

THE **New Era**

DECEMBER 2010



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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Distribution Services, Church Magazines, P.O. Box 26368, Salt Lake City, UT 84126-0368, USA.

Canada Post Information:

Publication Agreement #40017431.



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The New Era Magazine
Volume 40, Number 12
December 2010

Official monthly publication for youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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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: Christmas is a season of remembering and caring. See "The Spirit We Feel at Christmastime," p. 2.

Cover art: Be It unto Me, by Liz Lemon Swindle

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The SPIRIT

The Christmases we remember best generally have little to do with worldly goods, but a lot to do with families, with love, and with compassion and caring.



We Feel at Christmastime

Recently as I have reminisced concerning past Christmases I've realized that probably no other time of the year yields as many poignant memories as does Christmas. The Christmases we remember best generally have little to do with worldly goods, but a lot to do with families, with love, and with compassion and caring. . . .

Many years ago I read of an experience at Christmastime which took place when thousands of weary travelers were stranded in the congested Atlanta, Georgia, airport.¹ An ice storm had seriously delayed air travel as these people were trying to get wherever they most wanted to be for Christmas—most likely home.

It happened in December of 1970. As the midnight hour tolled, unhappy passengers clustered around the ticket counters conferring anxiously with agents whose cheerfulness had long since evaporated. They too wanted to be home. A few people managed to doze in uncomfortable seats. Others gathered at the newsstands to thumb silently through paperback books. If there was a common bond among this diverse throng it was loneliness: pervasive, inescapable, suffocating loneliness. . . .

The fact of the matter was that there were more passengers than there were available seats on any of the planes. When an occasional plane managed to break out, more passengers stayed behind than made

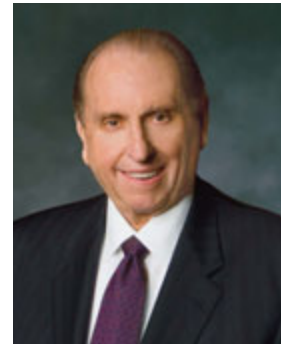
it aboard. . . .

Gate 67 in Atlanta was a microcosm of the whole cavernous airport. Scarcely more than a glassed-in cubicle, it was jammed with travelers hoping to fly to New Orleans, Dallas, and points west. Except for the fortunate few traveling in pairs, there was little conversation at gate 67. A salesman stared absently into space as if resigned. A young mother cradled an infant in her arms, gently rocking in a vain effort to sooth the soft whimpering.

Then there was a man in a finely-tailored gray flannel suit, who somehow seemed impervious to the collective suffering. There was a certain indifference about his manner. He was absorbed in paperwork: figuring the year-end corporate profits perhaps. A nerve-frayed traveler sitting nearby observing this busy man might have indentified him as an Ebenezer Scrooge.

Suddenly the relative silence was broken by a commotion. A young man in military uniform, no more than 19 years old, was in animated conversation with the desk agent. The boy held a low-priority ticket. He pleaded with the agent to help him get to New Orleans so that he could take the bus to the obscure Louisiana village he called home.

The agent wearily told him that prospects were poor for the next 24 hours, maybe longer. The boy grew frantic. Immediately after Christmas, his unit was to be sent to Vietnam—where at that time war was



**By President
Thomas S. Monson**



The Savior gave freely to all. And His gifts were of value beyond measure.

raging—and if he didn't make this flight, he might never again spend Christmas at home. Even the businessman looked up from his cryptic computations to show a guarded interest. The agent clearly was moved, even a bit embarrassed. But he could only offer sympathy, not hope. The boy stood at the departure desk casting anxious looks around the crowded room, as if seeking just one friendly face.

Finally the agent announced that the flight was ready for boarding. The travelers who had been waiting long hours heaved themselves up, gathered their belongings, and shuffled down the small corridor to the waiting aircraft: 20, 30, 100, until there were no more seats. The agent turned to the frantic young soldier and shrugged.

Inexplicably, the businessman had lingered behind. Now he stepped forward. "I have a confirmed ticket," he quietly told the agent. "I'd like to give my seat to this young man." The agent stared incredulously; then he motioned to the soldier. Unable to speak, tears streaming down his face, the boy in olive drab shook hands with the man in the gray flannel suit, who simply murmured, "Good luck. Have a fine Christmas. Good luck."

As the plane door closed and the engines began their rising whine, the businessman turned away, clutching his briefcase and trudged toward the all-night restaurant.

No more than a few among the thousands stranded there at the Atlanta airport witnessed the drama at gate 67. But for those who did, the sullenness, the frustration, the hostility all dissolved into a glow. That act of love and kindness between strangers had brought the spirit of Christmas into their hearts.

The lights of the departing plane blinked starlike as the craft moved off into the darkness. The infant slept silently, now in the lap of the young mother. Perhaps another flight would be leaving before many more hours. But those who witnessed the interchange were less impatient. The glow lingered gently, pervasively in that small glass and plastic stable at gate 67.

My brothers and sisters, finding the real joy of the season comes not in the hurrying and the scurrying to get more done or in the purchasing of obligatory gifts. Really, joy comes as we show the love and compassion inspired by the Savior of the world, who said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). . . .

As we contemplate how we are going to spend our money to buy gifts this holiday season let us plan also for how we will spend our time in order to help bring the true spirit of Christmas into the lives of others.

The Savior gave freely to all. And His gifts were of value beyond measure. Throughout His ministry, He blessed the sick, restored sight to the blind, made the deaf to hear, and the halt and the lame to walk. He gave cleanliness to the unclean. He restored breath to the lifeless. He gave hope to the despairing, and He sowed light in the darkness.

He gave us His love, His service, and His life.

What is the spirit we feel at Christmastime? It is His spirit—the spirit of Christ. **NE**

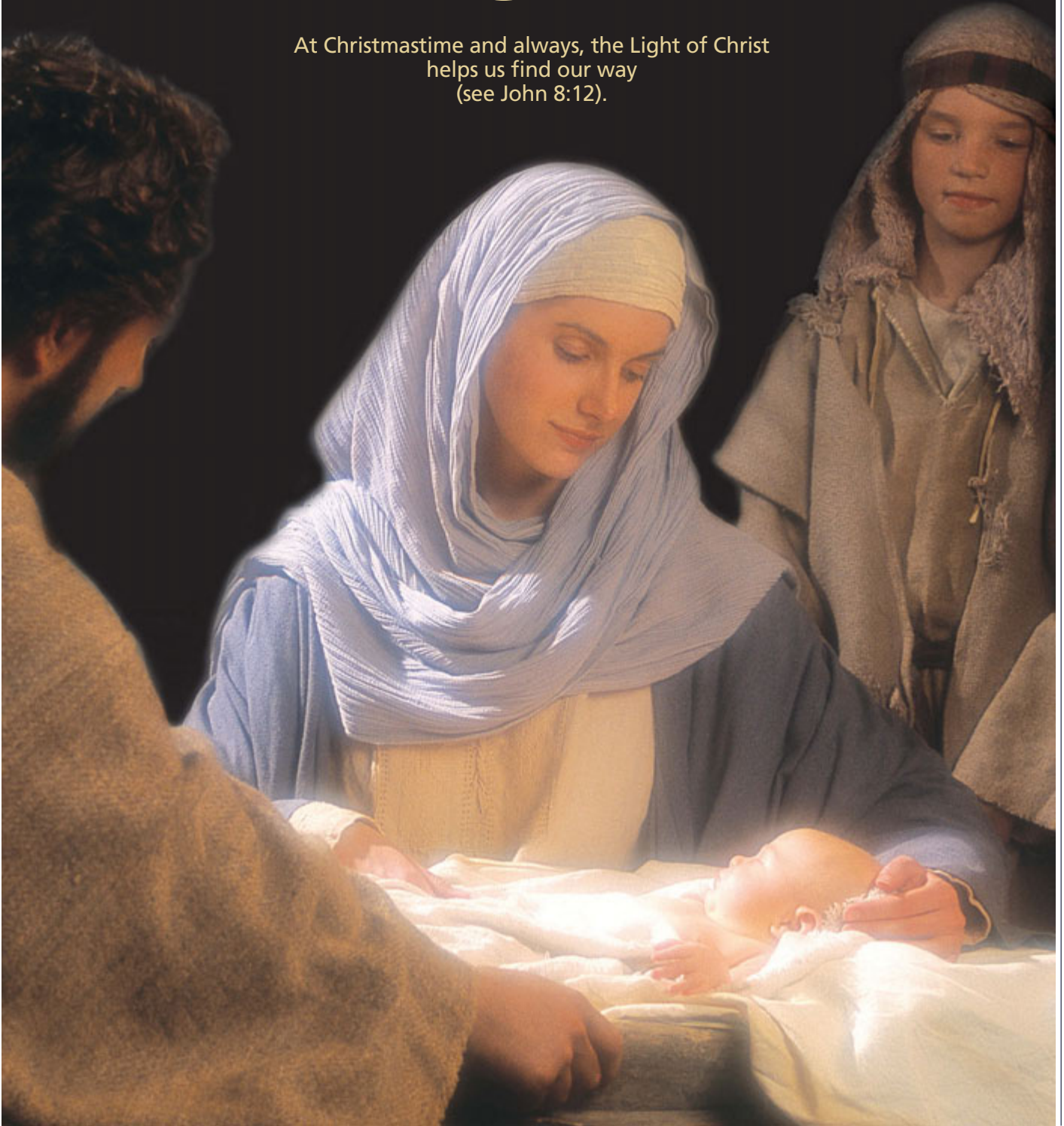
From the First Presidency Christmas Devotional, December 6, 2009.

NOTE

1. From Ray Jenkins, "The Quiet Drama at Gate 67, in Atlanta," *The New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1979, 23.

LOVE'S PURE LIGHT

At Christmastime and always, the Light of Christ helps us find our way (see John 8:12).



Like Sweet Milk

If you accept and apply the Lord's true gospel, it will sweeten your life like sugar sweetens milk.

By Yolanda Morales Posadas

I grew up as a serious, responsible person who followed the principles that my parents, with their limited religious knowledge, taught me. However, after my father died in 2005, when I was 15, I became someone different. Maybe it was a way of expressing my pain for not having said good-bye to him. I will always regret not giving him a kiss before he went to the hospital.

After his death I started hanging around people who didn't have good values. I was doing things I thought were OK and that everyone was doing, but I now understand they weren't pleasing to the Lord. I was having fun, according to the world's standard of fun, but in reality I wasn't happy. I was empty and missing something, but I didn't know what. I started doing poorly in school. The worst part was that I had no idea how to find happiness in my life. At the time I didn't see how much I was missing out on with my family and my mom, who is the person I love most.

At night I would pray to God. No one had taught me how to pray, but I felt like He was listening. I asked Him to help me be happy and to



True happiness comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

let me know if my dad was OK. I was so afraid that he was suffering somewhere. My pleas went on for many nights.

The answer finally came. I thought I would receive an answer in a dream, but instead it came in the form of two elders. They came to our house in December 2006. I didn't understand that they were an answer to my prayers, and I didn't want to listen to even one discussion. My mom listened and decided to go to church. She hasn't stopped going since. She was baptized, and a few weeks later

my nephews and my sister were baptized. I noticed a huge change in my mom after her baptism, to the point that she seemed much younger and happier. Her happiness and peace filled our house immensely; the minute someone came in he or she could feel that something was different.

I realized what had happened and decided to go to church. It was a strange experience; I had never been treated so kindly before. The sisters were friendly and treated me so well that I felt very comfortable at church. Little by little I was convinced the Church was true, and I decided to listen to the lessons from the elders.

