

THE

New Era

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QUIET
MOMENT
with the
CHRIST
CHILD
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 to take a
closer look
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THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

December 2015 • Volume 45 • Number 12

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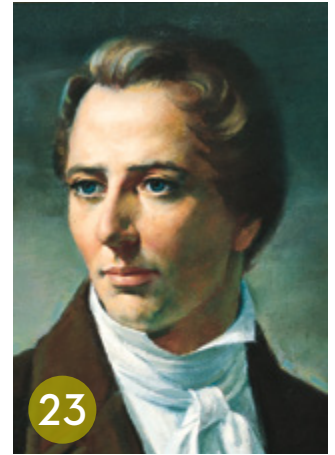


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By Elder D. Todd
Christofferson

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

Quiet Moments AT CHRISTMAS

*This Christmas season, just sit with the Christ child
and let Him warm you like a fire in winter.*

When we talk about the birth of Jesus Christ, we appropriately reflect on what was to follow. His birth was infinitely significant because of the things He would experience and suffer so that He might better succor us—all culminating in His Crucifixion and Resurrection (see Alma 7:11–12). But His mission also included the beauty of His service, the miracles of His ministry, the relief He brought to the suffering, and the joy He offered—and still offers—to the mourning.

I also like to think of what comes later. Two of my favorite verses speaking of that time are found at the end of chapter 7 in the book of Revelation:

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16–17; see also 21:4).

That captures for me the holy hope of what is coming, of what it will be like during the great Millennium and the celestial reign of Christ that follows.

With all of that to come, though, I think it’s appropriate this time of year to just think about that baby in the manger. Don’t be too overwhelmed or occupied with what is to come; just think about that little baby. Take a quiet, peaceful moment to ponder the beginning of His life—the culmination of heavenly prophecy but the earthly beginning for Him.



Take time to relax, be at peace, and see this little child in your mind. Don't be too concerned or overwhelmed with what is coming in His life or in yours. Instead, take a peaceful moment to contemplate perhaps the most serene moment in the history of the world—when all of heaven rejoiced with the message “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Let the Spirit Warm You

Some years ago I heard a radio interview featuring Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Anglican archbishop in South Africa. He had just published a book with his daughter about the reconciliation that had taken place in South Africa following apartheid.¹ Basically, the book's message is that there is good in all people.

During the interview the host asked a perceptive, inspired question of Bishop Tutu: “Have you found that your relationship to God has changed as you've grown older?”

Bishop Tutu paused and then said: “Yes. I am learning to shut up more in the presence of God.”

He recalled that when he prayed in his earlier years, he did so with a list of requests and solicitudes. He would approach heaven with what he called “a kind of shopping list.” But now, he said, “I think [I am] trying to grow in just being there. Like when you sit in front of a fire in winter, you are just there in front of the fire, and you don't have to be smart or anything. The fire warms you.”²

I think that is a lovely metaphor—just sit with the Lord and let Him warm you like a fire in winter. You don't have to be perfect or the greatest person who ever graced the earth or the best of anything to be with Him.

I hope you will take time this Christmas season to sit for a few quiet moments and let the Savior's Spirit warm you and reassure you of the worthiness of your service, of your offering, of your life. Sit quietly with that little baby and come away spiritually strengthened and better prepared for all that is going to come later. Let that moment be one of rest and refreshing and reassurance and renewal.

God grant you that blessing this Christmas as you, with me, bear witness of the Savior Jesus Christ—His centrality to our lives, to all human life, and to the very purpose of existence.

We worship Him, we serve Him, and we love Him. May your life reflect that love through your offering this Christmas season and always. **NE**

NOTES

1. Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference* (2011).
2. Desmond Tutu, interview by Renee Montagne, NPR, Mar. 11, 2010, transcript (“Desmond Tutu, Insisting We Are ‘Made for Goodness’”), npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=124539592.



A LIFE-CHANGING GIFT AT THE THRIFT STORE

By Keanu Williams

One year we didn't have much money for Christmas, so I prayed for help to be able to buy a gift for my stepdad, Adrian (whom my sister and I call Weegee). My sister and I had only two dollars between us to spend on gifts.

When my mom said we were going to a nearby thrift store to shop for Christmas gifts, I ran to my room and prayed for help: "Please help us find a gift for two dollars."

At the store Elaina and I looked through the books and found a triple combination that looked brand new. We were so excited when we found it. I held onto it tight as we ran through the aisles to my mom. Jumping up and down, we said together, "We found a gift for Weegee!" At the checkout my mom asked, "How much for this?" The lady replied, "Two dollars." My prayer was answered.

At that time our stepfather was not a member. He didn't like Mormons, he didn't believe in "the Mormon book," and he didn't like members picking us up for Young Men and Young Women activities. He even chased away the elders.

But the ward members and missionaries didn't give up on him.

On Christmas day we saved his gift for last. Elaina and I said, "This is the greatest gift anyone could ever give you! It will make you happy." Weegee guessed a couple of times, and we laughed at his answers. We told him, "It's an awesome gift! It's going to change your life. It changed ours."

Our mom was worried that he would be mad about our gift to him, but Elaina and I knew it was the right thing to do.

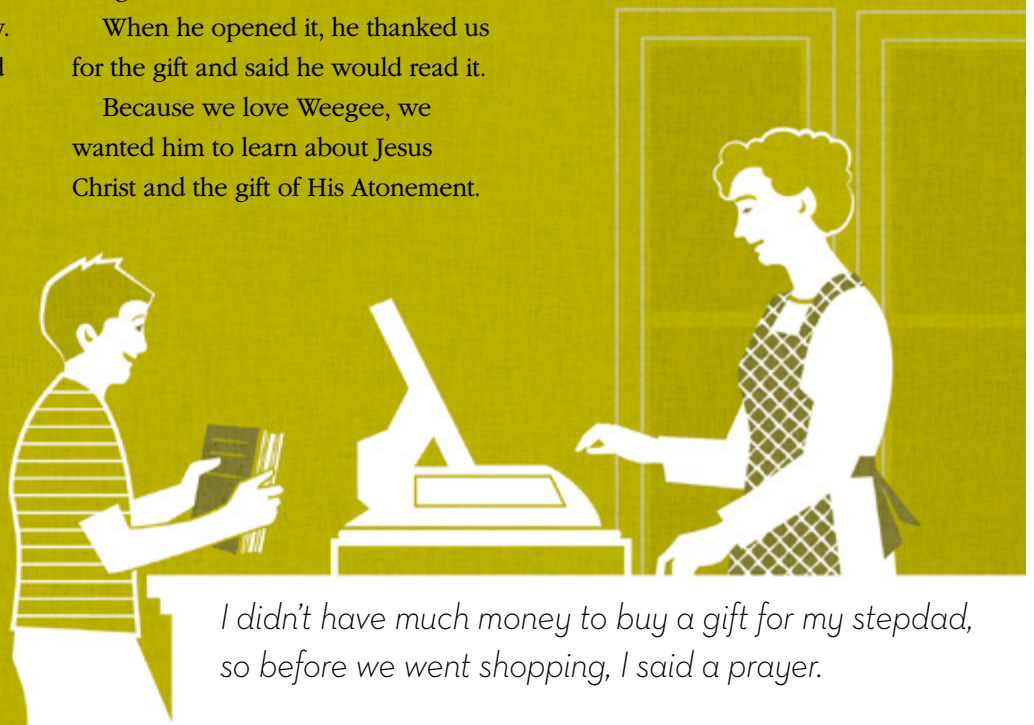
When he opened it, he thanked us for the gift and said he would read it.

Because we love Weegee, we wanted him to learn about Jesus Christ and the gift of His Atonement.

We wanted him to believe like we do, to pray and repent, and to have the gospel in his life.

He read and prayed about the Book of Mormon, and with the help of the elders and ward members, he was baptized and is now a member of the Church. We were so happy to be sealed in the temple, and we know we will always be together forever as a family. **NE**

Keanu Williams lives in Arizona, USA.



I didn't have much money to buy a gift for my stepdad, so before we went shopping, I said a prayer.

JESUS HOLY

Slowly and peacefully ♩ = 68-74
(Sing parts separately, then combine.)

Words and music by Kevin G. Pace

mp
Girls Je - sus, ho - ly Son of God ly - ing in a man-ger

mp
Boys Je - sus, Sav - ior, born on earth to dwell, Thou Ho - ly Son of

mp
full of hay. Come down from the realms of heav - en,
Heav'n - ly Fa - ther, Come to heal thy sons and daugh - ters,

God has come this bless - ed day. On this sa - cred
Come with heal - ing in thy wings. Je - sus, Sav - ior,

Chords: D, B m, D, G, D, E m 7, A, D, D7, G, G m, D, G m, A7, D, G m

night you rest in your moth - er's arms.

how I long to feel thy sweet em-brace.

D7 Gm D

Sleep - ing, maj - es - ty from heav-en, while the an - gels sing.

How I long to re - gain thy pres-ence in a com - ing day.

E^b D Bm E Gm 6 A7

How I long to kneel be-fore thee in a com - ing day.

How I long to kneel be - fore thee in a com - ing day.

D F# G Gm 6 D Gm 6 A7 D

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**CHRISTMAS
MEMORIES**
FROM PROPHETS AND APOSTLES

Members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles share some of their favorite memories during this season of joy.

What makes Christmas memorable for you? Gifts, music, and wonderful dinners? What about a simple drawing? Or delivering gift baskets? Here are a few delightful Christmas experiences from prophets and apostles.

A TIME OF GIVING AS A BOY



“Christmas time had come. We were preparing for the oven a gigantic turkey and anticipating the savory feast that awaited. A neighborhood pal of mine asked a startling question: ‘What does turkey taste like?’

