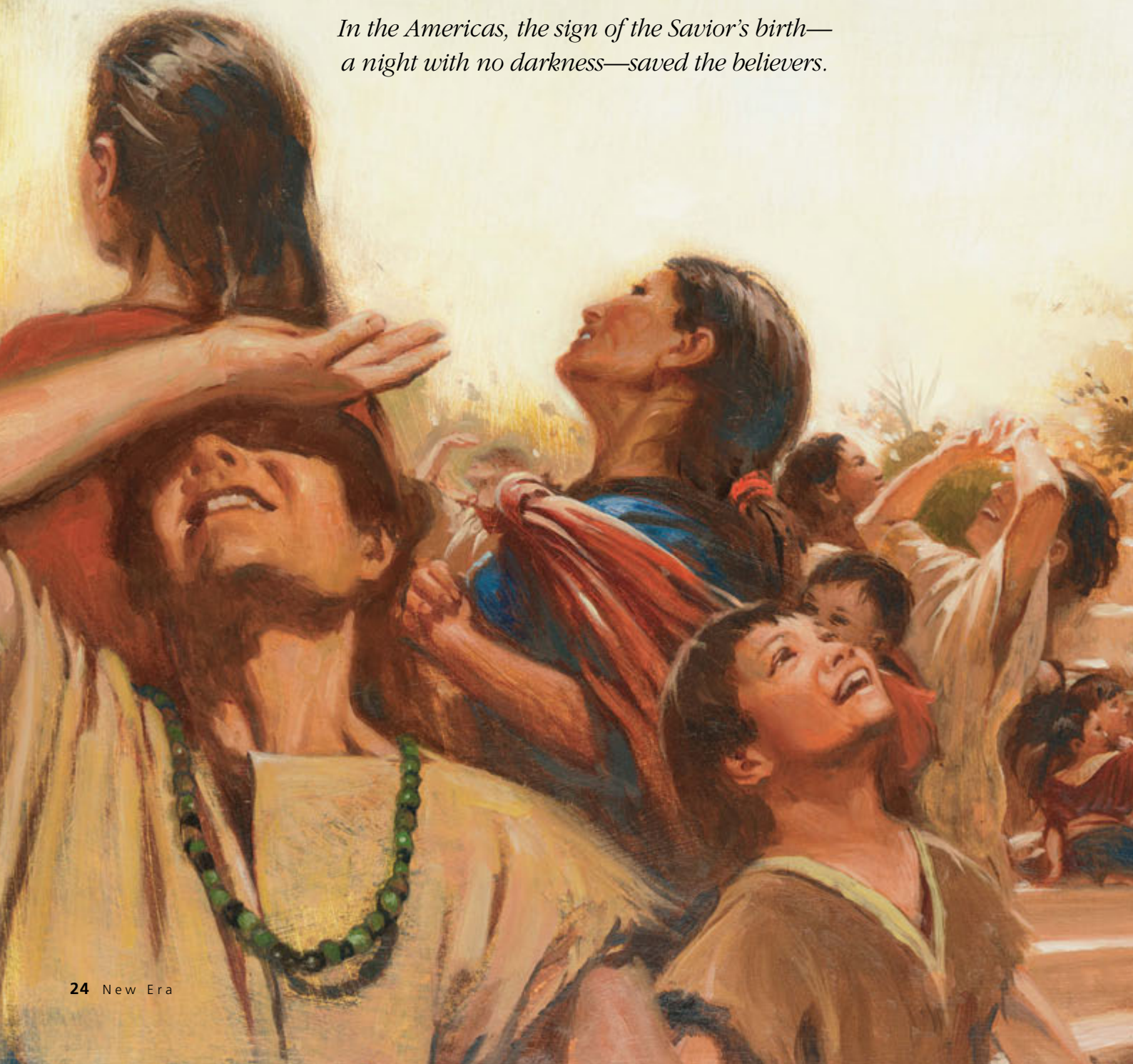


CHRISTMAS

IN THE NEW WORLD

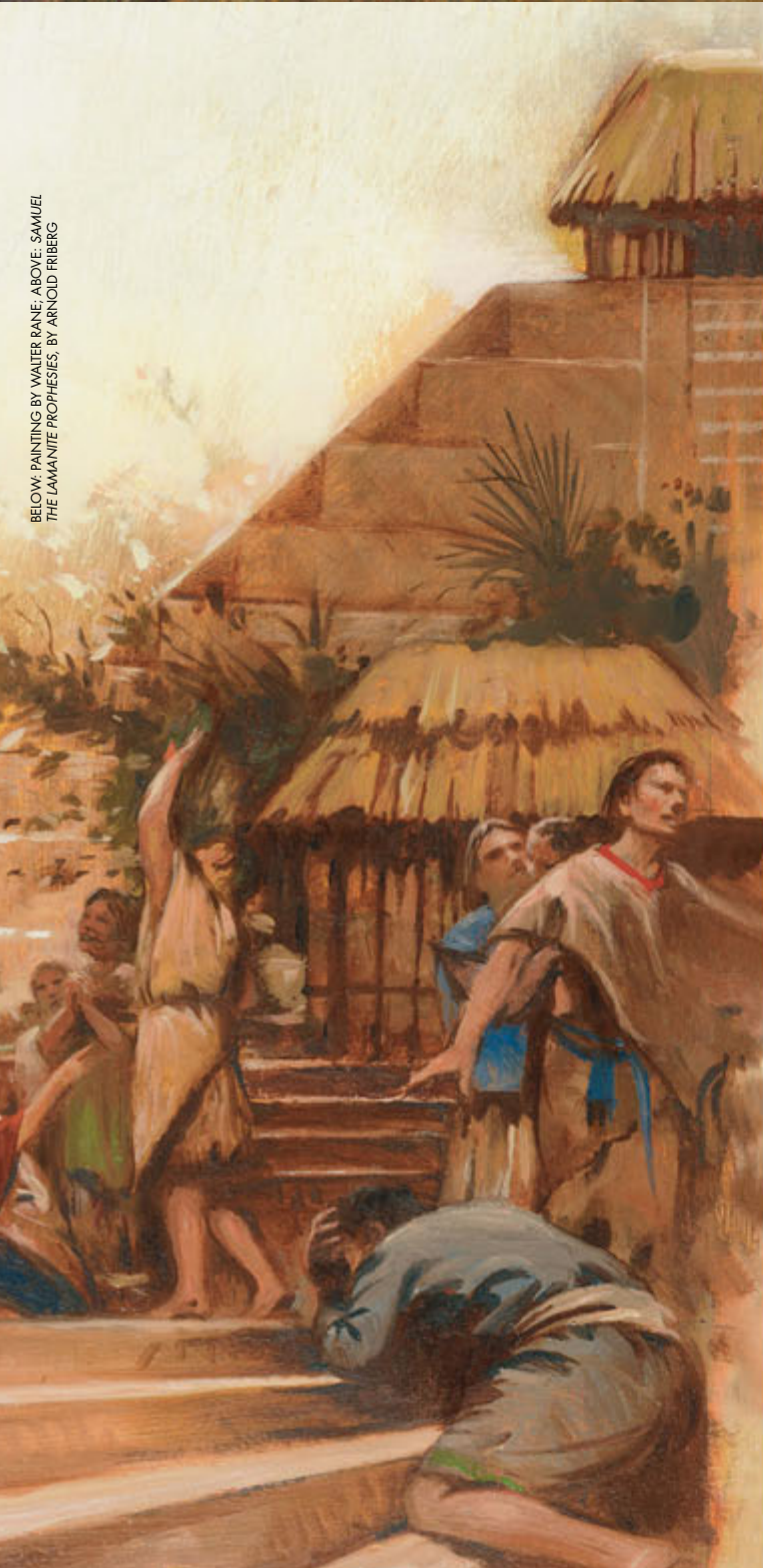
By Wendy Kenney

*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**