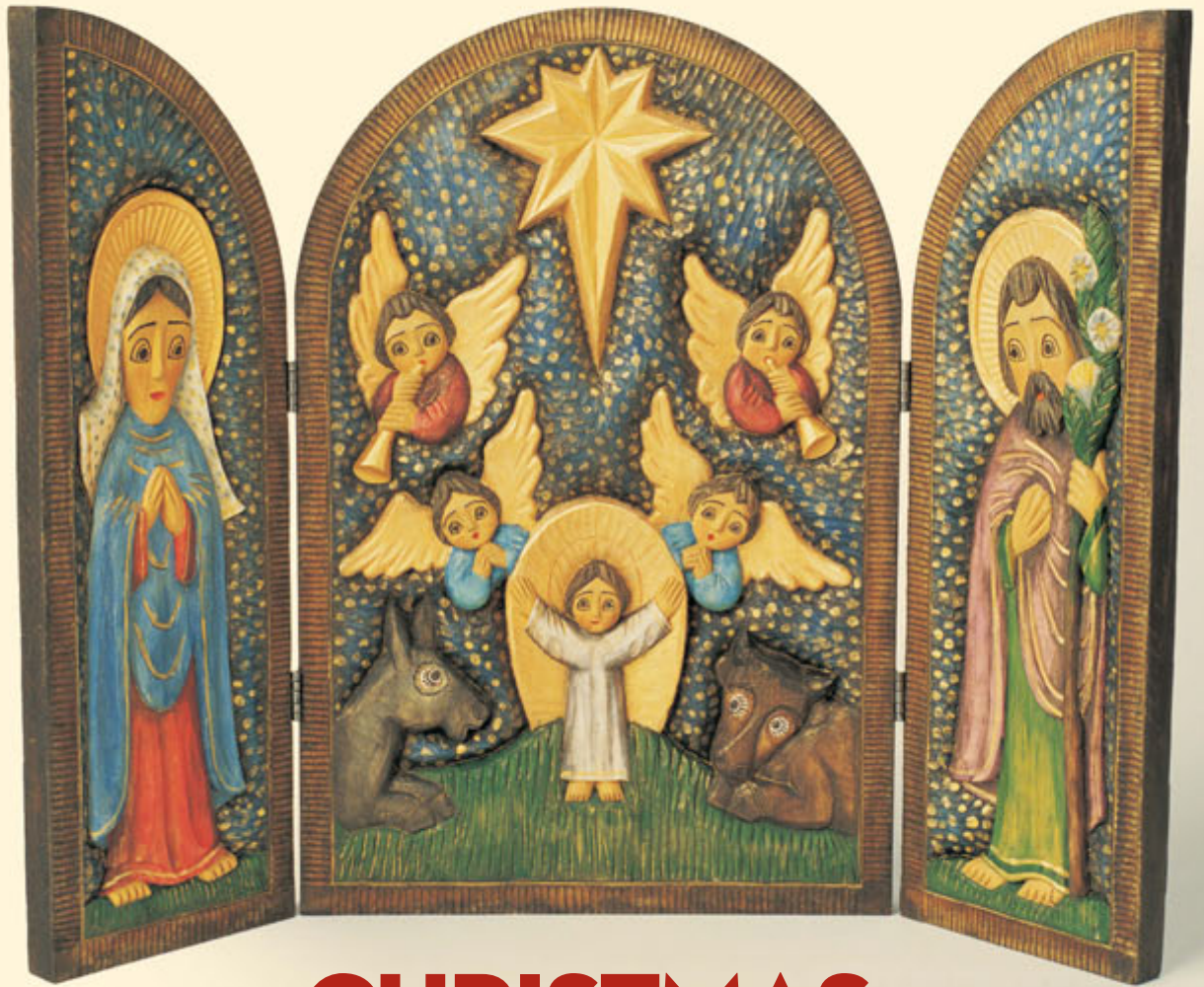
I was baptized on February 3, 2007, in the Uribe Ward, Veracruz Mexico Stake, by two amazing elders. I will always remember them, and I consider them our angels. My baptism is a day I'll never forget. I was clean from all sin. My mistakes had been erased because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I left my depression behind, and the void I had felt was no longer there. It was replaced by tremendous joy in my soul.



The true gospel has brought my family and me so much happiness. I've found eternal friends. I continue to battle against the world, but now I have the true gospel and the Spirit that give me joy and peace daily. Now I know the answer to the question I was asking the Lord for so long. If my dad accepted the ordinances we did for him in the temple, I know he's happy and at peace. I believe he accepted the gospel and is waiting for us.

Sometimes I look back and realize how much I've been blessed. I see there is a greater happiness than that offered by the world and its pleasures and distractions. True happiness comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything that the gospel teaches is for our good.

I once received an e-mail in which a mom explains to her young son that God is like sugar that you add to your milk. You can't see it, but it sweetens everything. In the same way, you can't see the Lord's true gospel, but if you accept it and apply it, it sweetens your life like sugar sweetens milk. **NE**



CHRISTMAS COMES AGAIN

Tenderly ♩ = 60-72

Words by Don Staheli Music by Jim Kasen

IN TUNE

1. Christ - mas day is come a - gain. Our hearts com - bine in praise to
 2. Christ - mas day is come a - gain. He brought e - ter - nal hope for
 3. Christ - mas day is come a - gain, this sweet Child by His Fa - ther
 4. Christ will one day come a - gain; in glo - ry He will then de -

heav'n. He came to earth, sal - va - tion bring - ing; now our
 men. To all who will in Him be - lieve, His
 giv'n. In life through Him we all have peace; from
 scend. His love will fill each ach - ing heart; then

voice we raise in grate - ful sing - ing— Christ - mas comes a -
 righ - teous of - fer - ing re - ceive— Christ - mas comes a -
 death He of - fers sweet re - lease— Christ - mas comes a -
 fear and pain will all de - part— Christ will come a -

gain, Christ - mas comes a - gain.
 gain, Christ - mas comes a - gain.
 gain, Christ - mas comes a - gain.
 gain, Christ will come a - gain.

NEmore
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PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT REIER



THE CHRISTMAS GIFT

I DIDN'T WANT

By Chad Morris

I didn't want this gift, but over time it became priceless.

Every Christmas I learned to expect two kinds of gifts—those I wanted and those my parents wanted me to have.

I remember one Christmas in particular. I was an ordinary 15- or 16-year-old boy. I tried to act casual about my gifts, but inside I was crazy with anticipation. I was hoping for some new music, sports equipment, or maybe a movie. I pulled a small rectangular package from under the tree with my name on it. The size surprised me. I couldn't think of anything I wanted that was that shape.

Of course that didn't stop me from happily ripping off the paper. Inside was a white box. The label glued to the top indicated a new set of scriptures. I didn't think much of it. My parents often reused old boxes.

As I lifted the lid, I thought of the possibility that the label might be accurate. I hoped it wasn't. I hoped against hope.

I didn't want new scriptures. I didn't need them. I already had the set I received when I was baptized. Sure, they were getting old and the binding was falling apart, but for how much I used them, they worked just fine.

My heart sank. Inside the box was a beautiful compact set of maroon scriptures with my name embossed on the cover. I remember looking up to see my mom watching me. I'm sure she was nervous about my reaction. She said something like, "I know you didn't ask for them and it isn't the most exciting gift, but we thought you could use them." I gave a polite smile, which I'm sure was completely transparent. I looked at the scriptures for a few minutes, trying to show appreciation, but eventually put them back in their box and gave my attention to my other gifts.

I tried not to think about all the things that I wanted more than new scriptures. I tried not to feel disappointed.

I tried not to hypothesize about a way I could take them back without my parents knowing, but I didn't try very hard.

I would love to report that later that Christmas day I opened those new scriptures and felt the great Spirit that comes through reading them. But I didn't. In fact, I don't believe I did anything with them other than put them in a corner of my room. I'd love to report that over the following weeks I gained a greater appreciation for my gift. I didn't. About the only attention I gave them was during sacrament meeting, mindlessly separating the pages that were stuck together.

In all honesty, I don't think I appreciated that gift for a long time. However, eventually I began to study them. I took them to church and to seminary. I began to read them on my own. They proved crucial to my decisions. At a time when

I wondered if it wouldn't be better to live what I thought was a more exciting lifestyle, like that of some of my school friends, I read Mosiah 2:41. I'm so grateful for that verse. I began to realize that only those who keep the commandments of God are truly happy.

Months later, my youth leaders challenged me to read the entire Book of Mormon before attending a summer camp. I agreed but procrastinated, and I soon fell behind. In a rush to catch up, I began to read for longer periods of time. I can still recall sitting on my porch reading for the better part of an hour. Before this, I was lucky to read for 10 minutes at a time. For the first time in my life, I lost myself in the scriptures. I realized that Alma the Younger was a real person. He wasn't just a story my leaders taught me. He actually rebelled against his prophet father, and, through faith and the Atonement, was still able to change.

The majority of my Christmas presents I received growing up were eventually packed in boxes, broken and discarded, or given to secondhand stores. But I still have those maroon scriptures with my name embossed on the cover.

I wondered what happened next. I had pieces of the story in my mind, but it hadn't come together into a whole. I kept reading, watching him grow. For the first time I actually enjoyed what I read.

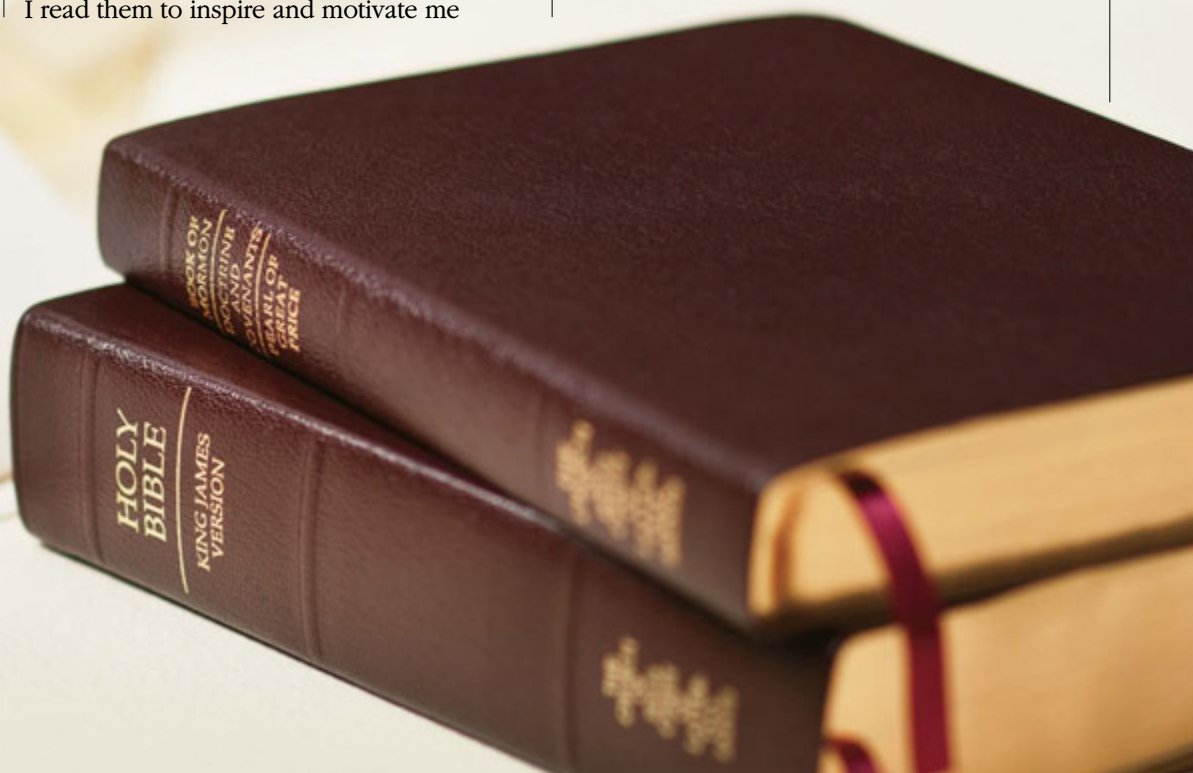
These experiences and many others began to build my small testimony. Yet, I still questioned. I questioned a lot. I decided to read the Book of Mormon daily and ask for confirmation that it was true. After many nights of reading and many prayers, I felt I received an answer from heaven. It was something I couldn't create. There was no one else around to lead me to the feeling. I felt a warmth—almost like a light—in me. It somehow seemed to calm and excite me simultaneously. I felt that my Heavenly Father had heard my prayer. He sent a message through my thoughts that the Book of Mormon is true and the Church is His kingdom on earth. I also felt He wanted me to know that He had been answering my prayers continually throughout my life. I just hadn't realized it. Where would my testimony be without the scriptures?