“I responded, ‘Oh, about like chicken tastes.’

“Again a question: ‘What does chicken taste like?’

“It was then that I realized that my friend had never eaten chicken or turkey. I asked what his family was going to have for Christmas dinner. There was no prompt response—just a downcast

They’re good to eat—just like chicken.’

“He took the box, climbed the fence, and headed for home, a Christmas dinner safely assured. Tears came easily to me as I closed the door to the empty rabbit hutch. But I was not sad. A warmth, a feeling of indescribable joy, filled my heart. It was a memorable Christmas.

“Heavenly Father is ever mindful of those who need, who seek, who trust, who pray, and who listen when He speaks. ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16). God’s gift becomes our blessing. May every heart open wide and welcome him—Christmas day and always.”¹

President Thomas S. Monson



GIFTS RECEIVED AS A YOUNG MAN



“Like many of you, I find that some of the warmest and most vivid memories of Christmas come from my childhood. Although I grew up in modest circumstances, my parents wanted Christmas to be a time of joy and wonder for their children. They went to great lengths to make Christmas a special time for our family.

“We children made gifts for each other. One year, I remember drawing a picture as a Christmas gift for my sister. It could not have been a work of art, but she treated it like a treasure. How I love her for that! Another year my brother, who is 12 years older than I, gave me a precious gift. He had found a wood stick in the park near our home and carved from it a small toy knife. It was simple, not fancy at all, but oh, how I cherished that gift because it came from him!

I PONDERED A SOLUTION. THERE WAS NONE. I HAD NO TURKEYS, NO CHICKENS, NO MONEY. THEN I REMEMBERED I DID HAVE TWO PET RABBITS.

glance and the comment, ‘I dunno. There’s nothing in the house.’

“I pondered a solution. There was none. I had no turkeys, no chickens, no money. Then I remembered I did have two pet rabbits. Immediately I took my friend by the hand and rushed to the rabbit hutch, placed the rabbits in a box, and handed the box to him with the comment, ‘Here, take these two rabbits.



“Isn’t one of the joys of Christmas seeing the excited faces of little children as they take in their hands a wrapped gift that is just for them?”

“This Christmas season and always, I pray that we will see the marvelous gift of the birth of the Son of God through the blessed eyes of a child. I pray that in addition to giving good gifts, we will strive to become good and grateful receivers. As we do so, the spirit of this season will enlarge our hearts and expand our joy beyond measure.”²

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency

CHRISTMAS MUSIC



“Music has always been an important part of our family activities, especially at Christmastime. One night preceding each Christmas, our extended family—brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins (and our parents before they passed away)—crowd into our living room for the children to stage their annual

I STOOD ... HOLDING THE BASKET AND WONDERING.



Christmas pageant. We read the scriptural accounts of the Lord’s birth from the second chapter of Luke and from the Book of Mormon. Then we sing carols, accompanied by pianists and other instrumentalists. Of course, we sing the whimsical ditties about Santa and many more. We get warmed up on those numbers. Then we sing our favorites about the Savior. By the time we sing our closing song, “Silent Night,” we truly feel the real spirit of Christmas.

“Just as the Savior’s mother pondered sacred things in her heart, so some of our deepest feelings of reverence and gratitude are unspoken and unsung. Some are felt only deeply within. They are so sacred that speaking openly of them would seem in some way to desecrate them. I’m sure we all feel that way when we sing and ponder the birth, the mission, and the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

CHRISTMAS AS A DEACON



“As a 12-year-old deacon, I was pleased to accompany the bishop to deliver Christmas baskets to the

widows of our ward in Vernal, Utah. The backseat of his car was filled with baskets of grapefruit and oranges. This was during World War II, when grapefruit and oranges were scarce, so they were quite a treat. He waited in the car while I took a basket to each door and said, ‘The bishop asked me to give you this Christmas basket from the ward.’

“When we had delivered all the baskets but one, the bishop drove me home. There he handed me the last basket and said, ‘This is for your mother.’ Before I could reply, he drove away. [Dallin H. Oaks was 7 when his father passed away in June 1940.]

“I stood in front of our house, snowflakes falling on my face, holding the basket and wondering. We had been delivering baskets to widows,





but I had never thought of my mother as a widow. I had never heard her refer to herself as a widow. I wondered why anyone would think my mother was a widow.

“That Christmas experience was formative in my understanding of the eternal family and in my appreciation for the faith of my mother. She always taught us that we had a father and she had a husband and that we would always be a family because of their temple marriage. . . .

“I am grateful for temple marriage and for the assurance that we can be together as an eternal family.”⁴

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM HOME



“For 19 years I had enjoyed Christmas surrounded by family and friends.

“Then, as the Yule season approached in 1960, I found myself half a world away from all that. I had been in England less than three months when, on the first of December, my first junior companion and I were sent to open missionary work in the conservative city of Guildford, an area that had never had Latter-day Saint missionaries.

. . . We were young, inexperienced, and a bit overwhelmed, but we were not fainthearted.

“We knocked on doors in the morning, we knocked on doors at midday, we knocked on doors in the afternoon, and we knocked on doors at night. . . . And we got in almost none of them.

“So it went until Christmas Eve, when people were even less inclined to hear a couple of missionaries. That evening, weary but devoted, we retired to our one-room rental and had a Christmas devotional. We sang a Christmas hymn and then offered an invocation. We read from the scriptures and listened to a tape recording titled *The True Story of Christmas*. Then we sang another hymn of the season, said a closing prayer, and went to bed.

“On Christmas morning we kept our morning study schedule and opened the two or three packages that had caught up with us following our transfer. Then we went out to knock on doors. . . . We didn’t get in any of them.

“For such an uneventful Christmas—clearly the least festive of

**WE KNOCKED ON DOORS
IN THE MORNING, WE
KNOCKED ON DOORS AT
MIDDAY, WE KNOCKED
ON DOORS IN THE AFTER-
NOON, AND WE KNOCKED
ON DOORS AT NIGHT. . . .
AND WE GOT IN ALMOST
NONE OF THEM.**

any I ever had before or since—it says something that those special days in December of 1960 remain in my heart as one of the sweetest Christmases I have ever had. I think that is because for the first time in my life, I found myself understanding Christmas rather than just enjoying it. I think for the first time in any truly significant way, I was getting the message of Christ’s birth and life—His message and His mission and His sacrifice for others.”⁵

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Christmas Gifts, Christmas Blessings,” *New Era*, Dec. 1986, 2.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Good and Grateful Receiver,” 2012 Christmas Devotional, lds.org/broadcasts.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Christmas Thoughts of Home and Prague,” *Christmas Treasures: Stories and Reminiscences from General Authorities* (1994), 32–33.
4. Dallin H. Oaks, “Christmas Memory,” *Church News*, Dec. 11, 2010; see lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/more-christmas-memories-from-the-brethren.
5. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Christmas within You,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2012, 10–12.

WHAT THE CHRISTMAS STORY CAN TEACH YOU

The birth of Jesus Christ, one of the most miraculous events in history, took place in a humble stable. A few people saw angels and guiding stars, but most were unaware of it or saw it as just another baby's birth. As you study these events, you can come to know for yourself that this baby wrapped in swaddling clothes was and is the Son of God, our Savior.



THE CHRISTMAS STORY

"The story of Christmas is a story of love. We heard the story first before the world was created. Heavenly Father told us of His plan of happiness for all of us, His beloved children. . . .

"Many have told since of the glorious time in that story when the Christ child is born to rescue and lead us home. . . .

"In the stories of Christ's birth, we can see and feel who He was and who He is. That lightens our load along the way. And it will lead us to forget ourselves and to lighten the load for others."

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, "Christmas Stories," 2009 Christmas Devotional, [lds.org/broadcasts](https://www.lds.org/broadcasts).



1

GOD'S
PROPHETS
FORETELL
SACRED
EVENTS.



4

2.
"And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name" (Mosiah 3:8-9).



2



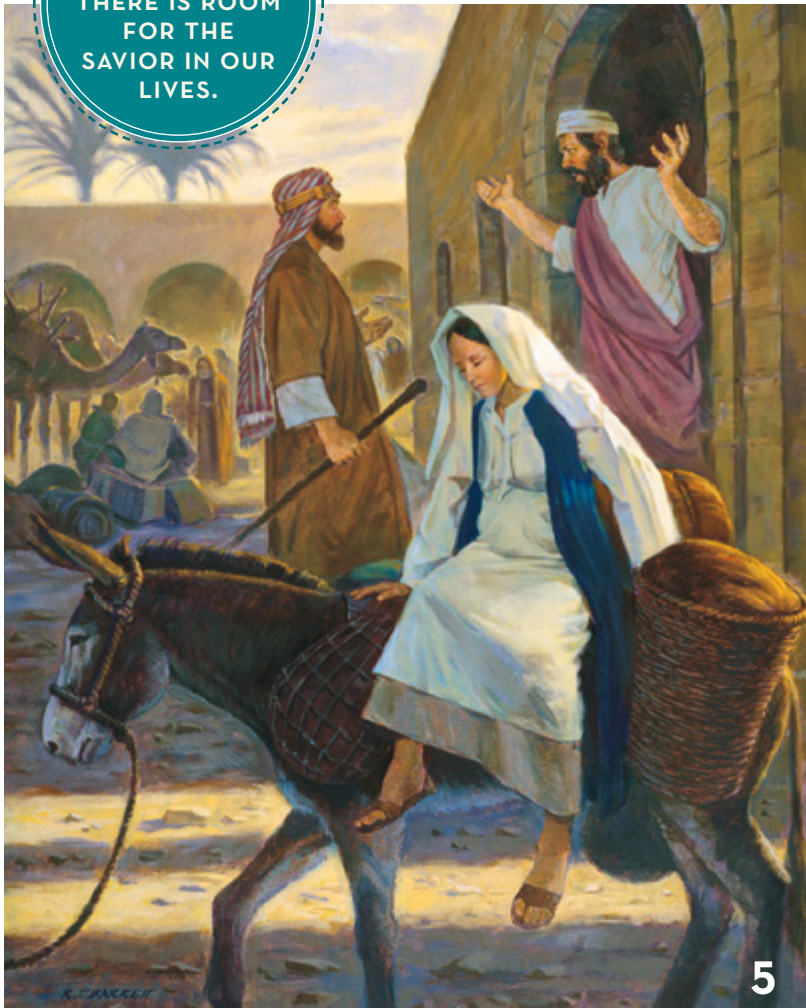
3

3.
"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

4.
"There shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign;...
"And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you" (Helaman 14:4-5).

