attended church regularly and was worthy of a temple recommend. Still, the stake president had one concern: The young man was drinking 12 energy drinks a day! In their meeting, the stake president suggested that he break the energy-drink habit before they submitted the application to the Missionary Department.

“No problem, President,” said the young man. “It’s not a habit. I can quit anytime.” They scheduled another interview a week later and the young man left. The following day he found out just how much of a habit his non-habit had become. His body was craving the drinks, and it was difficult to say no to himself. By midweek he called the stake president for a blessing. “I guess I really was more addicted than I thought,” he said. “This is really hard.”

The blessing was given, and the stake president continued to meet with the young man and monitor his progress. The process actually took months, but finally this young man felt ready to submit his application. His advice to others: “Don’t be fooled. Just because something isn’t specifically mentioned in the Word of Wisdom doesn’t mean there aren’t negative consequences.”

Energy drinks are powerful, easily available, and well marketed. Companies boast record sales that increase dramatically every year. There is no doubt the drinks pack a punch, but is it a punch that picks you up or knocks you down? In the long run, the drinks can have a negative effect both physically and spiritually.

**Physical Consequences**

While some people claim energy drinks improve their performance and concentration, such statements can be misleading. The drinks increase your heart rate and blood pressure, dehydrate your body, and prevent sleep—all of which can have devastating long-term effects.

Some high schools have banned the drinks from sporting events because student athletes, who were drinking them to stay alert and focused, were actually fainting. The combination of the fluid lost from sweating and the diuretic quality of the drinks (which...
"There are many habit-forming, addictive things that one can drink or chew or inhale or inject which injure both body and spirit which are not mentioned in the [Word of Wisdom].

"Everything harmful is not specifically listed; arsenic, for instance—certainly bad, but not habit-forming! He who must be commanded in all things, the Lord said, 'is a slothful and not a wise servant' (D&C 58:26)."

makes it hard for the body to absorb water) was leaving these athletes severely depleted.

Perhaps the greatest physical concern is that the body builds up a tolerance to these drinks, and people have to drink more and more to feel the same effect. In some cases this escalating cycle has opened the door to experimentation with pills and alcohol.

**Spiritual Consequences**

As serious as the physical consequences are, the greater concern is how energy drinks can affect us spiritually. Agency is absolutely necessary in the plan of salvation (see Moses 3:17; 7:32). Any addiction, however minor or innocent, is serious because it threatens our agency. When we allow any substance to control us, we surrender a part of the freedom for which we fought in the pre-earth life. We allow ourselves to be puppets controlled by outside influences rather than agents who act for themselves. This is contrary to the Lord's desire for us. "Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Nephi 2:16).

Along with giving us freedom, God has given us the light of Christ and the gift of the Holy Ghost to guide us in using that freedom. This heavenly direction is often communicated through feelings, so any substance that toys with our emotions has the potential to confuse us as we attempt to receive, recognize, and respond to the Spirit. Advertisements claim energy drinks heighten our senses, but in fact, over time they can dull them and leave us questioning what we feel.

**Use Your Brain**

One college professor who was not a member of the Church would delight in asking an LDS student if this or that substance was "against the Word of Wisdom." When the student would respond yes, the professor would quickly list other substances that are "just as bad" and question why they were
not also “on the list.”

Finally, one day the student said, “I make some choices in my life because God has given me commandments. I make other choices because He has given me a brain.” The student was correct. Everything we should or should not eat and drink is not listed in the revelations and every possible wise or unwise choice is not spelled out in the pages of For the Strength of Youth. The Lord has said, “It is not meet that I should command in all things” (D&C 58:26).

Break the Habit

For those desiring to end their dependence on energy drinks, take it one step at a time. It takes a while to develop such a habit, so it won’t be overcome immediately. Set reasonable and realistic goals that will leave you feeling successful rather than overwhelmed by an impossible task.

Seek help. Parents, along with youth leaders, can offer support. And though drinking energy drinks is certainly not something that has to be confessed, most bishops stand more than ready to help you reach any positive goal.