Later I read the same scriptures to calm my nerves on a plane to the mission field. I read them to inspire and motivate me

through my college years. I read them to confirm if I should ask my wife to marry me. I read them for guidance in my career. I read them to find out how to be a better father. Every day I felt I learned and grew more. My testimony became stronger. I found the strength to trust in the Lord more and more.

The majority of my Christmas presents I received growing up were eventually packed in boxes, broken and discarded, or given to secondhand stores. But I still have those maroon scriptures with my name embossed on the cover. They are faded and worn. Some pages are torn, and the margins are filled with notes and quotes.

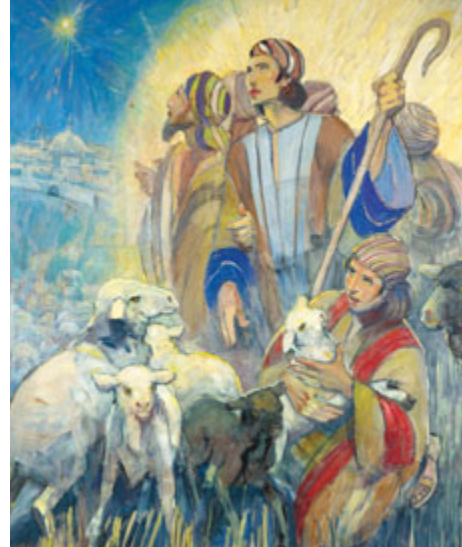
I cannot think of another Christmas gift that I have used more or one that has affected me more than what was in that little white box. Over time, it changed my life. It helped me come to my Savior Jesus Christ and learn to follow Him. It helped me gain a testimony of His gospel and motivated me to do my part in it. It has helped me become more like Him. What could be a more fitting Christmas gift? I thank my Heavenly Father that my parents gave me a gift I didn't want. **NE**



PHOTOGRAPH BY CODY BELL

Luke 2:8–14

Learn how the shepherds heard of Christ's birth.



SHEPHERDS SEEING THE STAR, BY MINERVA TEICHERT

Shepherds

These were more than just simple shepherds; according to the prophet Alma, they were “just and holy men” (Alma 13:26).

Glory of the Lord

This phrase appears frequently in the scriptures and often refers to an “outward and visible manifestation of the Divine presence” (Bible Dictionary, “Glory of the Lord”).

Good tidings

The Greek root for this phrase is the same as the one for *gospel*, which means “good news,” specifically the news that Christ has come to earth as the Savior of the world.

born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the ^binn.

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

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

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you ^agood tidings of great ^bjoy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is ^aborn this day in the city of David a ^bSaviour, which is Christ the ^cLord.

12 And this shall be a ^asign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 ^aGlory to God in the highest, and on earth ^bpeace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, to see this thing which

Swaddling clothes

Narrow strips of cloth wrapped around a baby to restrict movement.

Manger

An open box in which feed is placed for cattle to eat.

Glory to God

At the birth of Jesus Christ, a multitude of angels praised God for the gift of His Son. How can you show thanks to Heavenly Father for the Savior? Here are just a few ideas:

- Thank Heavenly Father in your prayers, both in public and in private.
- Bear testimony of Christ in your home, in testimony meetings, and at other times when prompted by the Spirit.
- Follow Christ's example by serving others.
- Record your spiritual experiences and write about your feelings regarding Christ in your journal.
- Share Christ's gospel with others.
- Sing or play the hymns about Christ and try to feel and express their true meaning.

Christ the Lord

“Jesus is the Living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the light, the life, and the hope of the world. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.”

“The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 3.

Editors' note: This page is not meant to be a comprehensive explanation of the selected scripture verse, only a starting point for your own study.

“I have a hard time motivating myself to read the scriptures.”

How can I find the motivation?”

Studying the scriptures can be hard at first. There are so many concepts to learn, and the people and places seem so foreign. But scripture study will become a rewarding experience if you stick with it.

Try the experiment the prophet Alma described (see Alma 32:27–34). He taught that if you “give place” in your life for the word of God, it will enlarge your soul and enlighten your understanding. It will also motivate you to continue reading the scriptures because, as Alma promised, the word of God will begin to be delicious to you (see Alma 32:28).

Another way to find motivation is to seek out the many blessings that come from studying the scriptures:

- Regular and sincere scripture study will invite the Spirit into your life, answer your questions, help you have clean thoughts, motivate you to serve others, help you pray more effectively, and build your testimony of Jesus Christ and the Restoration.
- The scriptures will teach you how to have faith, how to recognize the Holy Ghost, and how to repent. They will teach you why we need a Savior, why opposition is necessary, why this earth was created, and much more. As you experience these blessings, you won’t need to force yourself to read—you will look forward to it. **NE**

Scriptures Contain Answers



By reading 2 Nephi 32:3, you can immediately understand why we need to read and study the scriptures. I know that the scriptures contain all the answers to our questions! We should understand that the scriptures are given to help us progress towards perfection, which is such a necessary part of this life. Each day we all have a few minutes to set aside for reading the scriptures.

Sergij C., 21, Novosibirsk, Russia

A Stronger Testimony



I hadn’t been reading the scriptures until my Young Women president suggested that I work on Personal Progress. It asked me to read the scriptures every day for some weeks.

After doing this, I never stopped reading them. My best advice is that you ought to work on your Personal Progress or Duty to God. Challenge yourself to read the scriptures more and more, and you will see a change within yourself. I tell you this without a doubt—you will see that you have a stronger testimony.

Paola S., 16, Cortés, Honduras

Pray for Understanding



Even when I have many projects and assignments for school, I set aside those things and start reading the scriptures first. I start with a prayer to invite the Holy Ghost in understanding the word of God. And through the help of seminary manuals, my motivation to read the scriptures has developed and continues to grow.

Elieser N., 16, Ilocos Norte, Philippines

Armor of God



The key to developing any habit is desire. Make it your desire to read every day. Keep a log of how much you read, and try to read at the same time every day. This helps you to

develop consistency. Reading the scriptures is like putting on the armor of God. You would not go into battle without your armor. Don't go into a world of sin without the armor of God. Protect yourself—read the scriptures.

Andrew G., 18, Maine, USA

Something for Everyone



It helps me to think about what's in the scriptures.

Not only do they contain the gospel, Christ's teachings, and the commandments, but they—especially the Book of Mormon—are a big adventure book, full of wars, heroes, good guys, and bad guys. The scriptures have something for everyone.

Eve W., 15, Nevada, USA

Not Just a Book

Don't think of the scriptures as just a book you have to read for seminary or because you're supposed to. You get to read the word of God. It has adventures, afflictions, wars. The scriptures are a testament of Jesus Christ—that He is our Savior, that He bled and died for us. The prophets prophesied of His divinity. Many died because they would not deny what they knew was true. Their faith was unshakable. We should all strive to become as faithful as they were.

Kaleb L., 14, Utah, USA

He Wants to Talk to You

Our Heavenly Father has the answer to each question you ask Him; the only thing you have to do is read the scriptures and apply them to your life. Knowing that Heavenly Father wants to speak to you and answer your prayers will help you

seek Him daily in the scriptures. As you obey His word, your life will improve, and you will find refuge and tranquility. You will be happy as you hear His voice.

Elberth R., 18, Ixtapaluca, Mexico

Form a Reading Habit



Forming a habit can help tremendously. Start off slowly; read maybe a chapter or two each day.

Soon you should have a habit of reading the scriptures. I usually read a couple chapters each evening and sing a hymn. This routine uplifts me and keeps me optimistic for what the next day will bring. And I have a better understanding of the lessons in seminary. The scriptures are a blessing. Take advantage of them.

Taylor C., 15, Washington, USA

Counsel for Your Life

The scriptures relate the experiences of people who go through difficulties similar to ours. When beginning your reading of the scriptures, offer a prayer and have faith that you will find counsel for your life. The scriptures are one of the means

by which Heavenly Father communicates with His children. In the scriptures we find the strength to meet all kinds of trials, and I bear my testimony that when we are well instructed, we will succeed in discerning good from evil and will avoid the snares of Satan.

Anderson F., 19, São Paulo, Brazil

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

MORE ENJOYABLE



"I am grateful for emphasis on reading the scriptures. I hope that for you this will become something far more enjoyable than a duty; that, rather, it will become a love affair with the word of God. I promise you that as you read, your minds will be enlightened and your spirits will be lifted. At first it may seem tedious, but that will change into a wondrous experience with thoughts and words of things divine."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "The Light within You," *Ensign*, May 1995, 99.

NEXT QUESTION

"In these troubling times, how can I keep a positive attitude about the future?"

Send your answer and photo by January 15, 2011.

Go to newera.lds.org, click Submit Your Material, and then select Questions and Answers.

You can also write to us at newera@ldschurch.org

or to:

New Era, Q&A, positive attitude
50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-0024, USA

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.

*South African teens
use music to honor
Christ at Christmas—
and all year long.*

SING PRAISE TO HIM

By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines



Zintle Vuyiswa Njoli, 16, remembers when she was 12 years old and drifting away from the Church. “I was a recent convert, brand new in



Young Women. I felt uncomfortable and a bit kept out,” she recalls. “I started back-sliding. I was discouraged and I didn’t want to come anymore.” Then music came to her rescue.

“A Relief Society sister came to my house. She knew I loved music, and she gave my mother a stack of CDs with Church music for me to listen to. I couldn’t resist. When I came to a hymn called ‘Be Still, My Soul’ [*Hymns*, no. 124], I cried and cried. The words said exactly what I needed to hear. After that, anytime I felt upset or disheartened, I would sing those words to remind me to be patient and trust in the Lord. That song brought me back and kept me in the Church.”

Today Zintle is an active, happy member of the Kagiso Ward, Soweto South Africa Stake, joining other youth singing sacred Christmas hymns during seminary. She says music should play an important role in the life of all teenage Latter-day Saints, not only at Christmas but always.

“We read in the scriptures that the Lord is there for us, that when we do what is right, He’ll always be on our side,” she says. “The Christmas hymns reassure us of the same things, and so do the other hymns we sing throughout the year.”

And Zintle isn’t singing a solo when it comes to praising the Lord through music.

With Heart and Voice

Her friend and fellow ward member, Smangele May Dimakatso Merafe, 16, says hymns remind us to be grateful, to live a righteous life, and



to share the gospel with others. “There are hymns about every part of the gospel that I love,” she says. “There are hymns about the Book of Mormon, about Joseph Smith, and about prayer. There are hymns about Heavenly Father, about feeling the Spirit, and about the Savior. One of the great joys of Christmas is singing about the Savior.”



(Above) Zintle Vuyiswa and Smangele Merafe say music adds meaning to their worship. (Far left) Vuyo Dasha, Parker McOmer, Haley Westover, Katie Rae McOmer, Travis Alexander, and Kjirsten McOmer sing hymns in Pretoria. Nativities are by Stephen Kyalo, a Latter-day Saint from Kenya.

FILLING OUR SOULS

“Hymns can lift our spirits, give us courage, and move us to righteous action. They can fill our souls with heavenly thoughts and bring us a spirit of peace.”

First Presidency Preface, *Hymns*, x.



A GIFT OF MUSIC

Teens aren't the only Church members in the Pretoria South Africa Stake celebrating the holidays with music. Twenty-year-old Michael McLeod wrote an entire cantata (a presentation of words and music) about the life of the Savior, answering the question, “If we had been there, would we have known He was the Christ?” The presentation has been so popular that it's been performed in a variety of locations. Michael considers it his gift to the Church and the community.