How does it make you feel to know that God reveals important sacred events to His prophets, including those yet to come, such as the Second Coming of the Savior?

EACH
OF US MUST
DECIDE IF
THERE IS ROOM
FOR THE
SAVIOR IN OUR
LIVES.



5. *“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inns” (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 2:7 [in Luke 2:7, footnote b]).*

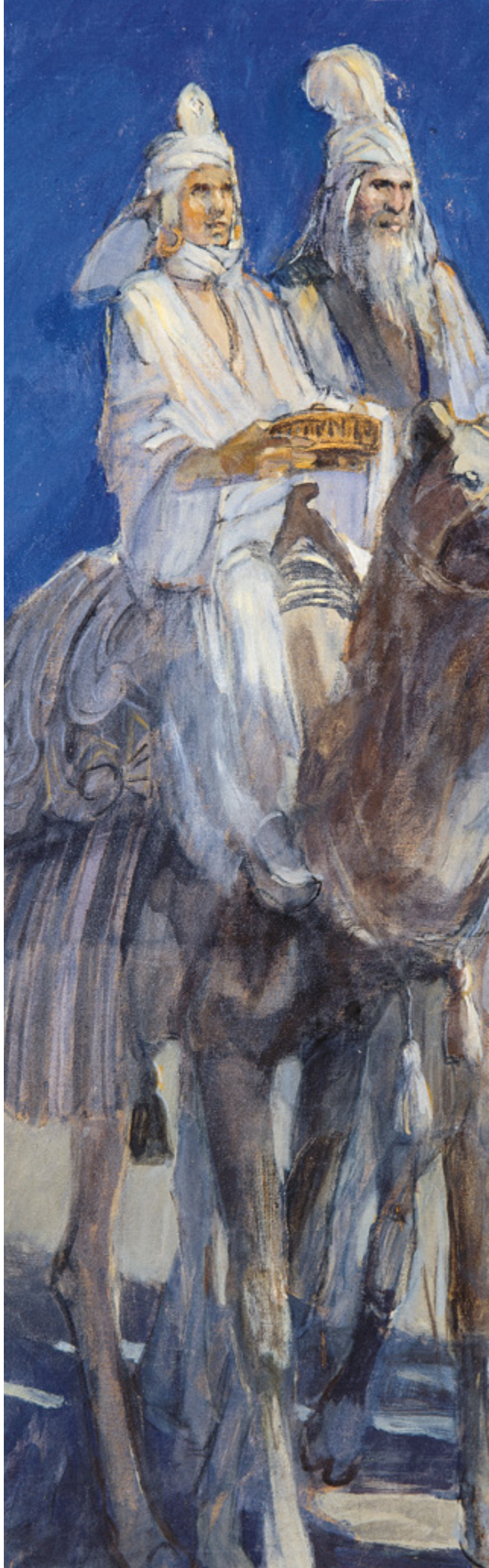
How do you make room for the Savior?



NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD

“The loneliness of his birth was to be, in a sense, duplicated in the loneliness of his death. Foxes had holes and birds had nests, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head either in his nativity or in his last hours of mortality.”

President Howard W. Hunter (1907-1995), “Christ, Our Passover,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 18.



5. NO ROOM AT THE INN, BY ROBERT T. BARRETT; 6. THREE WISE MEN, BY MINERVA TEICHERT; 7. BOOK OF MORMON STORIES, BY JERRY THOMPSON

6



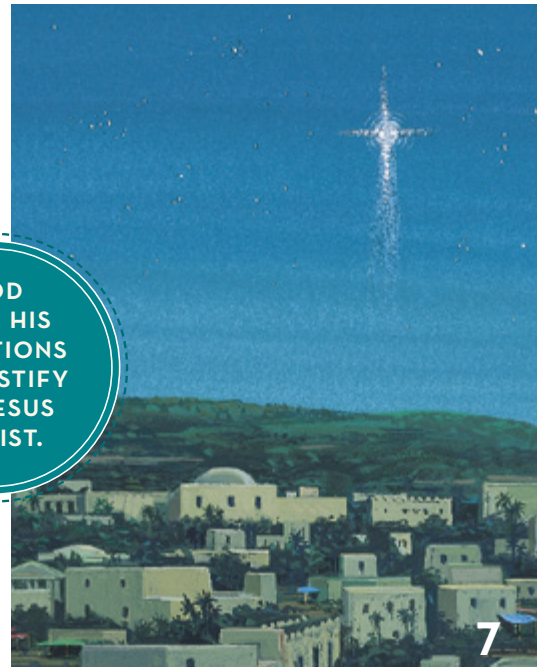
6.

"The star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Matthew 2:9).

Read Moses 6:63.

What are ways in which you have noticed that all things bear witness of Jesus Christ?

**GOD
USES HIS
CREATIONS
TO TESTIFY
OF JESUS
CHRIST.**



7

7.

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



THE
FAITHFUL
RECEIVE
A WITNESS
OF JESUS
CHRIST.

8

8. *The Holy Ghost bore witness to Simeon and Anna that the baby Jesus was the Christ who would bring redemption to the world (see Luke 2:26, 38).*

How can you prepare your heart to receive a witness of Jesus Christ?

GOD
WANTS ALL
OF HIS CHILDREN,
FROM LOWLY
SHEPHERDS TO
NOBLE WISE MEN,
TO LEARN ABOUT
JESUS CHRIST.

9



BORN IN A STABLE

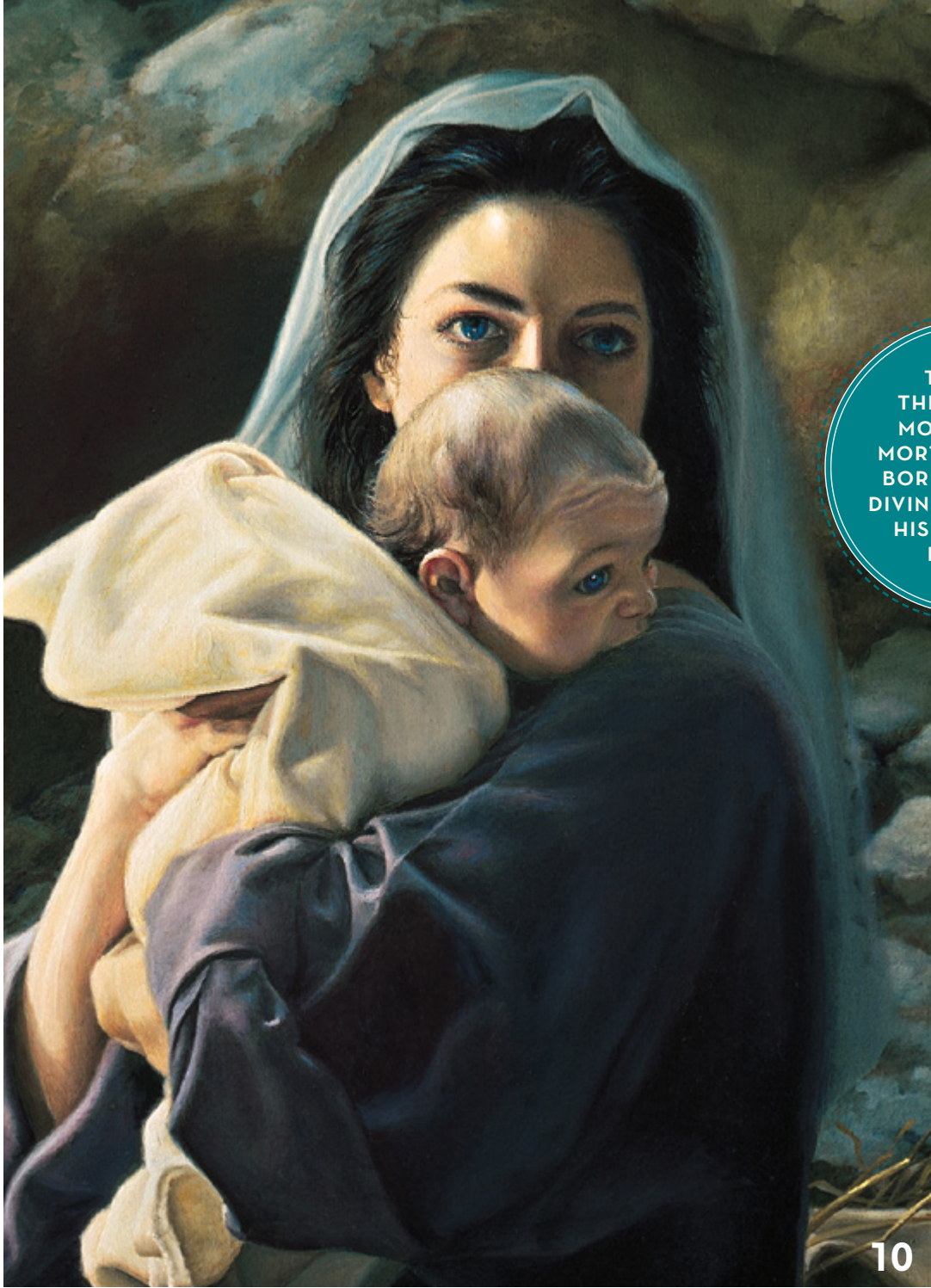
“Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, [the Savior] came forth from heaven to live on earth as a mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. . . . His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “The Real Joy of Christmas,” 2013 Christmas Devotional, lds.org/broadcasts.