Turn to natural sources of energy. The best way to avoid a negative behavior is to replace it with a positive one. If energy is what you seek, find it through more exercise, a good night’s sleep, and a nutritious diet. Draw near to your Heavenly Father. Determine to make service, scripture study, and prayer more regular patterns in your life.

When the stake president asked the young man to break his dependence on energy drinks before beginning his mission, the young man found it difficult. After several months of hard work, that missionary entered the MTC and wrote the following in a letter to his stake president: “I want to thank you for all your help preparing me to serve. This place is incredible. The Spirit is so strong in all the classes and devotionals. You can even feel it when you are walking down the halls. This feeling is better than any energy drink!”

THE ENERGY DRINK ADDICTION

BY THOMAS J. BOUD, MD

You’ve seen these drinks all over television and in the stores. Over the past several years, high-dose caffeine energy drinks have been aggressively marketed to teens and young adults. In 2006 alone, about 500 new brands of energy drinks were introduced. In fact, 7.6 million young people say they have used energy drinks, with consumption more than doubling in the past three years. The energy drink industry in the United States alone has ballooned into a $3 billion-a-year enterprise.  

But not all caffeinated drinks are created equal; the amount of caffeine varies greatly from one drink to another. Most cola soft drinks have from 22 to 55 milligrams (mg) of caffeine. By comparison, energy drinks can have from 80 to 500 mg of caffeine in one can! Beverage companies compete to market the drink that gives the biggest jolt. To do this, they combine caffeine with other substances such as sugars, alcohol, or other stimulants in order to intensify its effects. These drinks often come in larger and larger containers.

What are the consequences of high caffeine consumption? First and foremost, caffeine is a central nervous system stimulant that can lead to addiction. Both as a doctor and as a member of the Church, I recognize the physical, mental, and spiritual dangers of any addictive substance. Any addictive behavior, whatever the source, can lead to a loss of spiritual health and freedom. I have treated a number of caffeine-related medical conditions in young people and in adults. These conditions include jitteriness, agitation, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, dehydration, weight gain, depression, high blood pressure, and rapid heart rate. There have even been reports of deaths as a direct result of caffeine overdose. 

To read more about the potential dangers of energy drinks, see Dr. Boud’s article in this month’s Ensign magazine.

NOTES
2. See www.energyfiend.com/the-caffeine-database.
"Can you imagine living in an area so remote that seminary, Mutual, and Church meetings are held on the phone rather than in a building? A group of young men and young women in Alaska don’t have to imagine it. The telephone is the only way they connect regularly. And to them, it’s not a problem.

Three of the youth—Harrison Child, and Jaenell and Zach Manchester—live in Gustavus, Alaska. The other two teens, Matthew and Jennifer Parkin, live on Admiralty Island in a town called Angoon. Both are in the Gustavus Branch in the Juneau Alaska Stake. There are also a few Church members on other islands that make up the branch.

Although a new LDS meetinghouse is being built in Gustavus, for years the branch members there have met in a member’s home. The sacrament is prepared on a kitchen table. After it is passed, the Parkin family calls in from Angoon, and a few members on other islands call in, too. The rest of the meeting is held, like any sacrament meeting, from the pulpit. There is a pulpit, and talks are given, but a telephone sits on the pulpit so everyone can hear.

And how do the young men and women feel about it? “It works out pretty well,” says 14-year-old Zach of Gustavus. His sister, Jaenell, 15, agrees. “I think it’s just like regular.”

The two towns that these five youth live in are more than 100 watery miles apart, which is the equivalent of running around a high school.
HARRISON CHILD, 14

Harrison loves flying remote-control planes, playing sports, four-wheeling, paint balling, and hiking. When asked what it’s like to communicate with other ward members on the phone, he says, “I feel really glad to join with them to learn the gospel.” Harrison gains a testimony by listening to others’ testimonies and following the examples set by branch leaders.

Harrison’s favorite scripture is Mosiah 5:15, the Mutual theme for 2008, because “it reminds me that if I am steadfast and immovable when faced with temptation, then I am telling Heavenly Father my faith in Him is strong.”
Jennfer, a student at Angoon High School, is good at finding balance between church and school. She wakes up early in the morning for a teleconference with the youth in Gustavus for seminary. Then she’s off to school for a day full of classes and sports. She excels in track-and-field and weightlifting, activities she’s been participating in for three years.