She says there are many hymns we traditionally consider Christmas hymns, but that there are many others that could also be sung in celebration. One of those is “Praise the Lord in Heart and Voice” (*Hymns*, no. 73). “Tell of him in loud acclaim,” it says. “Sing the wonders of his name.” Smangele says that's a great message for the holidays.

Marching in Pretoria

In another city to the northeast, teens in the Pretoria Ward are also remembering the birth of the Savior with music. Amy Vermeulen, 16; Vuyo Dasha, 18; and Travis Alexander, 17, each play the piano and sing. They look forward to Christmas as a time when music is especially meaningful.

“Worthy music invites the Spirit whenever you listen to it,” Travis says, “It's one of my favorite parts of Christmas, to worship the Lord through song.”

Amy agrees. “Worthy music is the kind of music that will help us feel closer to the

NEmore

For a video about music in South Africa, including parts of the cantata, go to newera.lds.org or ensign.lds.org.

Savior," she says. "When I play the piano, I'm very picky about the music I play. It has to mean something to me, it has to uplift me, and I like to feel confident that it will uplift others as well. I love to play the Church hymns. They uplift me and bring a spirit into my home that I couldn't bring in any other way, and my family appreciates it."

"I've seen the influences of both good and bad music," Vuyo says. "With bad music, you might not think you're listening to the words, but they are being registered in your brain, and they can play back at times when you're feeling alone or discouraged and you might think that Heavenly Father doesn't care. But uplifting music encourages the feeling that Heavenly Father loves us and that He and His Son are always there for us. Whenever you're in doubt or alone, maybe when you're in temptation, you will know that Heavenly Father is there and you can hum your favorite hymn to uplift your spirit."



(Far left) Michael McLeod wrote a cantata about Christ that was presented throughout the community, while (below) Rugo Nortje and others decided a great way to celebrate was by counting their blessings.

A GRATEFUL CHRISTMAS

In addition to music, youth in South Africa are grateful for many things at Christmas. And they offer this suggestion: Rather than worrying about what you're going to receive this year, remember how much you've already been given. Here are some of the blessings for which they express thanks.

"I'm thankful that the Prophet Joseph Smith restored the gospel," says 12-year-old Rugo Francois Nortje of the Pretoria Ward. "And I'm grateful for the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. I'm thankful to know that President Thomas S. Monson is our living prophet today."

"I'm grateful for my testimony that the Savior lives and that He loves us," says Amy Vermeulen, 16. "I know that as we strive to be obedient, He will help us.

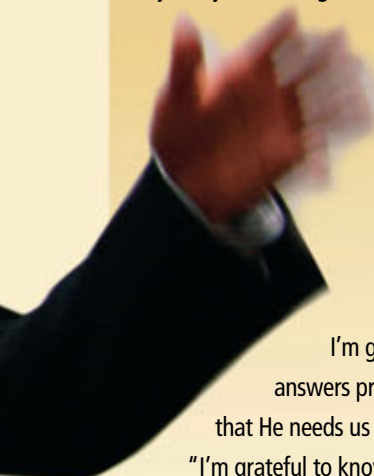
I'm grateful to know that Heavenly Father answers prayers and that He will show us the things that He needs us to do."

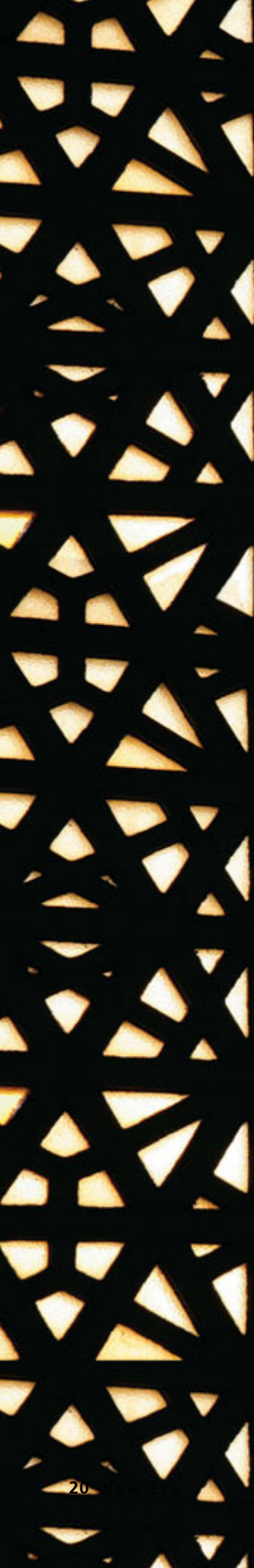
"I'm grateful to know the Church is true, and I am grateful for the guidance that it gives me every day," says Travis Alexander, 17.

"I'm grateful for programs like seminary. Every morning I have the opportunity to go and study the scriptures, and this helps me to make good choices in my life. I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet who restored this gospel to us in the latter days, and I'm so grateful for it. Each and every day I thank Heavenly Father for the works that Joseph did. I'm also grateful for my family and how they guide me and bless me and for their continuous love. I'm grateful for a brother who is serving a mission and is a good example for me."

Vuyo Dasha, 18, says, "I'm thankful to know that Heavenly Father lives. I know He loves us so much that He sent His son to die for us. And I am grateful beyond measure that Jesus Christ sacrificed His life so that through repentance and through His Atonement we may be able to live with our Heavenly Father again."

Why not make a list of your own blessings? You can keep it in your journal, or start a new Christmas tradition by sharing a list with others and encouraging them to make lists of their own.





Amy recalls, “There was one song that I started to listen to. It was like I couldn’t stop listening, I loved the melody so much. But I found out there was a hidden meaning to it and that the song was degrading me. I didn’t feel like a daughter of God. So I stopped listening to that song, and I was able to feel the Spirit again and follow its promptings. I contrast that with a song like a Christmas hymn. I always feel uplifted after I’ve listened to a spiritual song, something that is virtuous, lovely, and praiseworthy.”

Travis makes a promise. “I know that if you listen to good music, you will be blessed. You will feel guidance in your life. You will feel the Spirit. And isn’t that what we’re truly here for, to feel the Spirit and be closer to our Heavenly Father?” That’s the kind of attitude we ought to have at Christmas. It’s the kind of attitude we should have all year long.

A Promise Worth Pursuing

Yes, music helps all Latter-day Saints to worship our Heavenly Father, celebrate the Savior’s life, and feel the Holy Spirit. Back

in Soweto, it is Zintle who perhaps sums it up best. In her seminary class she is asked if there is a hymn that would describe the future of the Church in South Africa. She thinks for just a moment, then quickly responds, “Hymn number 3, ‘Now Let Us Rejoice.’ It tells us that the Lord is aware of us, that our struggles will be worth it, and that if we remain faithful we will be crowned with the angels of heaven.” That’s a promise worth pursuing at Christmas or at any other season of the year. **NE**

Seminary in Soweto (above) gives Latter-day Saint students another reason to rejoice, and Amy Vermeulen (inset) says hymns embody that which is virtuous, lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy.



HYMNS TO REMEMBER

Of course, any hymn that praises the Lord is appropriate to sing all through the year. Here are verses that are not normally associated with Christmas but that praise the Lord just the same. See if you can name which hymn they are from. There's a key at the bottom to help you.

1. Join in the theme and sing
With harmony unceasing
The praises of our King.
 2. Let us raise a joyful strain
To our Lord who soon will reign.
 3. In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born
across the sea . . .
As he died to make men holy, let us live
to make men free.
 4. All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing.
 5. Great King of heav'n, our hearts we raise
To thee in prayer, to thee in praise . . .
And with one voice in one glad chord,
With myriad echoes, praise the Lord.
 6. Alleluia, Alleluia,
Bright and clear our voices ring,
Singing songs of exultation
7. Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and Blessed One.
 8. Be joyful in the Lord, my heart! . . .
To Him all praise and glory!
 9. Then come before God's presence!
With singing worship him!
Express the heart too full to speak
In one exultant hymn.
 10. Exalt his name in loud acclaim;
His mighty pow'r adore!
And humbly bow before him now,
Our King forevermore.
 11. To praise him let us all engage,
For unto us is giv'n
To live in this momentous age
And share the light of heav'n.
 12. Let the Redeemer's name be sung
Through ev'ry land, by ev'ry tongue . . .
The great salvation loud proclaim,
And shout for joy the Savior's name.



13. Praise him for his mercy;
Praise him for his love.
For unnumbered blessings
Praise the Lord above.
14. And each one try, with single eye,
To praise the Savior best.
15. 'Tis sweet to sing the matchless love
Of Him who left his home above
And came to earth—oh, wondrous plan—
To suffer, bleed, and die for man!
16. Come, O thou King of Kings!
We've waited long for thee,
With healing in thy wings
To set thy people free.

KEY

1. "Come, All Ye Saints of Zion," no. 38
2. "Come, Ye Children of the Lord," no. 58
3. "Battle Hymn of the Republic," no. 60
4. "All Creatures of Our God and King," no. 62
5. "Great King of Heaven," no. 63
6. "On This Day of Joy and Gladness," no. 64
7. "All Glory, Laud, and Honor," no. 69
8. "Sing Praise to Him," no. 70
9. "With Songs of Praise," no. 71
10. "In Hymns of Praise," no. 75
11. "Great is the Lord," no. 77
12. "From All That Dwell below the Skies," no. 90
13. "Sing We Now at Parting," no. 156
14. "Come, Let Us Sing an Evening Hymn," no. 167
15. "'Tis Sweet to Sing the Matchless Love," nos. 176 and 177
16. "Come, O Thou King of Kings," no. 59





On Christmas day, just before lunch there was a knock on the door. There stood one of our neighbors, holding an enormous bowl covered with a towel.

An illustration on the left side of the page shows a pair of hands, one holding a small gift wrapped in orange paper. The background is a soft, light blue and white gradient.

THE BEST PRESENT

*We had no food that Christmas.
We could only hope for a miracle.*

By Ailson Sales

When I was 12 years old, my family lived on a farm in Brazil, far from the city. That December my brother and

I were harvesting nuts for another farm owner when it suddenly began to rain. For days the rain continued so heavily that we couldn't work.

It was almost Christmas, and our family was running out of food. My mother was worried we wouldn't have a Christmas dinner, so she asked my older brother and me to ask the farm owner for the money we had earned. It wouldn't be much, but it would buy a little food for our family at a time when others were preparing their holiday feasts.

My brother and I walked several miles on a muddy road to get to the farm owner's house. When we arrived, the owner was surprised. "What brings you here on such a rainy day?" he asked. We explained our situation, and he said, "I don't have any cash to pay you with, but I can pay you with a check." We accepted and left quickly so we could make it into town to cash the check and buy the groceries we needed.

By the time we got to town, almost every business had closed for the Christmas holiday. We were exhausted, and our efforts to cash the check were in vain.

When we arrived home without the groceries, my

mother and eight brothers and sisters were very disappointed. All we had was the check, which at the moment was worthless to us. Christmas Eve came without any presents and with little food. We ate a dinner of rice and went to bed.

We arose on Christmas morning to the sound of our neighbors celebrating outside, but we remained inside, hoping for a miracle that would put food on our table. To our surprise, just before lunch there was a knock on the door. There stood one of our neighbors, holding an enormous bowl covered with a towel.

"I came to bring this to you," she said. My mother gratefully accepted the bowl, and when we looked inside, we found it was full of Christmas foods. To us it was a banquet, a true miracle!