9. *“He inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33).*

For ideas on sharing the gospel online, go to lds.org/church/share.





THOUGH THE SAVIOR'S MOTHER WAS MORTAL, HE WAS BORN WITH THE DIVINE NATURE OF HIS HEAVENLY FATHER.

10.

“Our Savior was a God before he was born into this world, and he brought with him that same status when he came here. He was as much a God when he was born into the world as he was before. But as far as this life is concerned it appears that he had to start just as all other children do and gain his knowledge line upon line” (President Joseph Fielding Smith [1876-1972], Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith [2013], 314).

Read Alma 7:10-13. How does knowing that Jesus Christ was born with mortal and divine attributes help you draw closer to Him as you study His Atonement?



MORTAL AND DIVINE

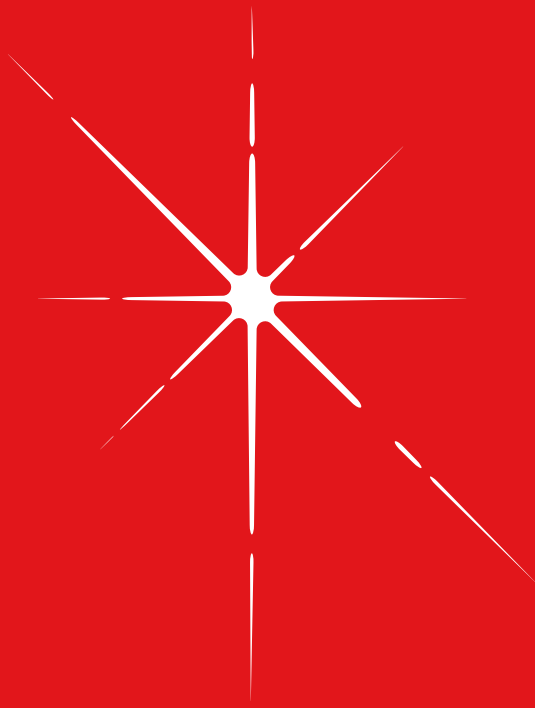
“He was the one perfect man to walk the earth. . . . His mother was mortal, and from her came an inheritance of the flesh. His Father was immortal, the Great God of the Universe, through whom came His divine nature.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910-2008), “At the Summit of Ages,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 73.

8. SIMEON SPEAKS WHILE HOLDING JESUS, BY PAUL MANN; 9. THE NATIVITY, BY BRIAN CALL; 10. BE IT UNTO ME, BY LIZ LEMON SWINDLE



By Elder
Dallin H. Oaks
Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles



A SAVIOR IS BORN

christmas.mormon.org

At this special time of year, families throughout the Christian world gather to read the scriptural account of the first Christmas, more than 2,000 years ago. In many of these readings, particular emphasis is given to Luke 2:11, the announcement made by an angel to the shepherds who watched over their flocks by night: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

That divine declaration was followed by a description of the sign that would help the shepherds recognize Jesus when they traveled to Bethlehem: “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). These humble shepherds became the first of millions of mortal witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like them, we are invited to be witnesses too.

You may ask, isn’t the opportunity to be a witness reserved for those men selected by the Lord and called to serve as His Apostles? The answer is no. Apostles are called and ordained to be “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23), but the duty to witness and testify of Christ at all times and in all places applies to every member of the Church (see Mosiah 18:9).

We live in a world where the power and influence of God in our daily lives are downplayed and dismissed and where the need for a Savior is ignored and even mocked. For those who are devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, there has never been a greater need for us to profess our faith in our Savior, privately and publicly.

The world needs a Savior. All people need to be cleansed from the effects of sin and to return to the presence of God. Jesus Christ is the Light and Life of the World. This Christmas season, each of us will have many opportunities to proclaim our belief in Him to friends and neighbors, fellow workers, and casual acquaintances. I hope we will take these opportunities to express our love for Him, to bear our witness of His divine mission, and to renew our determination to serve Him. As we do, we join “a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13–14). NE



Sharing This Year's Christmas Video

A video with testimonies of children and youth from around the world can be found at christmas.mormon.org. Share your own testimony of the Savior using the social media hashtag #ASaviorIsBorn.



#ASaviorIsBorn

Unto
you



Unto
me

Unto all
of us



From
Humbug
to
Happy

It took a question from our Scrooge of a janitor to help me find the joy in Christmas again.

By Makayla Steiner

When I was a little girl, I thought Christmas was heaven on earth. Between cookies and candy, parties and presents, everything was perfect. Everything waited for me to tear it open or munch on it.

In the midst of all this, my mother said, “Remember that Jesus is the reason for the season.” She went with us to sing carols to the ward members. She would suggest that we part with a few of our precious cookies and give them to a neighbor or a teacher. All of this service was of little interest to me. I wanted to go to Christmas parties.

As I progressed into my teenage years, Christmas lost the sparkle and magic. My parents had divorced, and we had moved away from my grandparents and my friends.

It became a hassle. I hated having to split my holidays between homes, and I was annoyed that I had to participate in my new stepfamily’s traditions. The neighbors were extra sweet and thoughtful at Christmas—almost too sweet and thoughtful, it seemed to me.

As a senior in high school, I decided that I was going to try harder to focus on that cliché about Christmas. I was going to find a way to appreciate the “reason for the season.” I offered to help with my high school’s Festival of Trees.

Each year various clubs and sports teams raised money, decorated a tree, and bought gifts for every member of a family they sponsored. For one week before Christmas break, the trees were put on display for the community. At the end



of the week, the families being sponsored were invited to a special program to have treats and pick up their trees.

All along I found that changing my attitude was harder than I'd expected. By the time the night of the party came I never wanted to see another Christmas tree or curly ribbon again. I'd even had my fill of Christmas carols. But the party came anyway.

I glanced at my watch and at Kim, my co-chair for the evening. I reviewed the commons area and went through my mental checklist. Everything looked good. I breathed a sigh of relief as I saw the first family timidly walk in the front doors. Whipping out my trusty list, I walked toward them, grinned, and said, "Merry Christmas! This is your host. She'll take you to your tree."

The evening went great. Even I was enjoying myself, I found.

I had just turned to tell a host that the last family was there when I noticed one of our janitors, Jay, standing beside me.

"Hi, Jay. Do you need my help with something?"

"No. But I do have a question for you."

He hesitated so long that I finally nodded and said,

"Okay, what's that?"

"What is it that you know that I don't?"

"I'm sorry?"

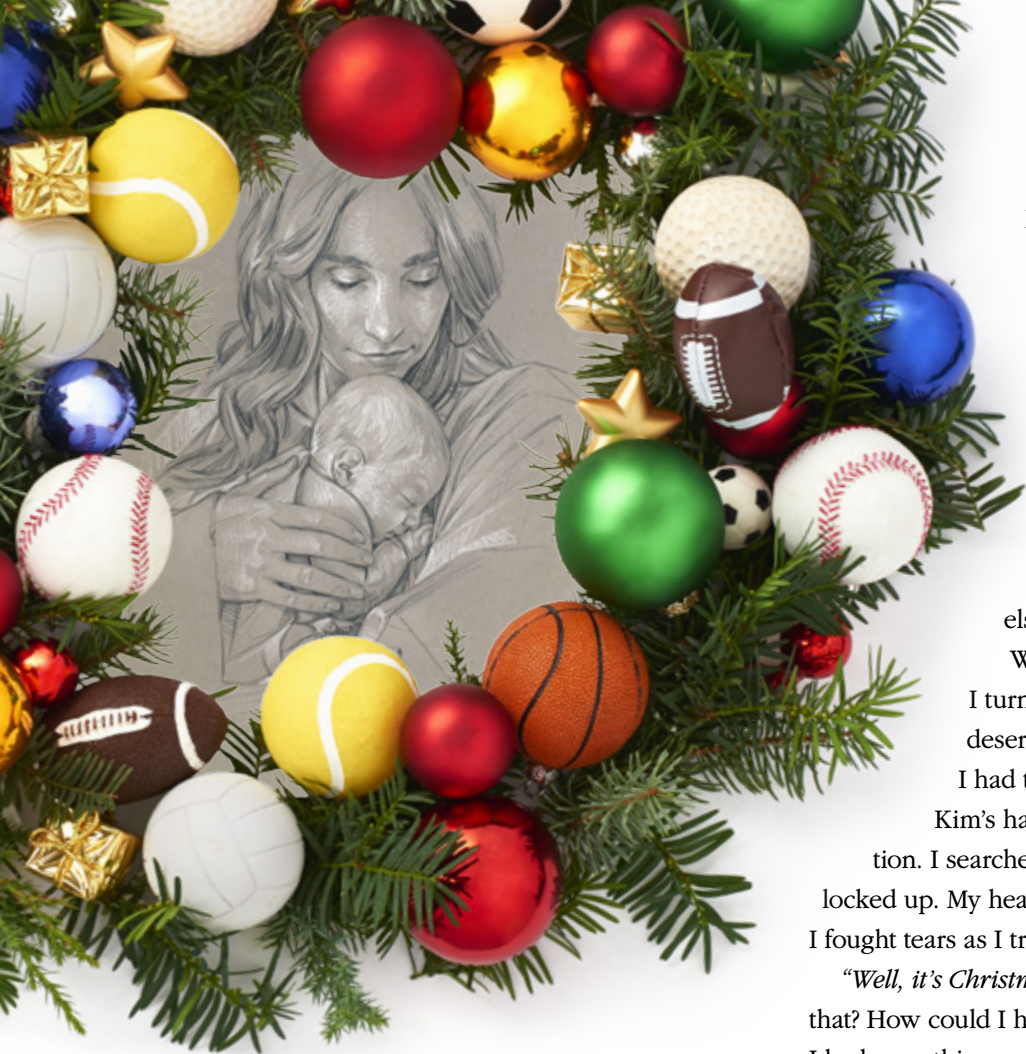
"You must know something that I don't know, because you haven't quit smiling, and I can't figure out why."