Jennifer’s favorite scripture is Joseph Smith—History 1:17–19 because, Jennifer says, “The story of the First Vision is very powerful. For a young man to pray to the Lord and get an answer that would change the world is totally awesome.”

Matthew says that it’s “never hard to say no or walk away” from a bad situation because his friends at school know about his high gospel standards, which help him make right choices. When he’s not in seminary or school, he loves to fish, hunt, wrestle, and snowboard. Matthew says he gains a testimony by reading his scriptures, going to church, and paying attention to the talks that are given.

His favorite scripture is Moroni 10:5. “I like that scripture because by the power of the Holy Ghost you really can know all things,” Matthew says.
helped those people who couldn’t help themselves," Zach says. He enjoyed looking at the names and dates of each person for whom he was baptized.

“I could feel the Spirit, and it felt very peaceful,” Jennifer says.

“When we were in the waiting room, I read an article by President Monson in the Ensign about the bridges Christ has built,” says Jaenell. “It really made me appreciate the things that the Savior has done, because we can’t build the bridges by ourselves.”

The trip strengthened each person’s testimony of Jesus Christ, a testimony that helps them in their everyday lives. Although they’re miles apart from each other, they’re only a phone call away. NE

JAENELL MANCHESTER, 15

Jaenell is self-motivated. Not only is she homeschooled, but she loves participating in service projects and sharing the gospel. In one online class, she’s had the opportunity to be a missionary by answering questions about the Church’s beliefs in the Word of Wisdom and the Restoration. “No matter where you are, the gospel is the same,” she says.

Jaenell’s favorite scripture is Alma 56:46–48 because she “loves the influence the mothers had” on their sons, the 2,000 stripling warriors.

ZACHERY MANCHESTER, 14

Zach says he reads an average of 20 books a month. Aside from that, he enjoys having a small seminary class because “it’s more focused and not spread out between many people. I think you gain more from it.” Zach, though not yet old enough to be a full-time missionary, is already having missionary experiences. When friends are curious and ask questions, Zach and Harrison explain the Book of Mormon and its history.

Zach’s favorite scripture is D&C 58:27 because it tells us how to choose the right.
Come in for prayer," called Angela, summoning everyone in for our family’s nightly routine. “This won’t take very long,” I thought as I rolled out from under the snug blanket where I had been reading.

I walked down the hall to my parents’ room, where everyone was gathering. While we were waiting for everyone to settle down, my mother reached behind her and grabbed a handful of pistachios from a bag sitting on the cedar chest. “Wait a second!” cried Corinne. “Where’s some for the rest of us?”

“Don’t worry,” my mom assured her, “sharing is exactly what I plan to do.” And without hesitation, she proceeded to divvy out the handful of nuts. With a smile she exclaimed, “Call it a blessing for participating in family prayer!”

We liked the idea. We liked it even better when mom reached behind her a second time, returning now with more than just a handful of nuts. She plopped the whole bag down in the middle of the bed we were gathered around.

We spent several happy minutes breaking open salty pistachios and talking. Our conversation became boisterous and enthusiastic as we chatted and snacked away. The nuts were soon gone but our conversation continued. We probably talked for half an hour. During this time, no one complained about family prayer taking so long. No one complained about being tired or wanting to go to bed. We were so happy to be together and content to continue talking.

At that moment, I realized that Heavenly Father had blessed us for participating in family prayer. The blessing wasn’t like the physical strength a bunch of pistachios could offer—it was more nourishing. The blessing was the opportunity to grow closer together as a family, and really, though I love pistachios, it was far more satisfying.

After we prayed together, I wandered back to my room to read a little more before calling it a night. I’d just opened my book when the sound of laughter wafted in from my parents’ room where two of my sisters continued to joke and tease my parents. I smiled and returned to my book. Who could have predicted the powerful impact of a simple mix of family prayer and pistachios?
“Can you tell me how to get to the temple?”