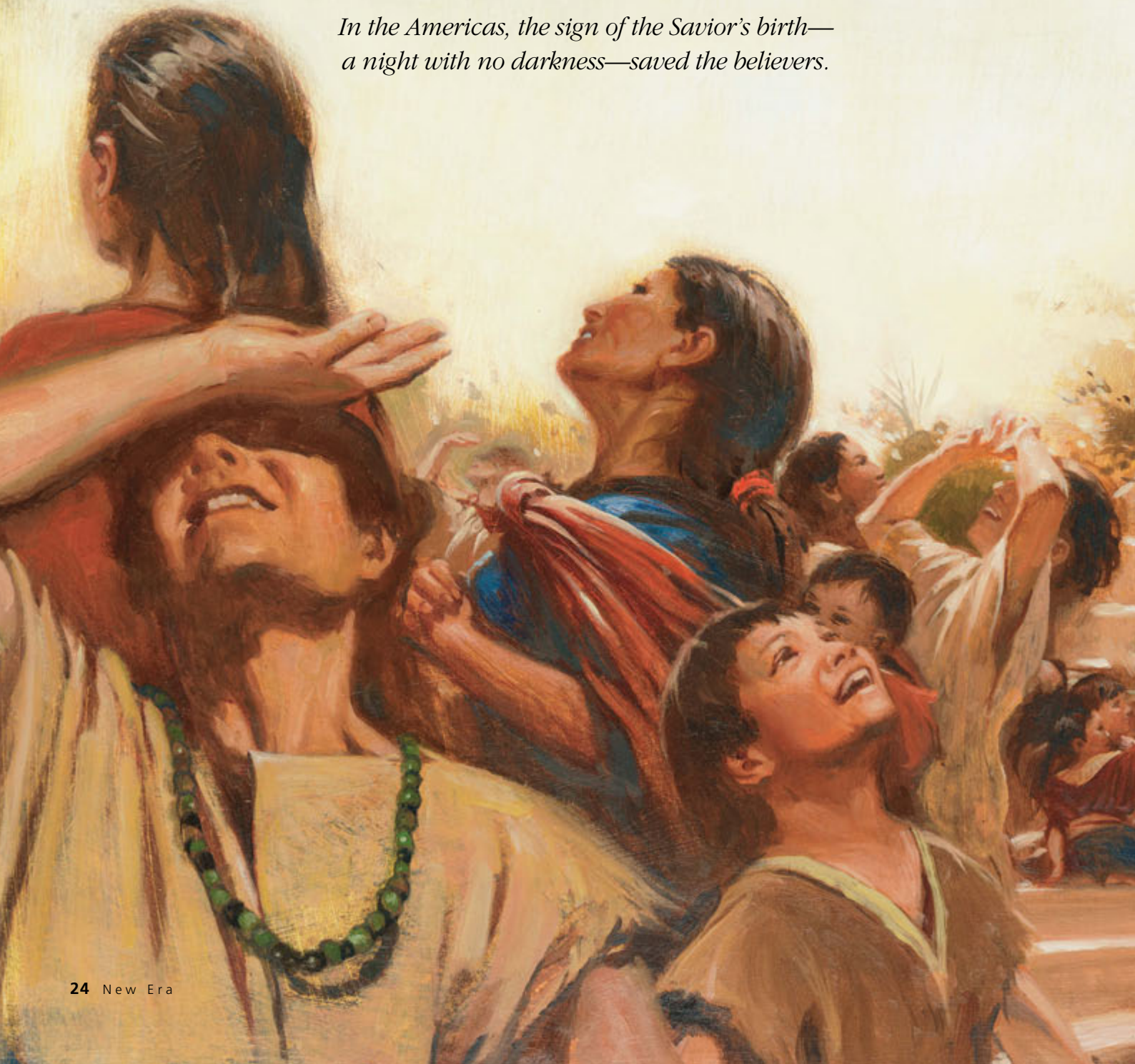
That Christmas meal was the best present I ever received because it fed us on such a special day. Although our neighbor was not aware of our circumstances, I know that our Heavenly Father was, and He worked through her to feed us that Christmas. I know that when we have no other way out, the Lord in His infinite mercy and goodness sends great miracles into our lives. And as our family learned that Christmas, we can serve the Lord—as our neighbor did—by bringing miracles into the lives of others. **NE**

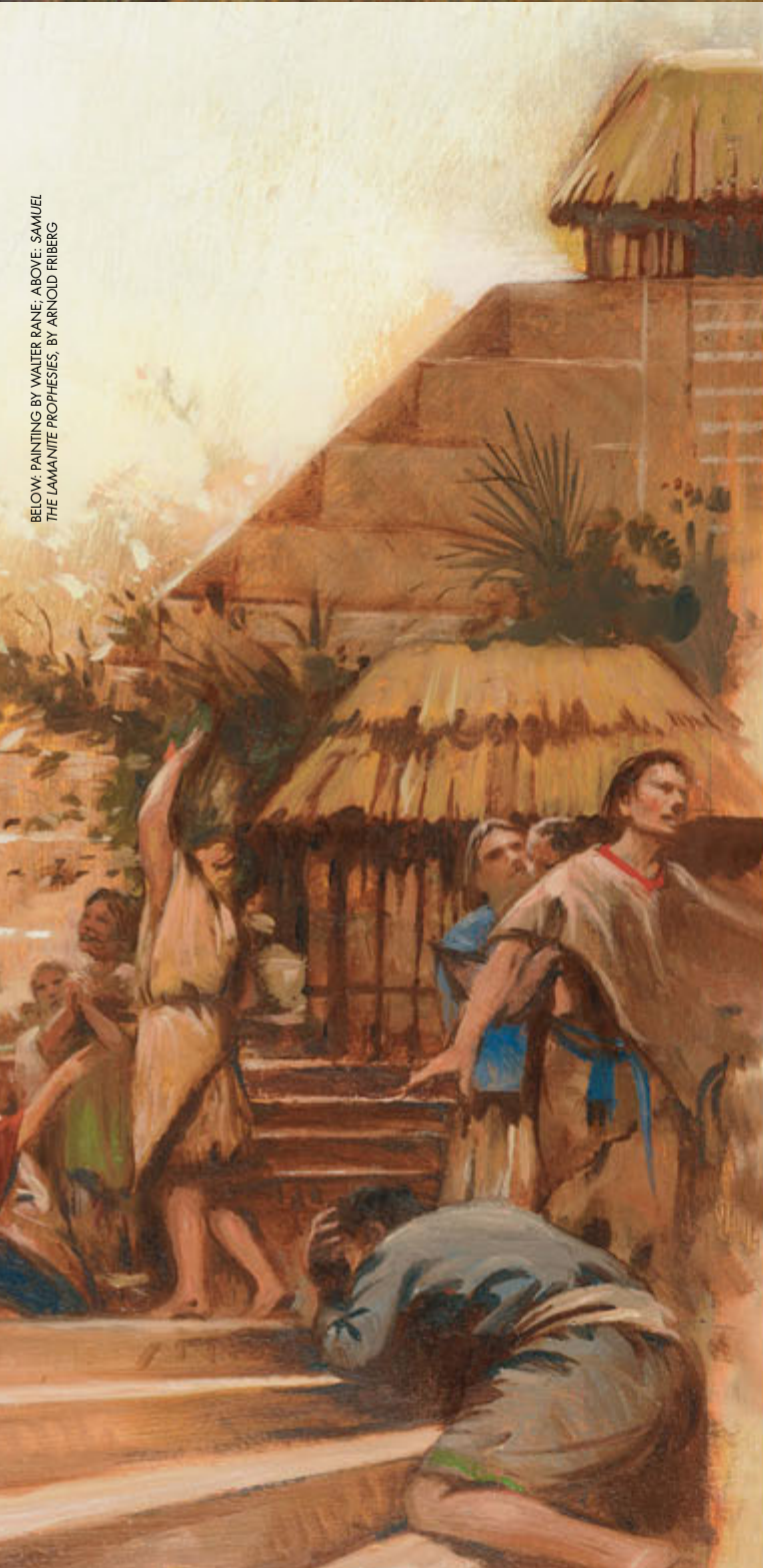
CHRISTMAS

IN THE NEW WORLD

By Wendy Kenney

*In the Americas, the sign of the Savior's birth—
a night with no darkness—saved the believers.*





BELOW: PAINTING BY WALTER RAINE; ABOVE: SAMUEL THE LAMANITE PROPHECIES, BY ARNOLD FRIBERG

Would you notice if a new star suddenly appeared in the sky one night? Maybe not. But you would certainly notice a night that never got dark—a night that remained as bright as midday even after the sun had set. Now that would be hard to miss, especially if you had been in the crowd when Samuel the Lamanite stood upon a city wall and told of the great signs and wonders that would mark the birth of the Son of God. If you had heard Samuel speak, you surely would have been watching for the signs.

Samuel's Mission to Zarahemla

Samuel was a Lamanite who was commanded by an angel to go to the land of Zarahemla to call the Nephites to repentance. By this time in the history of the New World as recorded in the Book of Mormon, the Lamanites were actually the more righteous people—hence the need for a Lamanite prophet. No doubt the Lord knew it would take some time for the Nephites to turn from their evil ways and accept Him as the Redeemer of the world, so He sent Samuel five years in advance to prepare the people for His coming.

Besides preaching repentance, Samuel was directed by an angel to teach the people of Zarahemla about the signs of the birth of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, Samuel proclaimed that in five years there would be “a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day” (Helaman 14:3). He said this sign would occur “the night before [the Lord] is born” (Helaman 14:4). In addition to prophesying of a night without darkness, Samuel told them to watch for “a new star . . . , such an one as ye never have beheld” (Helaman 14:5).

Believers Ridiculed

About five years after Samuel's prophecies, the faithful were mocked by their enemies, who said, "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). The unbelievers even conspired to murder the believers if the signs did not appear by a certain date (see 3 Nephi 1:9).

As the five-year mark neared, the faithful began "to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass" (3 Nephi 1:7). But they continued to "watch steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain" (3 Nephi 1:8).

Prophecy Fulfilled

The day that had been set aside to put the believers to death grew near. The worries of his people so grieved the prophet Nephi that

he petitioned Heavenly Father "in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith. [And] he cried mightily unto the Lord all that day" (3 Nephi 1:11–12). His pleas were heard, and the Lord spoke to him, "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" (3 Nephi 1:13). That night, "at the going down of the sun there was no darkness" (3 Nephi 1:15), just as Samuel had foretold. Everything Samuel had prophesied came to pass, even the appearance of a new star.

No Cause for Unbelief

In the Bible there is no record of a night without darkness at the time of Christ's birth and only a brief mention of the new star, seen by the Wise Men who followed it to the Christ



THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

At the birth of Him who once identified Himself as the "bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16), a new star appeared in the heavens. (See Matt. 2:2; 3 Ne. 1:21.) Shining brightly over Bethlehem, that star had been placed in orbit far in advance of the foretold event in order that its light could coincide in time and place with His blessed birth.

"At the arrival of Him who is called 'the light of the world' (John 8:12), darkness was banished as a sign of His holy birth. (See 3 Ne. 1:15, 19.)"

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Why This Holy Land?" *Ensign*, Dec. 1989, 13.



child (see Matthew 2:2, 9–10). In the region of Judea, only a few people witnessed the signs of Christ’s birth, such as the shepherds (see Luke 2:8–18). But in the Americas, “all the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south” saw the signs and knew that “the Son of God must shortly appear” (3 Nephi 1:17).

Why did so many more people witness the signs of the Savior’s birth in the New World? Samuel’s words provide some explanation: “The angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might believe that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, *to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men*” (Helaman 14:28; emphasis added).

Deliverance at Last

When the sun again rose in the sky after the night without darkness, the people “knew that it was the day that the Lord

should be born, because of the sign which had been given” (3 Nephi 1:19). Imagine the rejoicing! The believers were safe. Their lives had been spared from death at the hands of their unbelieving enemies. Spiritually, they had been spared too, for the Son of God had come into the world to save mankind from their sins through His Atonement.

We don’t typically think of Christmas as a celebration of deliverance, as Passover is to the Jews, who celebrate the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. But the day the Savior was born was indeed a day of deliverance for the believers in the New World.