I gave him a funny look and said, "Well, it's Christmastime, Jay."

All along I found that changing my attitude was harder than I'd expected.

He stared blankly at me for a moment, muttered something I didn't quite catch, and shuffled off toward the janitor's closet.





As I watched him walk away, I thought about how often he described Christmas as just a holiday for kids who didn't get what real life was like. Jay had experienced many disappointments in life and hardly ever seemed happy.

At that moment I had what the Prophet Joseph Smith described as a stroke of "pure intelligence" when I realized

Christmas is an opportunity to feel love and kindness in a world that may sometimes seem dreary and hopeless. I was in the middle of a program to ease the burdens of the poor families in my community, and I knew I had done a good job. But I also knew that I had missed someone. There was a man in that crowd who needed that love and hope just as much, if not more, than everyone else there, and I had shrugged him off.

With this realization fresh on my mind, I turned to see if Jay was still around. He deserved an answer. I couldn't see him, but I had to find him. I thrust my checklist into Kim's hands and hurried off with no explanation. I searched every inch of the school that wasn't locked up. My heart sank as I realized that he was gone. I fought tears as I trudged back to the commons area.

"Well, it's Christmastime, Jay." What kind of answer was that? How could I have been so insensitive? Jay knew that I had something more, but I had not really answered him.

The moment I got home I knew what I had to do. I sat down and wrote Jay the most sincere Christmas card I have ever given anyone. He had been the key influence in my epiphany about the reason for Christmas, and he deserved to know what I knew. I left the card for him at the school office.

At that moment I had what the Prophet Joseph Smith described as a stroke of "pure intelligence" when I realized Jay was right.

Jay was right (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 132). I did know something Jay didn't know, but until then I had not really let it sink in.

I knew there is a God in heaven who loved me enough to send His Son to be born in a lowly manger, live a life of intense trial, and be resurrected and atone for my sins so that I could have happiness and hope. I had a knowledge of the reality of the Savior. I knew why we celebrate Christmas: so people who are followers of Christ would be reminded of who and why He is, and also that they might be reminded of their commitment to strive to be like Him.

I have no idea what Jay thought of that card, or if he even read it. I saw him a few more times before Christmas break, then off and on for the rest of the year, but he never said anything to me. But every time I walked past him the hope rose in my heart that maybe, just maybe, his Christmas had been a little lighter because I answered his question. And I know my Christmases will be forever changed, because I came to realize for myself that focusing on Christ as the "reason for the season" is so much more than a cliché. **NE**

Makayla Steiner lives in Iowa, USA.

Why Do I Need to Know

JOSEPH SMITH IS A PROPHET?



By Joshua J. Perkey
Church Magazines

Think about it. Everything you know in the Church, everything you believe, everything you do, really hinges on this question: Was Joseph Smith really called as a prophet? If the answer is yes, then the Church really is true, the Book of Mormon really is a book of holy scripture, the doctrines of the Church are true, and the Church really is led by prophets today. That pretty much affects every aspect of your life.

Still not sure? Here's a little quiz that illustrates the point. Which of the following doctrines and principles were taught by Joseph Smith, revealed through him, or made clear by his teachings?

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

1. God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate beings.
2. Heavenly Father answers prayers and takes an active role in our lives.
3. God calls prophets and apostles today to lead and guide us in His work.
4. The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price are true scripture.
5. Priesthood authority and power reside in the Church.
6. Mormon, Moroni, Alma, Nephi, Lehi, and many other individuals in the Book of Mormon were real people.
7. Jesus Christ visited the Americas and taught His gospel to the people there.
8. Priesthood blessings can provide comfort and heal the sick.

9. There are three degrees of heaven, and the highest is the celestial kingdom.
10. We lived with God before we were born.
11. God's grace can bless me now and in the future.
12. There really is a purpose to life: to become like Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father through our choices and with Their help.
13. God is more powerful than the adversary.
14. Youth can receive callings and receive priesthood authority to serve.
15. The Word of Wisdom is a true principle.
16. Great blessings come when we keep the law of tithing.
17. Fasting with a purpose draws us closer to God.

18. All people will be resurrected with spirit and body reunited forever in an immortal frame.
19. Families can be together forever through the sealing ordinances in the temple.
20. The leaders of my class or quorum, ward, and stake have been called of God.

How many principles did you check? The truth is, Joseph really did teach or reveal *all* of those things, and most of them are things people in his day did not know before he taught them.

So if you really want to know who you are, where you came from, and what God has in store for you in life, you really need to know that Joseph Smith was called as a true prophet. Knowing that leads you closer to Jesus Christ, and that makes all the difference. **NE**

THEY KNEW JOSEPH

What kind of a man was Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration? We can learn more about him by reading what those who met him and those who knew him well had to say about him.

NON-MORMONS WHO MET JOSEPH

Many non-Mormons who met Joseph were impressed. For example, Josiah Quincy, a Harvard graduate and soon-to-be mayor of Boston, visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. He said Joseph was a “phenomenon to be explained,” a man born to lead, “of commanding appearance . . . whom it seemed natural to obey.” He said that future textbooks might refer to Joseph Smith as exerting “powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen.”¹

RECENT CONVERTS WHO MET HIM

Converts who met Joseph for the first time also expressed admiration. Five days after arriving in Nauvoo from England, William Clayton wrote home: “Last night many of us [were] in company with Brother Joseph, our hearts rejoiced to hear him speak of the things of the Kingdom, he is an affectionate man and as familiar as any of us. We feel to love him much and so will you.”²

Mary Alice Cannon Lambert, who was 14 when she arrived in Nauvoo, said, “Several of the leading brethren were there to meet the company of saints that had come on [the boat]. Among those brethren was the Prophet Joseph Smith. I knew him the instant my eyes rested upon him, and at that moment I received my testimony that he was a Prophet of God.”³

You can read more about Joseph Smith in chapters 43 and 47 of Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith. The statements there will help you get to know the Prophet Joseph.



PEOPLE WHO KNEW HIM WELL

John M. Bernhisel, an early member of the Church, was a doctor. He boarded in the Smiths' home for several months. He said Joseph Smith had "strong mental powers," lots of energy, "a profound knowledge of human nature," "calm judgment," "enlarged views," and a "love of justice." "He is kind and obliging, generous and benevolent, sociable and cheerful, and is possessed of a mind of a contemplative and reflective character. He is honest, frank, fearless and independent, and as free from [false appearances] as any man to be found."⁴

Howard Coray, one of Joseph's clerks, was impressed by the Prophet's ability to meet with all types of people—doctors, lawyers, priests, and others—who came to "ask hard questions." He wrote that Joseph "was always equal to the occasion. . . . I was truly gratified, at seeing how much at ease he always was, even in the company of the most scientific, and the ready [prompt, prepared] manner in which he would answer their questions."⁵

Daniel D. McArthur, who later led a handcart company to the Salt Lake Valley, said, "My testimony is that he was a true Prophet of the living God; and the more I heard his sayings and saw his doings the more I was convinced that he had of a truth seen God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ."⁶