“You need to keep the commandments.”

“Oh, okay! So everybody who wants to go scatter King Lamoni’s sheep raise your arms!”
Winter is a cold time of year in the Russia Moscow Mission. To a missionary this sometimes seems true of not only the weather but also the people. They become introverted. Everybody seems to be rushing home after work. People are ill, the roads are terribly slick, and the cold ruthlessly bites every exposed piece of skin. Smiles are rare.

My companion and I found ourselves in these conditions during the winter of 2005. We wanted to cheer people up by sharing our message of faith, hope, and love, but nobody wanted to listen. And to be honest, my mood wasn’t all that great. I couldn’t help but feel discouraged. Day after day we walked the cold streets in search of people to teach, freezing our feet to the bone. In spite of the discouraging circumstances, we didn’t want to give up. Christmas was getting close, and we wanted to help people feel the Christmas spirit. But how?

One evening as we were on the train returning home, a small group of musicians walked into the railcar. They played wonderfully, but to my surprise, their performance didn’t have an effect on anybody. Maybe a person or two gave them some pocket change, but the rest just stared out the frosty windows. I felt bad for the performers and gave them a few coins.

Soon we arrived at the station near our apartment and ran home. As soon as I closed the apartment door, the phone rang. I picked it up and recognized the voice of our district leader. That day we were supposed to have thought of ideas for celebrating the Christmas season as missionaries. I had totally forgotten, but I didn’t want him to know that. Straining for an idea, I remembered the group of musicians and suggested that our district could sing Christmas hymns on the trains. I could accompany them on the violin. To my surprise and perhaps dismay, our district leader loved the idea. We decided on a day. “What was I thinking!” I said to myself, remembering that three of the missionaries in our district were tone-deaf.

The day came, and the missionaries met on the platform. The sun had set long ago, and it was terribly cold. My feet were already numb. We rehearsed for about five minutes until the train crept slowly up to the platform. We gladly entered its open doors, getting out of the cold wind and snow. I took my violin out of its case and silently prayed that God would touch the hearts of the listeners.

As we boarded the train, most of the people didn’t pay any attention to us. My fingers hadn’t warmed up yet, so when I started to play, the tone of the violin sounded very simple but very piercing. Suddenly the mood in the railcar changed. It was almost as if something could be felt in the air. The passengers seemed to hold their breath. The other missionaries joined with me, singing the words to “Silent Night”:

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace;
Sleep in heavenly peace.\(^1\)

While I played and the other missionaries sang, nobody in the railcar spoke a single word. When we finished the hymn, I looked around at people’s faces. Everybody was looking attentively at us. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of several women. It was silent for a minute as nobody wanted to interrupt the moment. Finally a man standing in the back of the railcar exclaimed, “They are Saints, genuine Saints!” Everyone began to applaud.

As we walked down the aisle, many people wanted to give us money. When we didn’t accept it, they became all the more surprised. I heard somebody saying under his breath, “This just doesn’t happen.” One man even tried to give us a thousand rubles and was shocked when we refused the money. Instead, we offered him a pass-along card, which he gladly took. Soon other passengers began asking for pass-along cards. They also asked about the Church and us. It seemed like wherever we looked, our eyes were met with smiling faces and warm greetings. At the end of the railcar, we wished the passengers a merry Christmas and waved good-bye to our new friends.

On the other side of the door, we looked at each other in disbelief. “What just happened?” we asked. Then, with twice as much energy, we entered the next door. At first the passengers didn’t pay any attention to us, but after we performed the hymn, they had the same miraculous reaction. For the rest of the evening, we made our way through the railcars, experiencing the same thing in each one. Never before had I seen such acceptance and love.

Returning home that night, I realized that I had experienced a miracle wrought by music, a message about the Savior, and the spirit of Christmas. Even in the coldest times of our lives, we can be comforted by the Lord’s presence. How blessed I was to have seen how drastically people can change under the influence of the Spirit. I will always remember that evening and treasure it in my heart. May the Spirit forever work such miracles! NE

NOTE
1. “Silent Night,” Hymns, no. 204.
ADOPTION
Adkins, Marie D.
Adair, Jill B.
Acker, Joshua J.