As you celebrate Christmas this year, remember the events that occurred in the Americas as well as those that took place on the other side of the globe in the Savior’s birthplace. Though His birth brought spiritual deliverance for all mankind, it quite literally brought deliverance from death for a group of stalwart believers in the New World. And His birth continues to offer deliverance to all who accept Him as their Lord and Savior. **NE**



To Samoa

By Nathan Covarrubias

I was discussing options for my Eagle project when I heard about the tsunami that had caused widespread devastation on the island of Samoa. I also learned that a sister in our ward, Savili Martin, would be traveling to Samoa with her family to visit relatives during the Christmas holidays. While

I realized that the main concern of the people of Samoa was to rebuild and make the best of what they had, I also knew that all children love to receive gifts, and I felt inspired to organize a service project to provide Christmas presents to the children whose lives had been affected by the disaster. Although the gifts wouldn't be extravagant, I felt that this project would be a

with Love

blessing to the children and would help ease the burdens of their parents.

I worked with the Scouts in my ward to start a Christmas stocking gift drive. So many people were eager to help with this project. The Scouts and Young Women in my ward helped pass out flyers and collect donated gifts. We received donated material to make the stockings. My family and another family in the ward made the stockings, and the girls at the Primary activity days in our ward stuffed them. We gave all the gifts too big to put into stockings to the school district's Project Help for Christmas.

We completed the project in time for the James and Savili Martin family to take the boxes of stockings with them to Samoa, where they gave the stockings to the Primary children.

When Sister Martin and her family returned to Arizona, she brought back a video of the children receiving their Christmas presents. I felt so warm inside when I saw how grateful every child was for his or her gift. One young boy in particular

Half a world away, one Scout was preparing to send Christmas gifts to the ravaged island.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF JAMES AND SAVILI MARTIN, © GETTY IMAGES, © ISTOCK

was wrapping his little arms around his Christmas stocking, making sure everybody knew it was his. Their appreciation and excitement more than compensated for all the hard work put into this project. The Spirit was strong after we watched the video, and I felt that the Lord blessed us in our efforts to help and serve His children. **NE**

FLOWERS FOR SAMOA

In conjunction with Nathan's Eagle project,

the young women of the Apache Junction Arizona Stake made silk flower hairpins to give to young women in Samoa.

The young women in Arizona who helped to make the hairpins learned about the joy of service. "It's really touching that something so small can mean so much," says Emalee Gillespie. Briana Lara adds, "It's neat to know that there is a Young Women class halfway around the world just like mine. It makes me happy that we can serve them."

The young women in Samoa who received the hairpins were touched by the thoughtfulness of those Arizona young women. They made a point of wearing the pins to church the Sunday after they received them.

Bella Tuivaiti says, "The flowers that were given to the Lotopa Ward Young Women were awesome. I was so surprised to see the beautiful and creative flowers that the Arizona young women made for us."

Mili Lafaele adds, "I was at first surprised and then in awe of the flowers—awe because of the delicate manner in which these flowers were made and surprised that they chose us to wear them. I am thankful to know that there are thoughtful sisters out there like the young women in Arizona."





RYAN STOKER



KEVIN BECKSTROM



RICK + RYAN GOLDSBERRY

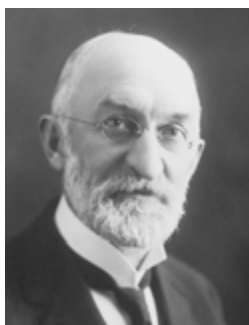


VAL CHADWICK BAGLEY

NEmore
See a different
Extra Smile
online every
week at
newera.lds.org.

THE STORY THAT IS EVER NEW

No one ever lived upon the earth who exerted the same influence upon the destinies of the world as did our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



Heber J. Grant, seventh President of the Church, was born on November 22, 1856. He was ordained an Apostle on October 16, 1882, at age 25, and on November 23, 1918, he was sustained as President of the Church. The following article is an excerpt from "Story of Old," Improvement Era, Dec. 1940, 713, 765.

By President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945)

The story of Jesus the Christ is a story of old that ever remains new. The oftener I read of His life and labors the greater is the joy, the peace, the happiness, the satisfaction that fills my soul. There is ever a new charm comes to me in contemplating His words and the plan of life and salvation which He taught to men during His life upon the earth.

We all know that no one ever lived upon the earth who exerted the same influence upon the destinies of the world as did our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and yet He was born in obscurity, cradled in a manger. He chose for His Apostles poor, unlettered fishermen. [More than] 1,900 years have passed and gone since His Crucifixion, and yet all over the

world, in spite of all strife and chaos, there is still burning in the hearts of millions of people a testimony of the divinity of the work that He accomplished. . . .

It is a source of unbounded joy to me and fills my heart beyond my power of expression to contemplate the fact that God our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ have visited the earth and again revealed the gospel to man; and it fills me with thanksgiving and gratitude, far beyond my power to tell, that He has blessed me with a knowledge of the divinity of the work in which we are engaged. My constant and earnest prayer to Him has always been that my mind should never become darkened, that I should never depart from the path of rectitude, but that as I grew in years I would increase in understanding, that the light and inspiration of the Spirit of God might burn in my heart and enlighten my understanding and keep me firm and faithful in serving my Heavenly Father.

And I want to say to the Latter-day Saints that it behooves us, having received a testimony of the divinity of the work in which we are engaged, so to order our lives from day to day that glory shall be brought to the work of



Glory shall be brought to the work of God by the good deeds that we perform.

God by the good deeds that we perform, so letting our light shine that men, seeing our good deeds, shall glorify God. No people upon the face of the earth have ever been blessed as have been the Latter-day Saints; no people have ever had the manifestations of the kindness and mercy and long-suffering of God that have been bestowed upon us, and I say we, above all men and women upon the earth, should live godlike and upright lives. **NE** *Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization standardized.*

ENOUGH STUFF

Find out how to ensure that your life is not defined by your stuff.

We all need stuff—stuff to wear, stuff to eat, stuff for home, stuff for school. And, of course, beyond the necessities there's also the stuff we want but don't really need, as well as the stuff we dream about but could never afford. There's big stuff and little stuff, girl stuff and guy stuff, stuff for work and stuff for play, stuff for now and stuff for later. It seems the world is filled with stuff.

If we're not careful, we can have a hard time seeing past all that stuff. Material possessions (both those we have and those we want) can obstruct our view of who we really are and what life is really about.

Add to this stuff the persistent prattle of marketing and advertising, and you're in a tough spot as a teenager today. So how do you call a halt to the onward march of materialism in your life? The scriptures and modern prophets—and even modern science—give some suggestions.

1 Know Who You Are

One of the most subtle and dangerous aspects of materialism is the false identity it can give us. When we think of ourselves in terms of our stuff—whether it's our clothes, our toys, or our money—we paint a pale and shrunken picture of ourselves.

In addition, our sense of self-worth suffers under the constant onslaught of advertising messages that try to sell us an image of who we *ought to be* based on what we *ought to buy*. Some research suggests that such advertising has negative effects on self-esteem, relationships, creativity, and overall happiness.¹ To get teens to buy their products, some companies use cunning advertising techniques targeting the greatest teenage insecurities—fitting in, being “cool,” body image, and so on. By doing so, they distort true identity and hijack our natural development of self-image and personality.

As children of our Heavenly Father, we have a divine identity and potential, but Satan wants us to forget this

fact. When we doubt our divine nature and lose confidence in ourselves, we are more prone to fill the void with worldly things—with the outward trappings of coolness, prosperity, abundance, pleasure, or acceptance.

But the Savior reminds us, “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). In our hearts we know it's true, but it's easy to lose sight of. Prayer, scripture study, and other spiritual experiences help give us sublime reminders that we are much greater than the sum of our stuff.

Five Tips for Tackling Materialism

2 Know Where You're Going

You may have seen the bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." Whoever came up with that slogan was probably just having a bit of fun at the expense of consumer culture, but it's funny only because some people really do seem to believe that life is about acquiring stuff.

A correct outlook on the purpose of life probably can't be easily boiled down to a bumper-sticker slogan, but the scriptures give us several correctives to the "gimme, gimme" philosophy.

The prophet Alma taught, "Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you" (Alma 39:14). You've probably heard the saying "You can't take it with you." Well, it's scriptural.

So where should our focus be? The Savior has told us to look beyond the way station of this world toward our final destination. He said, "Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness" (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38). He also taught, "Thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better" (D&C 25:10).

The stuff we can buy in this world is nothing compared to the gift of eternal life, "which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7).

DON'T GET TRAPPED

"The tugs and pulls of the world are powerful. Worldly lifestyles are cleverly reinforced by the rationalization, 'Everybody is doing it,' thus fanning or feigning a majority. Products are promoted and attitudes engendered by clever niche marketing.

"Peter counseled, 'Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage' (2 Pet. 2:19).

Brothers and sisters, there are so many personalized prisons!"

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Tugs and Pulls of the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 35.



3 Be Grateful

Researchers have pointed out that teens who develop a sense of thankfulness are able to reduce the negative effects of the materialism that surrounds them.² And modern prophets have also taught that gratitude can transform our lives.

President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “We can lift ourselves, and others as well, when we . . . cultivate within our hearts an attitude of gratitude. If ingratitude be numbered among the serious sins, then gratitude takes its place among the noblest of virtues.”³

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught: “Walk with gratitude in your hearts. . . . Be thankful for the wonderful blessings which are yours. . . . Be thankful to your parents. . . . Thank the Lord for His goodness to you. . . . Let a spirit of thanksgiving guide and bless your days and nights. Work at it. You will find it will yield wonderful results.”⁴

And the Lord Himself has promised, “He who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more” (D&C 78:19).

4 Think Outside Yourself

Material things, along with the ways they are marketed, move our focus onto ourselves rather than others. In this way, materialism can cause us to quietly reject the Lord’s commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39).

This focus on self and the stuff of this world is not part of living “after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27). In fact, modern research seems to have verified that (1) you can’t buy happiness and (2) a focus on others can bring greater personal satisfaction.⁵

As Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (1917–2008) taught, “We are happiest when our lives are connected to others through unselfish love and service.”⁶



5 Be Wise

The Savior told His Apostles, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). In other words, we should be innocent but not naïve; we should understand the ways of the world without being worldly. This teaching can be applied to materialism.

According to some research, we can avoid developing materialistic attitudes if we are more aware of the selling intent of advertising and marketing.⁷ That is, if we constantly remind ourselves that the ads we see are just trying to get us to buy stuff, we’re less likely to buy into the message that stuff is all-important.

Again, we all need some stuff, and most stuff is neither good nor bad in and of itself. Neither is most advertising—unless it’s trying to sell us something harmful or has inappropriate content. But over time the incessant drone of materialism can influence our attitudes and thoughts and cause us to forget the Lord and His commandments, as well as our true selves. So we must be on guard.

These things, these necessities and accessories of life, are constantly before us. But we don’t have to let them drown out the voice of the Spirit telling us of a better self, a better way, and a better world. **NE**

NOTES

1. See, for example, Karen Kersting, “Driving teen egos—and buying—through ‘branding,’” *Monitor on Psychology: A Publication of the American Psychological Association*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2004): 60.
2. *Trends and Tudes* (newsletter for Harris Interactive, Jan. 2007), 7; available at www.harrisinteractive.com.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “An Attitude of Gratitude,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2000, 2.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *New Era*, Jan. 2001, 8.
5. See, for example, Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (2002); and Tori DeAngelis, “Consumerism and its discontents,” *Monitor on Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2004): 52.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 101.
7. See Moniek Buijzen, “Parental mediation of undesired advertising effects,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2005): 153.

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Matthew 6:19–21.

“For the Strength of Youth . . . features standards from the writings and teachings of Church leaders and from scripture, adherence to which will bring the blessings of our Heavenly Father and the guidance of His Son to each of us.”

President Thomas S. Monson, *“Preparation Brings Blessings,”* Ensign, May 2010, 64.