PROPHETS WHO KNEW HIM

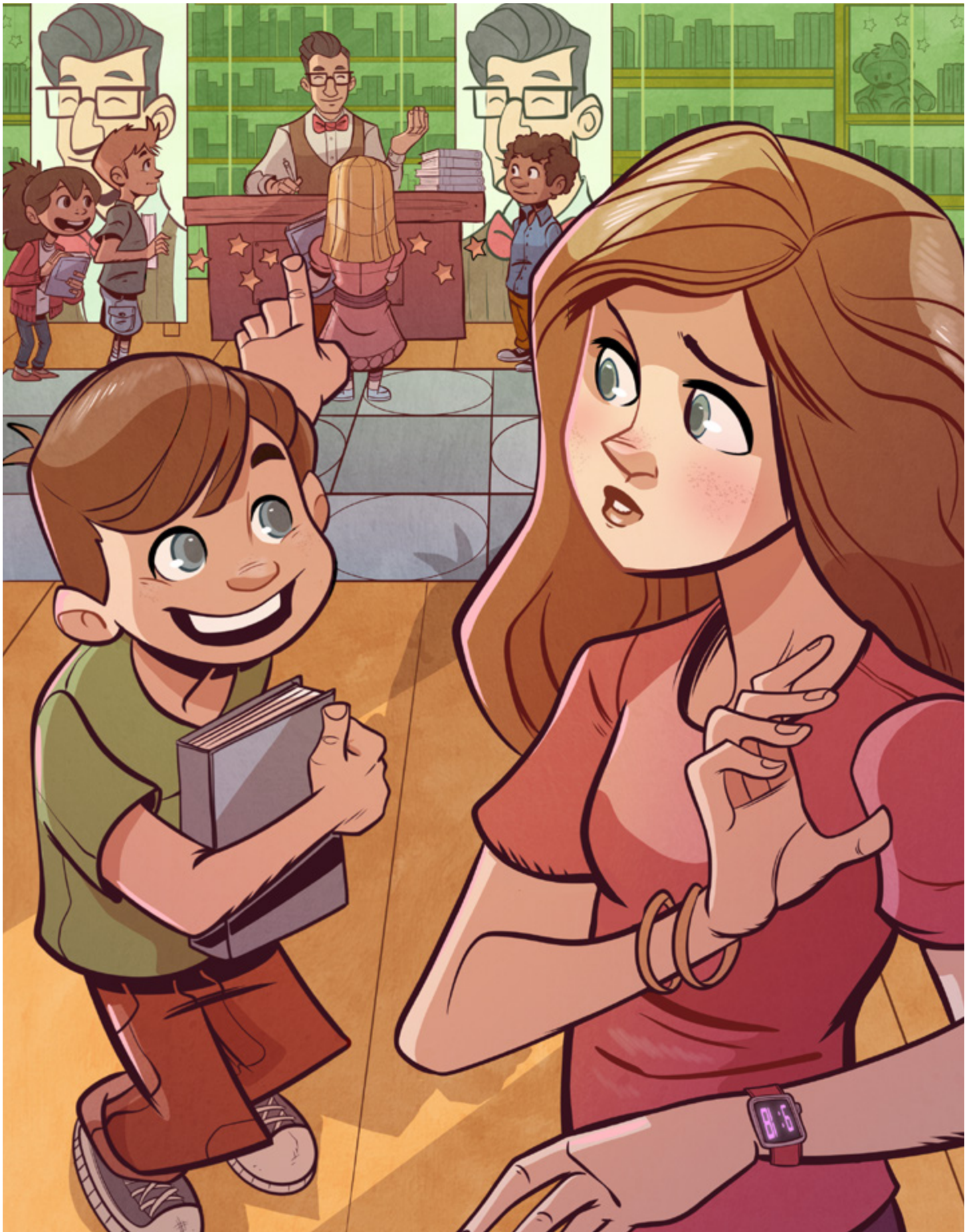
John Taylor, who became the third President of the Church, said, "If you were to ask Joseph what sort of . . . man Adam was, he would tell you at once; he would tell you his size and appearance and all about him. You might have asked him what sort of men Peter, James and John were, and he could have told you. Why? Because he had seen them."⁷

The Prophet's nephew, Joseph F. Smith, became the sixth President of the Church. He wrote that Joseph Smith "was brimming over with the noblest and purest of human nature, which often gave vent in innocent amusements—in playing ball, in wrestling with his brothers . . . and enjoying himself; . . . he was full of joy; he was full of gladness, he was full of love, and of every other noble attribute that makes men great and good, and at the same time simple and innocent; . . . he had power, by the grace of God, to comprehend the purposes of the Almighty too. That was the character of the Prophet Joseph Smith."⁸ **NE**

NOTES

1. Josiah Quincy, "Joseph Smith at Nauvoo," *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals*, 3rd ed. (1883), 376–400; see also Richard L. Bushman, "The Character of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2003), 29–30.
2. Bushman, "The Character of Joseph Smith," 33.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 496.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 498–99.
5. Bushman, "The Character of Joseph Smith," 29.
6. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 496.
7. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 103.
8. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 499.





Unexpectedly AWESOME

MY LITTLE BROTHER CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE.

By Alex D. Malouf

The link jumped out at me from the computer screen. My little brother Ethan's favorite author was coming to our local library in just a few weeks. Ethan would love this! Imagining his excitement, I clicked the link but then sighed. The event was on a school night—and would be in the way of homework and sleep.

My first impulse was to keep the news to myself. I had early-morning seminary the day after the event and would really need the sleep I'd lose if we went. After arguing with myself for several minutes, a prompting to tell Ethan about it won over.

I called out to Ethan, who ran quickly over to me. "Look who's coming to the library," I said while pointing at the computer screen.

Ethan let out a gasp and began dancing wildly around the room. "He's coming to our library?" he asked. Without waiting for my answer, he hurried to ask Mom's permission to go. Returning only a few moments later with a yes, he asked, "Are you coming too?"

I still hesitated at the thought of a late night and a tough morning. But the eagerness on Ethan's face made it impossible for me to disappoint him. "OK," I said and smiled in spite of myself.

He shouted excitedly as he pumped his fist in the air.

Over the next several weeks, Ethan constantly talked about the author event. He kept trying to think of new ways he could talk about it with his friends, and he asked over and over again how many days were left until it happened.

When the day finally came, I followed Ethan into the library. I couldn't help but smile as he clutched one

of the author's books in his arms. There was a long line of people, and I worried we'd come too late to get a good seat. Luckily, after some shuffling we found a spot where we could watch the author speak from a video projection.

When the author finished, people flooded out of the room to get in line for the book signing. We had to wait another hour to get to the front of the line, but Ethan finally got his book signed.

Once outside, I glanced at my watch and gulped. It was late.

Ethan turned. "He's the coolest person in the world," he said, giving me a toothy grin, "but he's not as awesome as you are."

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Matthew 16:25.

His words hit me so unexpectedly that I almost stopped walking out of pure shock. What I received in return for the sleep I gave up was far greater than any sacrifice I'd made. I'd strengthened my relationship with my brother and also gained a new perspective of myself. I walked away from that library glad to have gone and feeling like I was on top of the world. **NE**
Alex D. Malouf lives in Washington, USA.



By Elder Jörg
Klebingat
Of the Seventy

Things I Learned as a **YOUNG CONVERT**

When I was new in the Church, I saw a great example of sacrifice from the other youth in my ward. From that point onward, I have learned many great lessons.

I joined the Church when I was 17 years old. I had been introduced to it through Americans from a military base in my hometown in Germany. There was no German-speaking ward in my area, so I attended church with the Americans at the military base in the little multidenominational army chapel.

One Sunday not long after I was baptized, at the end of the services, the bishop stood up and asked, “Can all the parents with seminary students please remain behind?” He also asked me to join them.

Once these families, the bishop, and I were the only ones remaining in the chapel, the bishop explained that I was eligible to join their seminary class for the next school year. But I attended the local German school, which started over an hour earlier than the American school that all of the youth from the military base attended. In order for me to have enough time to race down the hill to get to my school on time, they would have to move their seminary class to 6:00 a.m., more than an hour earlier than they had been meeting.

The bishop then asked everyone to vote on whether they would be willing to make this sacrifice so that I could join the class. Immediately, all the parents and all the students raised their hands and said yes.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID STOKER



The bishop asked everyone to vote on holding seminary an hour earlier so that I could attend. They all said yes.



That was quite an impressive moment for me. It taught me a lesson about sacrifice. These young students were willing to personally sacrifice their own comfort—not only for a day or a week but for the whole school year—on behalf of a new convert who otherwise could not have participated in seminary.

I'm still grateful for their sacrifice, realizing how important that one year of seminary (studying the Doctrine and Covenants) was for my early life in the Church. Without seminary I wouldn't have had much contact with the Church except on Sunday. Daily seminary was a great preparation for a mission. It taught me a lot about discipline, and, of course, it blessed me to no end in my knowledge of the gospel and the scriptures. Ask me all the Doctrine and Covenants scripture mastery verses from back then, and I will still know them. These experiences helped me to draw closer to Heavenly Father and also helped me to deal with the challenges of being the only German-speaking member of the Church in my town.

Commune with God

After I finished school and before I went on a mission, I completed mandatory military service. While I was in the military, I picked up a habit that I've kept to this day: to pray always.

Obviously, the environment in the military wasn't always very spiritual—the lockers, the pictures, the talk, the movies people watched at night. But I knew I was going to go on a mission. I wanted to stay strong. I didn't want to fall. I didn't want to give in to peer pressure. So I developed a habit of praying in my heart all the time.

Walking from building to building, going up and down hills in the forests, lying in the foxholes, playing war games—wherever I was, I would engage with Heavenly Father in prayer whenever I could, filling minutes and sometimes hours by communing or talking with Heavenly Father in order to draw close to Him and stay strong. Mostly, I would just give thanks.

This habit is still with me. When I'm driving somewhere or sitting in a bus or walking someplace, it has become natural for me to always have a prayer in my heart or to “pray always” as the scriptures say (see, for instance, 2 Nephi 32:9). That's a good habit to develop at an early age.

We know we're supposed to say our prayers, but that doesn't just mean kneeling for a brief moment in the morning and at night as a favor to Heavenly Father. Prayer should turn into an honest, deep, and ongoing communion with your Father, which, over time, will help you draw closer and closer to Him. Developing this habit of prayer will help you face all of the temptations out there in the world (see 3 Nephi 18:15, 18). So, when you're going from point A to point B, or whenever you have a free moment, consider spending less time listening to music or texting and a little more time praying in your heart.

Apply the Atonement of Jesus Christ at All Times

As you continue to pray and to learn the gospel, you will find that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to you every hour of every day in order to help you “retain a remission of your sins” (see Mosiah 4:11–12). You can go before Heavenly Father to access this power and be made clean literally at any time, not just on Sunday, not just when you go to the bishop to confess something serious.