Anna's Afghans,
Amazed at the Love Jesus Offers
Agency and Accountability,
Agency, Oct, 9

ATHLETES
Aaron, Ammon, and Me,
A

ANGER
An Honest Grade, Feb, 46

AGENCY
Agency and Accountability,
Charles W. Dahlquist II, Oct, 18
Agency, Oct, 9
Make Your Move (Mormonad),
Sep, 19
Agency, Oct, 9
Agency and Accountability, Charles W. Dahlquist II, Oct, 18
Amazed at the Love Jesus Offers
Me, Jeffrey R. Holland, Dec, 2
An Honest Grade, Feb, 46

ANGER
Cool It (Mormonad), Apr, 17
Pearls and Plastic Beads, Liora Johns Phillips, Mar, 22
Anna's Afghans, Lisa Hardman,
Nov, 28

ATHLETES
Face Trials with Smiles, David A. Edwards, Feb, 18
Good Sports, Aug, 26

Run, Swim, Run, David A. Edwards, Nov, 24
Split-Second Decision, A, Hugo da Cunha Silvants Rodrigues,
Feb, 28

ATONEMENT
Amazed at the Love Jesus Offers
Me, Jeffrey R. Holland, Dec, 2

ATTITUDE
20 Things I Like about Who? Jun, 36
Do-Over Companions, Devon Black, Jun, 22
Face Trials with Smiles, David A. Edwards, Feb, 18
My Attitude Transplant, Michael Brodeur, Sep, 16
Still Serving, Richard M. Romney,
Aug, 16

B
BALANCE
Good Sports, Aug, 26
Q&A (finding balance), Mar, 14

BAPTISM
Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost, Mar, 9
Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost, Mar, 9
Barker, Dan
Just One Sip, Nov, 45
Be Big, Don't Belittle, May, 17
Be Wary of Wooden Horses, Kenneth Johnson, Oct, 30
Bednar, David A.
Steadfast and Immovable, Always Abounding in Good Works, Jan, 2
Befriending Our Church Leaders,
Ashley Bliss, Nov, 45

BOOK OF MORMON
Book in Many Languages, The,
Duane E. Hiatt, Jan, 23
BOOK OF MORMON
Book in Many Languages, The,
Duane E. Hiatt, Jan, 23
Was Lehi Here? David A. Edwards, Jan, 10
Why the Book of Mormon? Henry B. Eyring, May, 6
Brodeur, Michael
My Attitude Transplant, Sep, 16
Building an Eternal Family,
Benjamn De Hoyos, Aug, 40
Building Ryan's Place, Janessa Cloward, Jun, 40
Bytheway, John
Five Scriptures That Will Help You Get through Almost Anything, Sep, 26

C
Call to Grow, A, Ulisses Soares, Jun, 30
CALLED TO SERVE
Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Jun, 10

BELONGING
My Ward Family, Dallas Sadler,
Jun, 44
There Are No Strangers, Jessica Best, Jan, 45
Best Coach, The, Hahna Danz,

Best Friends Forever (Mormonad),
Mar, 17
Best, Jessica
There Are No Strangers, Jan, 45
Better Use of Time, A, Cameron Nickels, Sep, 46
Biggest Test of Her Life . . . So Far, The, Adam C. Olson, Aug, 10
Bingham, Jo
Perfect for the Job, Sep, 8
Black, Devon
Do-Over Companions, Jun, 22
Blessings of the Restoration, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Feb, 2
Bliss, Ashley
Befriending Our Church Leaders,
Nov, 45
Book in Many Languages, The,
Duane E. Hiatt, Jan, 23

CHRISTMAS
Christmas Miracle, A, Ryan Campbell, Dec, 40
Gift Box, The, Scott Luebke, Dec, 12
God So Loves You (Mormonad),
Dec, 20
Light before Christmas, The, Rhett Wilkinson, Dec, 11
Little Baby, Traci Law, Dec, 16
Prophecies of Christ's Coming: An Advent Calendar, Dec, 21
Star, the Savior, and Your Heart,
The, Sue Clark, Dec, 8
Christmas Miracle, A, Ryan Campbell,
Dec, 40