FISHING CHAMP

Joe Kent, 14, a teacher in the Horbury Ward, Huddersfield England Stake, became Fish ‘O’ Mania 17 Junior Champion last July at Cudmore Fisheries in Staffordshire, England. This competition is one of the largest fishing tournaments in the entire country.

Along with being an excellent fisherman, Joe is an all-round sportsman, who with his friend Joe Perkis—another teacher in his quorum—represented The Wakefield District under 15s at football where they have had a successful year. And that’s no fish story.



SERVICE BY MAIL

Marnie Weintz, 17, of the Copper Hills 12th Ward in West Jordan, Utah, decided to build on a 12-year friendship with Sister Rebecca Mackey, an elderly woman her mom befriended in the temple. When it came time for Marnie to pick her Choice and Accountability project for Personal Progress, she thought to reach out to Sister Mackey in a different way by sending her a thoughtful card each week. She says that sending the cards “takes discipline to be dedicated in doing it every week.”

Marnie and her family aren’t able to visit Sister Mackey too often, but they maintain their relationship through phone calls. Marnie thought that by sending cards, she could show Sister Mackey in another way that she cares. Marnie has learned that even the smallest service can make a big impact. “I’m just surprised that it’s meant so much to her. I didn’t even know if she would really want me to send them to her every week or if she would save the cards at all.”

Sister Mackey looks forward to and cherishes those weekly cards, and for Marnie, her Choice and Accountability project turned out to be more lasting than she ever thought.

STANDARDS: A BURDEN OR A BLESSING?

Those who say Church standards are restrictions probably know some Church members who carry the standards as a burden, not as an advantage in life. If you want your friends to know that your standards make you free from addictions, then live a happy life and try to show the joy you have through a healthy body, mind, and heart. We teach by example, not by words only. Show them the blessings of standards by the way you use your agency for good things.

Patience O., 19, France



BY THE NUMBERS 7,708

Number of sound-producing pipes in the Conference Center organ.

THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

The first missionary of the Church to Australia was William Barratt, a 17-year-old English convert who arrived in 1840. He was followed a year later by Andrew Anderson from Scotland, who organized the first branch in 1844. Many early converts emigrated to the United States, including Joseph Ridges, who was an organ builder. He later built the organ that was used in the historic Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

In the mid-1950s, the Church in Australia was caught up in an unprecedented surge in membership that has continued ever since. This surge resulted from a number of factors, including fewer converts emigrating to Utah, much-improved social acceptance of the Church in Australia, the start of an intensive chapel-building program, growing numbers of local leaders, and an emphasis on missionary work.

The country's first temple (shown below), located in Sydney, was completed in 1984.

Here are a few facts about the Church today in Australia:

Membership	126,767
Missions	7
Temples	5
Wards & Branches	284
Family History Centers	148



MY FAVORITE SCRIPTURE

Moses 1:39

Every time I remember this verse, I remind myself that if I do my part in this world (which is to follow the commandments of the Lord), I will be rewarded with the gifts the Lord has promised me.

**Roland D., 17,
Pangasinan, Philippines**

Tell us about your favorite scripture in one or two sentences. Go to newera.lds.org and click on Submit Your Material.

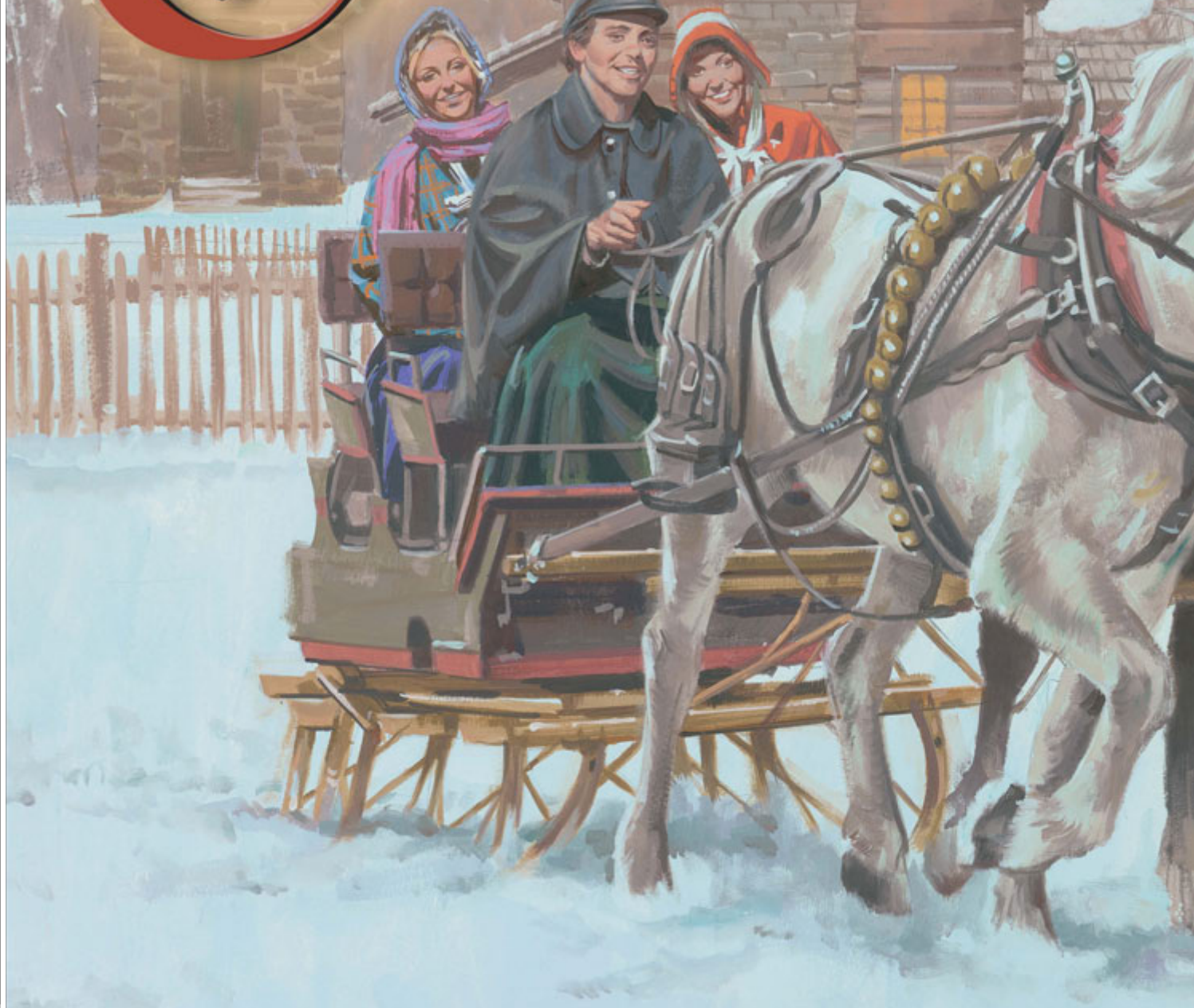
FINDING CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| Christmas | Nativity | Manger |
| Rejoice | Shepherds | Prince of Peace |
| Savior | Angels | Service |
| Charity | Bethlehem | Joy |
| Giving | Mary | Wise Men |
| Love | Joseph | Hallelujah |
| Christ | Star | |

See if you can find all twenty of these words related to Christmas.



CHRISTMAS with the



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL MANN, LETTERING BY JOHN H. CLARK, PHOTOGRAPHS BY TAMMAY COLEMAN, AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN LUKE

Pioneers

Imagine what Christmas was like back with the early Saints.

For pioneers, Christmas in the depths of harsh winters was unfortunately not often a time of plenty. Yet memories of those early Christmas holidays, some as simple as a dance, a word of gratitude, or a small gift of sweets, have been passed down through families to this day.

Here are just a few records written down of holidays held in pioneer times:

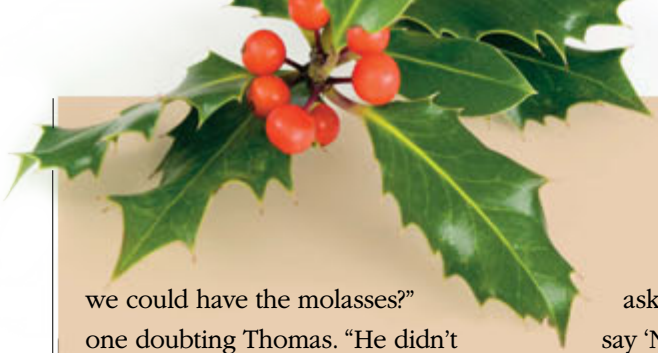
The Case of the Missing Molasses

Orderville, Utah—One December evening some of the sisters of Orderville met to plan a Christmas treat for the children. The Order had no luxuries and the necessities were strictly rationed. About the only sweets the people had was molasses, so, the sisters decided to make molasses candy and cookies for the youngsters.

But on Christmas Eve, they came to “Grandmother Spencer,” wife of Howard Orson Spencer, bishop and leader in Orderville, with the news that the brother in charge of the molasses “won’t let us have any. He says our allowance for the month is already used.” Grandmother’s lips tightened. “The children are going to have something for Christmas. I’ll speak to my husband after dinner—he’ll give us permission.”

When her husband came in tired and hungry, Sister Spencer hovered over her husband and after dinner urged him to rest by the fire. As he sat looking drowsily into the flames, she said in a low voice, “You do think the children should have some candy and cookies for Christmas, don’t you Howard?” “Ummhmmmm,” was the sleepy response, and grandmother went away smiling. She reported to the ladies that everything was all right, “My husband has given us permission.” “Did he say





we could have the molasses?" asked one doubting Thomas. "He didn't say 'No,'" replied Sister Spencer truthfully. "Now we won't wake up the brother in charge of the molasses. We'll just slip out and take what we need."

The man in charge of the molasses barrel was very conscious of his responsibility. On the lid of the barrel he had placed a section of heavy logging chain and a large boulder. Only a thin wooden partition at the head of the bed separated him from the barrel outside, and he was a light sleeper. Shivering from the cold the women crunched through the snow toward the barrel. It was beginning to snow again and the night was very dark.

With infinite caution they removed the heavy chain without so much as one betraying clank. It took the combined efforts of all the women to lower the boulder noiselessly to the ground. There was a breathless pause as Sister Spencer raised the lid and dipped into the barrel with a saucepan. She emptied its contents into a bucket and dipped again, and again. "We have enough now," whispered one of the women. "Let's go back." With the same caution the chain and boulder were replaced and the women filed back to the warm kitchen to make the Christmas goodies. But, there was a dismayed gasp when they looked into the pail. "Oh dear, we haven't enough molasses. We'll have to get some more." "Oh no, Sister Spencer. It's cold and dark. It's too risky." "Well, just the same, we must unless we want the children to be disappointed."

There could only be one answer to such a statement and the little band of mothers went again to the molasses barrel. They returned safely and set to work. When morning came, every child in Orderville had two molasses cookies and one big slightly sticky lump of candy in his stocking. Santa Claus had not forgotten them. Grandfather insisted all his life that he could not remember ever having given the women permission to get the molasses.

Our Pioneer Heritage, 18 (1975): 160-61

A Clothespin Doll for Clara

Willow Creek, Idaho—James A. Smith and his wife,

Annie Sellars Smith, left their home in Utah and settled in Willow Creek, about twelve miles northeast of Idaho Falls, in 1886. Their eight-year-old daughter, Mamie, took a special interest in her younger sister, Clara, and the two played together endlessly. Mamie was heartbroken this Christmas to think that little Clara would not get a doll. The little family was snowbound and their Christmas celebration would consist of homemade candy, apples, a cheerful fire and music.

Christmas morning found a little doll, neatly and beautifully dressed, in her little sister's stocking. Mamie had taken a long clothespin from her mother's peg sack and had spent hours in hemming, folding, dyeing, tying, painting and padding a doll for Clara so her Christmas cry in the morning would be one of gladness, not of disappointment. Clara Smith DeMott always cherished the memory of her first doll and of the happiness it brought and the never-to-be-forgotten loving sister who made her first doll from a clothespin.