The Lord means for you to draw upon the Atonement of Jesus Christ daily so that you can become clean and worthy, feel the Spirit, and be guided all the time rather than having constant ups and downs. By drawing upon the Atonement every day, you can have this blessing no matter what mistakes you may have made in the past. Many youth feel that repentance consists only of going to the bishop and telling him about serious sins. But repentance is a lot more. It means making a humble, consistent, prayerful, daily effort to (1) study the scriptures, especially those that teach about the Atonement of Christ, and then (2) learn how to actually apply it in your life every moment of every day. That is what it's for. Let Heavenly Father know every day that this is what you want—to be better today than you were yesterday.

and striving to keep the commandments and apply the Atonement every day, *all the time*. As the Apostle Paul said, “Examine yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). But once you learn about the Atonement and how to draw upon it, you'll find that you can feel the Lord's love despite your shortcomings.

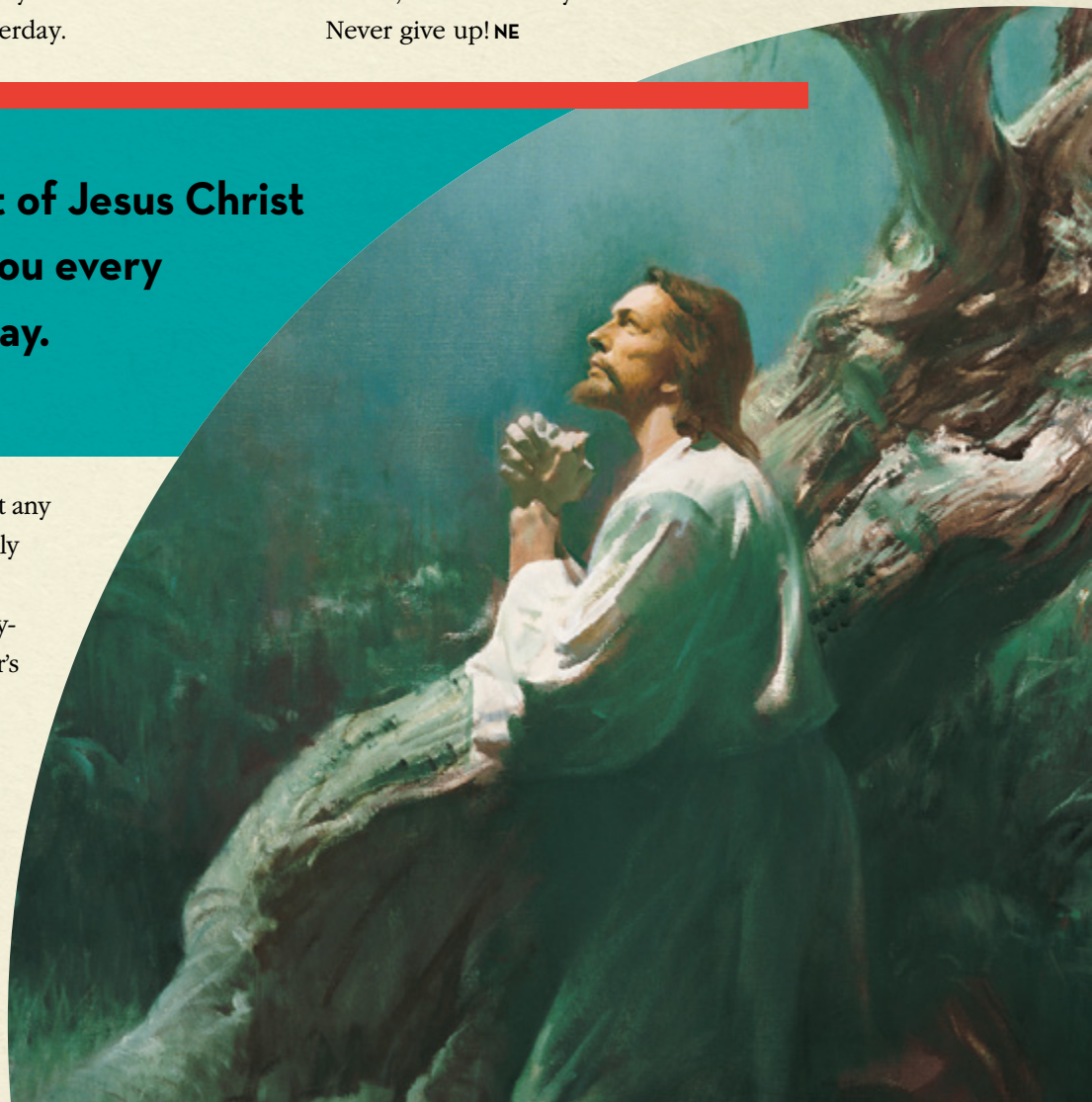
Understand who you are, and understand who Christ is and what He did for you. Then put those two things together so that you can be clean all the time and have confidence in yourself and in Heavenly Father and the Savior. Then, by extension, you will have a good sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

In time, these are things I began to learn as a young convert, and they have blessed my life greatly. As you sacrifice, study, and strive to stay close to Heavenly Father, He will bless you as well.

Never give up! **NE**

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to you every hour of every day.

Don't allow the adversary to put any distance between you and Heavenly Father by causing you to feel that you're not good enough, that everybody else is better—as if the Savior's Atonement and His love and approbation were dangled in front of you but never reachable. That just isn't true. Heavenly Father loves you just as you are today, but, of course, you *always* have to keep improving




SUNDAY LESSONS

.....
 This Month's Topic:
**Building the Kingdom
 of God in the
 Latter Days**

The **NEW GUY**

*I was the only active priest in my new ward.
 How was I going to get other priests to church?*

By Matthew Flitton

Church Magazines

When my family moved a few months after I turned 18, I found myself in a new ward and facing a challenge. Within two weeks of my moving in, almost all of the priests were made elders. I was also called to be the first assistant in the priests quorum.

In giving me this calling, the bishop explained that there were a lot of priests on the roll, but almost no one showed up. We had a lot of work to do to encourage people to attend.

“Just invite people to come,” he said.

Only one other priest came to church, a guy named Ryan, who showed up a couple times each month. I decided to go knock on doors of our less-active quorum members and invite them to our activities. I was nervous, afraid that they'd get upset at me for inviting them to church. I figured they weren't coming because they didn't like church. But I also figured it was good practice for my upcoming mission to try to invite, so I gritted my teeth and started

calling the other priests or stopping by their houses. I invited them to firesides, to activities, to church.

What surprised me was that some actually responded and came. We eventually had a group of four priests who started coming on a regular basis. It wasn't that they didn't like church—they had just been waiting for an invitation to come. They were just as nervous about a new situation—attending church—as I had been.

Some activities were more successful than others. Everyone showed up for volleyball, but I struggled to get people to attend other activities.

Youth conference that year was especially rewarding as I watched some of these young men stand up and bear their testimonies. I felt like I had made a difference in their lives.

One of the differences I saw was that Ryan was attending church every week and we had become good friends.

Ryan and I both received the Melchizedek Priesthood about six months after I moved in. I had chosen to wait until after my mission to attend college so I could work to save for my mission. Ryan was already established in a trade, and he decided not to go to college either. After work we often hung out together.

Once, we stayed up most of the night trying to get through the book of Alma as Ryan read the Book of Mormon for the first time. It was exhausting but spiritually energizing. It was also great to see the changes



ILLUSTRATION BY GREG NEWBOLD

Ryan was making in his life. He gave up old habits, created better ones, and changed some of his friends so he could be with people who shared his standards.

I had been looking forward to my mission since I had started going to church a few years before. Ryan wasn't sure if he would go. While hanging out, we discussed my mission and my excitement to serve. As I encouraged him and answered gospel questions, I gained more confidence in my own abilities to serve as a missionary. Ryan was old enough to go but struggled with his decision.

"I wasn't sure if my testimony was strong enough, even though I felt

good about the Church at the time," he said. "I did want to go, but it was really difficult to leave family."

The day finally came when I could start filling out my mission papers. When I told Ryan, he surprised me by saying he had decided to serve as well. Our mission calls arrived on the same night. Ryan left to serve in Canada a month before I started my mission in France.

When I came home two years later, I looked up all the priests

I had worked with. It saddened me to learn that some had stopped going to church shortly after I left, but I was happy to see Ryan again. He had served an honorable mission, and just as with Alma and the sons of Mosiah, I had more joy to see that he was still my brother in the Lord (see Alma 17:2). **NE**

It wasn't that they didn't like church—they had just been waiting for an invitation to come.





By Karee Brown

Do you wish you could fly like a super hero and save the world, but you're afraid of heights? Maybe you dream about sailing around the world in a boat, but you're afraid of deep water. You probably have many righteous desires and goals. Do you ever feel like your fears stop you from sailing off to great heights?

Katelyn B., 16, from Missouri, USA, was working on her Personal Progress when she noticed some of the projects she had set felt a little too easy to accomplish. So she decided she needed to challenge herself to do something greater and perhaps a little more meaningful. Little did she know she would also have to face one of her fears: speaking in public. Maybe not such a scary thing for some people, but for Katelyn it certainly was.

Reaching Out

As Katelyn thought about setting a Personal Progress project goal for divine nature, she thought a lot about creating a project that could take her out of her comfort zone and really push her. She asked her leaders for ideas and one suggested visiting little girls in hospitals. Katelyn initially wanted to forget the idea. What would she even say to them?

But as Katelyn tried to think of a different project, her mind kept going back to those little girls. *They are daughters of God like me*, she thought. *Maybe I could help some of them*. She still felt the fear, but realizing she couldn't push the feeling off any further, she got to work planning. Just a couple months later she began dressing up like a princess

*One young woman learned
more about divine nature by
embracing her inner princess.*

on her way to uplift and inspire the girls she visits in the hospital.

“Going to the hospital for the first time was one of the hardest things I have done,” Katelyn says. “It’s hard for me to talk to people I don’t know. But after the little girls saw me and began smiling, I felt peace. I knew it was what I needed to be doing.”