CHURCH ACTIVITY
Only a Phone Call Away, Hillary Holbrook, Dec, 34
Clark, Sue
Star, the Savior, and Your Heart,
The Dec, 8
Clark, Tyler
My Personal Tryout, Oct, 6
Close Call, A, Anna Wagner, Nov, 43

Cloward, Janessa
Building Ryan’s Place, Jun, 40
Grateful for the Savior, Aug, 44
It’s Just a Copy, Right?, Feb, 34
Now Is the Time, Jul, 10
Temple-Going Teens, Apr, 26
Two of a Kind, Mar, 10
Come Listen to a Prophet’s Voice (Mormonad), Nov, 11
Comfort at the Time of Death, Aug, 13

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
Building Ryan's Place, Janessa Cloward, Jun, 40
Help by the Handful, Christa Skousen, Jul, 24
Let There Be Praise, Jill B. Adair, Dec, 26

CONVERSION
I Couldn’t Say No, Andy Cargal, Nov, 8
"You Have to Be Something," Loraine Jordan, Jul, 20
Cook, Quentin L.
Strengthen Faith as You Seek Knowledge, Sep, 26
Cool It (Mormonad), Apr, 17

COURAGE
Meeting Your Goliath, Thomas S. Monson, Jun, 2

COURTESY
Wish You Were Here (Mormonad), Jul, 33
Cutler, Sarah
I Am Important, Apr, 24

Dahlquist II, Charles W.
Agency and Accountability, Oct, 18
Preparing to Receive the Ordinances of the Temple, Apr, 30
Danz, Hahna
Best Coach, The, Nov, 43
Dark Friday, Bright Sunday, Joseph R. Wirthlin, Mar, 2

DATING
Q&A (turning down a date before 16), Nov, 12
De Hoyos, Benjamn
Building an Eternal Family, Aug, 40
de Oliveira, Mónica Santos
Plans for the Future, Oct, 19
DEATH
Comfort at the Time of Death, Aug, 13
Grateful for the Savior, Janessa Cloward, Aug, 44
Decker, James
No Need for Tattoos, Jan, 45
Defeating Your Goliaths, Jun, 8

DEPRESSION
I Almost Lost My Sister, Aug, 38

Determination
Steadfast and Immutable, Always Abounding in Good Works, David A. Bednar, Jan, 2
Steadfast and Immutable, Jan, 8

DISABILITIES
Face Trials with Smiles, David A. Edwards, Feb, 18
My Change of Heart, Allison Judd, Sep, 46
Service Comes from the Heart, Lacy Douglas, Mar, 44
Swarling, Jennifer, Laura Kohn and Susan Winters, May, 10
Two of a Kind, Janessa Cloward, Mar, 10

DIVINE NATURE
I Am Important, Sarah Cutler, Apr, 24
Outside Looking In, Marcie Jesse, May, 46
Sanctity of Womanhood, The, Richard G. Scott, Nov, 2
True Beauty, Lynn G. Robbins, Nov, 30
You Are a Child of God, Russell M. Nelson, Jul, 2
Do-Over Companions, Devon Black, Jun, 22
Don’t Chance It, Ryan Jenkins, Jan, 34
Douglas, Lacy
Service Comes from the Heart, Mar, 44
Dowse, Jayni
Friday Night Tomatoes, Aug, 24

DRESS STANDARDS
To the Point (why do women have to wear dresses to church), Nov, 23

EDUCATION
Biggest Test of Her Life . . . So Far, The, Adam C. Olson, Aug, 10
Mission or Admission? Debbie Twigg, Apr, 34
Plans for the Future, Mónica Santos de Oliveira, Oct, 19
Q&A (deciding what to study in college), Jul, 14
Stand-Up Students, Daniella Nye Poulier, May, 36
Strengthen Faith as You Seek Knowledge, Quentin L. Cook, Sep, 2