Deon Smith Seedall, *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 4:201-2

Sleigh Bells, Skating, and a Big Bonfire

Centerville, Utah—The severe winter resulted in the finest open air sport in the world—sleighriding, in big groups, in bob sleighs piled with soft straw, hot bricks and plenty of covers. At Christmas, it is a thrilling new world to participate in, or the sounds at night as you relax in a warm home listening to tinkling bells placed on the harness of the horses drawing merry groups. Then there was Christmas skating, in the perfectly flat, smooth lake bottoms west of Centerville, with a big bonfire of cast-off railway ties. And the ice, frozen to a thickness of 18 inches, was soon stored in the co-op store ice house and covered with a thick layer of sawdust and kept for summer use.

John Q. Adams, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 18 (1975): 158

Dancing Parties and a Santa Claus Tree

Salt Lake City, Utah—When the Social Hall was completed, in 1852, Christmas was celebrated there with dancing parties, both for the adults and the children. Our girls and boys will never forget the first Christmas tree there

where there was a present for every child of several large families, and all numbered and arranged in perfect order of name and age. President Young—Brother Brigham—was foremost in making the affair a grand success. Hon. John W. Young, then only a boy, handed the presents down from the tree, and I recollect Brother Brigham standing and pointing with his cane, and telling John just which to take down, and so on; the children were wild with delight and some of the mothers quite as much elated, though not as demonstrative. After the Santa Claus tree was

My, How Time Flies

La Verkin, Utah—One night when I was sixteen years old, Father gave a Christmas party for his own children and their families and the nearest neighbors. We danced. My brothers were the musicians. We knew it was Father's aim to end the party at ten o'clock, which he did right in the middle of a square-dance by ordering the musicians to stop. But Father didn't know that my brothers had lifted me up to the clock many times that night. Each time I turned it back thirty minutes. It must have been past midnight

Christmas was a time of joy and giving. In pioneer times, even when there wasn't much to give, it was still a time to make memories.



stripped of its gifts, the floor was cleared and the dancing commenced, and there was good music too, and President Young led the dance, and “cut a pigeon wing,” to the great delight of the little folks. In fact, I think the evening was almost entirely given up to the children's festivities, and the older ones, the fathers and mothers and more especially President Young, made them supremely happy for that one Christmas eve.

Adapted from Emmeline B. Wells, *Young Women's Journal*, 12 (1901): 539–42

when the party broke up.

“Julia's Christmas,” from the Christian Olsen family record, *Our Pioneer Heritage* 14 (1971): 199





The **LAST** Carol

By Amy Rhoads

We wanted to sing his request, but no one seemed to know the words.

Rushing to scribble a message on the last Christmas card, I quickly licked the envelope and stuffed the cards into my bag. I arrived at church just in time to join the other young men and young women in a holiday service activity.

This particular Christmas season we had decided to go to a local nursing home to sing hymns and Christmas carols as we strolled up and down the halls. I had decided that I would also bring along Christmas cards to hand out and to visit with people as we sang. I was looking forward to that evening, mostly because I love to sing Christmas carols. And it was a lot better to sing indoors rather than outside in the bitter cold!

We gathered in the foyer and began with a few Christmas classics like “Jingle Bells” and “Frosty the Snowman.” Then we opened our hymn books and began to sing as we wandered up and down the halls. Our voices soared and filled the air with the beautiful spirit of Christmas. Each doorway was overflowing with smiling faces, “Merry Christmas” greetings, and even several hugs.

But there was one man in a wheelchair who followed our every move for two hours. When we were done singing, he motioned for me to come to him. I leaned down to hear his frail voice.

“Can you please sing ‘O Holy Night?’” he asked softly.

Looking into his warm and hopeful eyes, I knew that he felt the Spirit and that hearing this song would help him feel closer to the Savior.

“Sure,” I replied. “We would love to.”

This song was not in our hymn book, and I did not know all of the words, but I was sure that with close to 75 people there, someone was bound to know the lyrics. But as I gathered everyone to sing this request, I could not find anyone who knew the lyrics.

Slightly discouraged, I stood there staring at that man in his chair, desperately wishing to sing his simple Christmas request. Then I heard a girl in our group begin the song. One by one we all began to sing. The words flowed from my mouth with such ease, it was as if I had written the song myself.



Our voices created an angelic chorus and echoed through the lonely halls. I knew that Heavenly Father was using our group to bring His Spirit to this man and the others in the nursing home.

After the song, everyone in the group and in the foyer stood in silence for a few minutes with tears running down our faces, full of the spirit of Christmas. I looked in my hand and noticed that I had one Christmas card left. I knelt down by the man in his wheelchair and handed him the card. Before I could say anything, he flung his arms around my neck.

“Thank you,” he said. “Thank you so much.”

As we finished giving hugs and Christmas wishes, we decided to walk around the neighborhood to continue our caroling. We had all been messengers that night, sharing our feelings of the Savior and His love. We strolled through the cold night air singing hymns, warmed by our testimonies of the Savior, whose birth we celebrated. **NE**

SAVE ME!

When I was about 14 years old, my brother, some friends, and I went to a nearby pond to go row boating.

One of my friends challenged me to race her to the shore. I really didn't know how to swim well, but it wasn't very far, so I said yes, but what I didn't realize was that my jeans would take on water and get really heavy.

I got into the water, and my jeans immediately began pulling me down. I thought for sure I was going to die. My brother and another friend came in and pulled me to shore, but what surprised me was that in my panic I tried fighting them off because I thought they were trying to drown me.



This experience reminded me of how easy it is to make bad choices and how we sometimes pull away from those who are trying to help us. Like my brother and our friend, the Savior is always there to try and help us, even when we initially resist. I couldn't save myself from drowning, but my brother and friend could. Through the Atonement, our Savior can help each of us to return to His presence if we just let Him. Satan gives us many temptations that are hard to resist, but if we stay close to the Lord, He will help us overcome them.

—Janice C., Oregon, USA

COMING UNTO CHRIST

Coming unto Christ, for me, is part of bringing others unto Christ also. There is a teenager in my ward who does not believe in Christ or this gospel. One Sunday afternoon I had the opportunity to walk to the temple with him and bear him my testimony. When he asked me questions, I was never without an answer, because the Spirit was there helping and guiding me the whole way. When I got home, the Spirit I felt was so strong that I knew, through my actions and this experience, I had come closer unto Christ and had hopefully brought my friend closer also.

—Jessica H., Utah, USA

A RING FOR MOM

Several years ago our house was robbed. Almost everything of worth was taken, including my mother's wedding ring. We'd never been able to afford a new one.

One year as we approached another Christmas season, my six-year-old brother, Jason, and I were coming home from an activity. Jason leaned toward me and whispered in my ear that he wanted to get Mom a new wedding ring. He said she should have one. I told him it was a good idea and that I would think about how to do it.

I thought about it, I planned, I schemed, and I tried to think of some way we could save enough money. I figured we could slip away for a few minutes while Christmas shopping with Dad. Before we went off on our own, however, Jason decided that we should let Dad in on the secret. Dad was surprised but happy and said that was the sweetest thing he had heard all day. He said we could all go together and choose the ring after we had finished the rest of our shopping.

We spent a while looking at different rings. Jason made the final decision, choosing a ring with a ruby in the center surrounded by three tiny diamonds on each side. It was perfect!

On Christmas morning our gift was the second present opened.



As my mom unwrapped it, I felt tense. A thousand thoughts went through my head: what if she doesn't like it, what if it's too big, what if she doesn't think it's right for her kids to be giving her a wedding ring?

When Mom saw the ring, Jason explained what we'd done. Her face broke into the hugest smile, and she hugged him. She put the ring on right away and said "thank you" a dozen times over. She told Jason that someday she and Dad would replace the stolen ring, but until then, the ruby ring would be her wedding ring.

I sat in the background and just watched the whole thing, feeling extremely relieved and happy.

I have never had a better Christmas. I was so happy to see my mom happy that I hardly cared about my own presents. I believe that is the true spirit of Christmas: giving. We can find so much more happiness in giving than in receiving. Although I've known this truth for years, I've never been more struck with it than I was on that morning.

Catherine W., Utah, USA

IT SHOWS HE CARES

As a writer and editor myself, I want to applaud you on your cover photo for the May 2010 issue. I was drawn in by the informality and warmth of the candid shot of President Monson with his grandson. At first I saw the boy as just another child in the Church that President Monson cares for. It came across to me as fresh and real, and therefore made a difference to me as an average reader. I just want to say job well done as well as thank you for the courage and vision to be a little less formal, a little less conventional, in order to have a lot more positive, meaningful effect.

Renee B., Nebraska

SABBATH DAY

I enjoyed the Message in the July 2010 issue on the sacrament by Elder L. Tom Perry because there were things in there that I didn't know about. I didn't know that on the Sabbath we should keep unspotted from the world right down to the clothes we wear.

Mike P., Idaho

FRIENDLINESS

I just wanted to say how important friendliness is in the Church. Reaching out to people and being friendly to them can make a difference in their spirituality and testimony. Being nice to someone who is having trouble with sin or with anything else can be a huge encouragement and can strengthen that person.

Jacob F., Texas

I especially like it when conference messages are included in the magazine. I love to refresh my memory of the rousing messages shared by the leaders of our Church.

SOMETHING EVEN BETTER

I used to skip to the Extra Smile to read the cartoons when the *New Era* came. As I stopped to read some of the stories, I knew I got something even better than just funny LDS cartoons in the mail. I got inspirational messages, including some from teenagers like me that I can relate to. I especially like it when conference messages are included in the magazine. I love to refresh my memory of the rousing messages shared by the leaders of our Church.

Benjamin D., Idaho

MODEST BY DESIGN

I enjoyed the article "Modest by Design" (June 2010). I think it's great that

these young women set an example by being modest. I have noticed a growing trend among young men to be immodest. It's not only the non-members, but the good guys in my seminary classes and ward. I don't think they realize that their immodest dress is as distracting and uncomfortable to young women as ours is to them. When a young man wears immodest clothing, it makes it difficult for me to respect him.

Erin T., Utah

TENT ON A ROCK

I appreciated the article "Tent on a Rock" (June 2010). It taught me a very important lesson about staying on the high ground and leaning toward the better choices and not settling for the easy way out of things or the temptation of sin.

Phillip E., California

The story "Tent on a Rock" helped me understand that our fathers are important, help us with trials, and teach us new skills. It also lets us know that our fathers love us and want us to be successful in our lives. I realized that the story is also saying that Heavenly Father loves us, too, and will guide us in our lives.

Matthew G., Utah

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*Or you can e-mail us at newera@ldschurch.org or write to New Era
50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-0024*





Quest for the Best

By Kathryn May Chapman

I left your arms so long ago
To venture into life,
Into this world of beauty
Of challenges and strife.
What is it you would have me do?
What treasure should I find?
The answer comes so quietly
And gently to my mind.
It isn't gold or diamonds
Or something you can see,
The Lord has sent me out upon
The quest for the best in me.

WHAT'S ONLINE

What can you do to get into the Christmas spirit?

Go to **Christmas.lds.org**, and you'll find an inspiring video, "The Christmas Spirit," ideas about focusing on the spiritual rather than the material, and an opportunity to share ways that you have brought Christ into Christmas.



How can you remember the Savior at Christmas?

Go to **JesusChrist.lds.org**, and you'll find testimony after testimony from Latter-day prophets, links to magazine articles, videos, and other resources to help you learn more about the Savior and strengthen your testimony of His role as your Redeemer.

Did you know Personal Progress has moved to the Internet?

Young women, you can now do your Personal Progress online! Go to **PersonalProgress.lds.org**, where you can work on value experiences and projects, submit them for approval, and track your progress. You can even keep your journal securely online!

What about the New Era online? Review the gallery of Mormonads, read the experiences of LDS youth, download music, find links to videos, get answers to your gospel questions, and more, at **NewEra.lds.org** and **youth.lds.org**.