Education
Face Trials with Smiles, David A. Edwards, Feb, 18
Man with Answers, The, Don L. Searle, Oct, 10
Matthew 5:14–16, Sep, 43
Note to the Good Guys, A Note to the Good Girls, A, Kerstin Wittwer and Rhett Wilkinson, May, 22
Stand-Up Students, Daniella Nye Poulier, May, 36
Standing on My Own, Lindsay Cano, Jul, 36
What I Learned from Lisa, Kathy C. Webb, Feb, 9
Eyring, Henry B.
Why the Book of Mormon?, May, 6

Faith
Believe It to the Bone, Richard M. Romney, Nov, 18
Prayer in Samoan, A, Jacob Loose, Apr, 45
Sink or Swim, Mary Ellen Heiner, Jul, 30
Strengthen Faith as You Seek Knowledge, Quentin L. Cook, Sep, 2
When in Rome . . . Do as These Romans, Jennifer Maddy, Sep, 20
World Is Looking to You, The, Oct, 29
Faith for My Father, Tyndall Taylor, Apr, 46
Faith of A Child, Katy L. Jeffsson, Mar, 46

Family
Faith for My Father, Tyndall Taylor, Apr, 46
Family Pistachios, Celeste Green, Dec, 38
Friday Night Tomatoes, Jayni Douse, Aug, 24
Recipe for a Happy Home, Paul VanDenBerghe, Jul, 16
Small Miracle, Catherine Loveland, Feb, 6

Family History
How Could I Relate? Rhett Wilkinson, Jan, 44
My Family Treasure Hunt, Rosalie Westenskow, May, 40
Family Pistachios, Celeste Green, Dec, 38

Family Relationships
20 Things I Like about Who?, Jun, 36
Building an Eternal Family, Benjamn De Hoyos, Aug, 40
Hanging Out with Mom and Dad, Jennifer Mayer, Jul, 46

Faithful
Meet Me?, The, Lawrence G. Wiebe, Jan, 2

Fasting
Faith for My Father, Tyndall Taylor, Apr, 46
Not So Fast! Daniella Nye Poulier, Sep, 24
To the Point (can’t fast), Sep, 36
Where Do Fast Offerings Go?, May, 32

Fear Not, Jessica Smith, Jul, 45

Fellowshippership
Q&A (helping friends return to church), Aug, 14
They Brought Me Back, Gretchen Fitzsimmons Stone, Mar, 34

Five Scriptures That Will Help You Get through Almost Anything, John Bytheway, Sep, 26

For the Strength of Youth
Write A Testimony, Nov, 19

Friend or Honesty?

Friends
Changing Friends, Apr, 44
Friendship or Honesty? Emily Hopkins, Oct, 46
It Could Have Been Me, Oct, 20
New Best Friends, Megan Gebhard, Aug, 45
On Your Mark . . . Get Set . . . Pray! Christa Skousen, May, 24
Prompted to Leave, Chase McPhie, Aug, 45
To the Point (my friend is pregnant), Apr, 40

Friendship
Anna’s Ahnas, Lisa Hardman, Nov, 28
Befriending Our Church Leaders, Ashley Bliss, Nov, 45
It Starts with Sharing, Ryan E. Withrow, Jun, 15
Sitting with Chris, Amanda Tingen Jones, Apr, 42
Visits from Nathan, Melanie Kenny, Feb, 44
Friendship or Honesty? Emily Hopkins, Oct, 46
From Bondi to Baguio, Nov, 46
From Generation to Generation,
The snow, the snow, 
the pure white glow 
with Christmas drawing nigh. 
The cold it brings 
so often stings 
as it falls from the sky. 
It stings the skin 
but warms within 
and brings bright holiday cheer. 
It warms the heart 
to see the start 
of this special time of year.

SNOW
BY STACEY MARIE PENMAN
CELEBRATE WITH US!

Don’t miss a thing. You can check out the special program A Brand New Year online. Link to it from our Web page at NewEra.lds.org. You can access it beginning in the brand new year—2009.

• Download some great songs.
• Listen to our Church leaders speaking especially to youth.
• Watch videos of LDS teens and the good things they’ve been doing.

SEE US ONLINE AT WWW.NEWERA.LDS.ORG