The glitter from Katelyn’s dress caught the little girls’ attention as she walked into the hospital rooms. This unexpected visit from a princess brightened their day. “They need to know they are important too,” she recounts.

Her goal was to help them smile as they engaged in fun activities and to encourage them to keep going.

“You really are a princess, whether you think you look like a princess or not,” says Katelyn. With a new perspective on divine nature, Katelyn learned to see these girls as daughters of God with great potential.

Finding Her Worth

That was a lesson for Katelyn. She had had difficulty seeing this kind of potential in herself. As a Beehive, she looked up to the other young women, but she didn’t feel like she had anything to contribute to her Beehive class. At school she felt pressure to try to be popular and fit in. “It’s hard when other people try to tell me what I am supposed to look like, act like, and do well at.”

One night for Mutual each young woman received a piece of paper with a name on it. The paper was passed around the room and each young woman wrote talents, abilities, or admirable traits about the young woman whose name was on the paper. As Katelyn read the kind words that the other Beehives wrote about her, she realized that the other girls saw talents and gifts that she had never seen in herself. That experience, coupled with her efforts visiting the hospital, “have taught me a lot about my role here.”

Fulfilling Her Divine Role

Now Katelyn is trying to find more ways to fulfill her role by using her talents to serve, lift, and bless others. She feels like the more she does now, the better prepared she will be as a wife, mother, leader, and in her future career. Katelyn’s princess project not only gave her an opportunity to help others feel loved and valued, but it also gave an opportunity to grow. As she focused more on lifting others and less on herself, she became more confident in her own worth.

Katelyn is no superhero flying across the sky. She hasn’t done anything to break world records. But visiting her little princesses in hospitals has helped her overcome her fear and realize her true worth as a daughter of God. **NE**

Karee Brown lives in Utah, USA.





How will I be blessed by paying tithing and fast offerings?

What will I gain by attending church?

How will my tithing and fast offerings help build the kingdom of God?

How does my attendance at church show my devotion to the Lord?

What blessings will I receive from a temple marriage?

How will I benefit from being honest?

How will a temple marriage give me an opportunity to serve my spouse and children?

How will my honesty bless others?

What recognition will I receive by serving in this calling?

How will a mission help me?

How does my calling allow me to help strengthen others?

In what ways will I be able to serve others on a mission?

ARE YOU A GETTER or A GIVER?

Have you ever paused to think about *why* you serve others and keep the commandments? This month would be a good time to do that as you study about building the kingdom of God in your lessons at church. You can ask yourself, am I motivated

more by what I can *get* or by what I can *give*?

The questions above will help you see whether you tend to face inward (thinking of yourself) or outward (thinking of others).

It's OK to think about blessings you'll receive, but if you find that

you tend to look inward more than outward, try looking up. President Thomas S. Monson has taught: "Remember that this work is not yours and mine alone. We can look up and reach out for divine help" ("Do Your Duty—That Is Best," *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 58). **NE**

USE IT OR LOSE IT

Weed out the excuses and develop your talents.
You can play a key role in making the world a better place.



By Charlotte Larcabal

Church Magazines

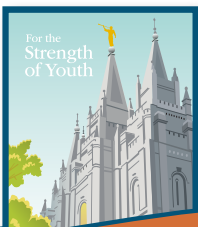
You? A special agent? You better believe it.

Imagine you are a special agent and you are on a deadly, super important mission. You press your earpiece into your ear, listening for the command center . . . but then you remember your earpiece is broken. You meant to get that fixed, but never got around to it. Whoops. Carefully, you ease open a door and then step inside a warehouse. Immediately a man jumps up and starts shouting and waving a gun. You hear others shouting and running. Worst entrance ever! Why didn't you know anything about the security here? Oh well. Just stick to the plan. Oh that's right. There is no plan.

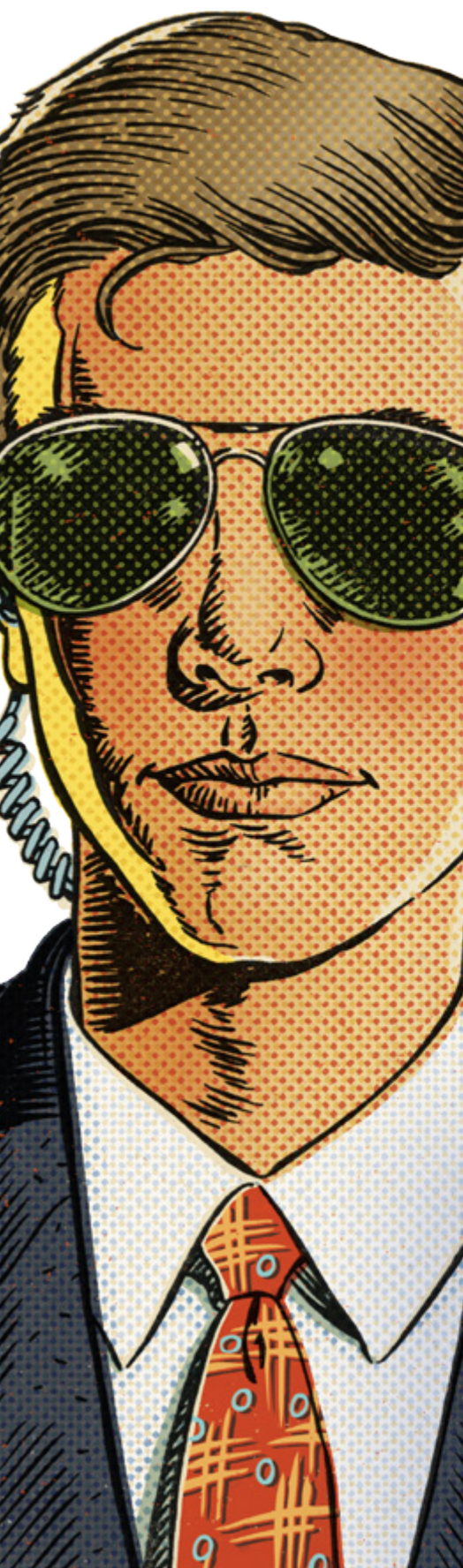
Wait, what? No communication, no information, and no plan? What are you doing out here anyway?

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that running an operation with no communication, information, or a plan is just asking for trouble. If you were a special agent, you would never waltz into a dangerous situation completely unprepared. The thing is, you *are* a special agent. You accepted your mission a long time ago. Like before you can even remember.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN KACHIK



AGENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY



THE MISSION

Before this life, Heavenly Father presented His plan and gave each of us our mission: come to earth, get a body, learn, grow, be tested, and someday return to Him. A big part of His plan is the gift of agency—the ability to choose and act for ourselves. You used your agency way back then, too. You chose to follow Heavenly Father and accept your mission on earth, and now you can choose to accept or reject His plan every day.

While you have total control over every choice you make, you can't control the consequences of those choices. That would be like a special agent choosing to stroll into an enemy camp, and then loudly demanding birthday cake instead of imprisonment. It doesn't work like that! Every choice you make has a natural result, so it's important to choose wisely.

Agency is a gift and a responsibility. All children of God “should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves” (D&C 58:27–28).

You are a special agent of agency. The power is in you—the power to choose, and the power to do a lot of good. If you choose to.

So how do you best use the power of agency? Well, by acting like a special agent.

GATHER INTELLIGENCE

Gathering intelligence is crucial to any operation. Agents want to know as much as possible about the situation, the dangers, the options—anything to help them complete the operation safely and effectively. As agents of agency, you should be gathering intelligence as much as possible too! That doesn't mean surrounding yourself with negative influences or burying yourself in the world to learn more about it. Instead, make sure you are gathering intelligence from the best, most trustworthy sources.

“Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

Education and secular knowledge are important, but Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “We will not make the right eternal choices based solely on our pure intellectual deduction and factual analysis from our own understanding: Prayer and study must be used together to build knowledge and wisdom.”¹

The scriptures and the words of modern prophets are chock full of principles and examples that can help you face all sorts of challenges. A good agent would never ignore that much crucial information!

HAVE A PLAN

A good special agent has a plan, a backup plan, a contingency plan, an escape plan . . . you get the idea. Lots of planning.

Agents of agency are no different. You can start by figuring out what you want. Do you want eternal life? An eternal family? Do you want to serve a mission? Do you want to graduate from college? Write your goals down, and then write down specific steps that will help you achieve them. Think about how everyday decisions can move you closer to or farther from your goals.

Sister Elaine S. Dalton, former Young Women general president, has a great idea: “When I was a young woman, I learned that some decisions need to be made only once. I wrote my list of things I would *always* do and things I would *never* do in a small tablet. It included things like obeying the Word of Wisdom, praying daily, paying my tithing, and committing to never miss church. I made those decisions once, and then in the moment of decision, I knew exactly what to do because I had decided beforehand. . . . I hope each of you will write a list of things you will *always* do and things you will *never* do. Then live your list.”²

You can and should choose *this day* whom you will serve (see Joshua 24:15). Choose it, and plan for it.



KEEP COMMUNICATION LINES OPEN

It's a common battlefield tactic: take out enemy communications. If you can't connect to the command center, you won't know of operation changes, enemy movements, threats, or opportunities.

As an agent of agency, you've got something better than a command center. You have Heavenly Father. He sees all and knows all about your situation, the enemy, and your challenges, capabilities, and potential. So keeping strong communication lines to and from Him is critical. President Brigham Young taught that our “first and

foremost duty [is] to seek the Lord until we open the path of communication from God to our own soul.”³

You wouldn't speak into your radio and then rip out your earpiece, so you shouldn't jump up from your knees as soon as you finish speaking with God. Take time to listen. Check your spiritual earpiece. Is it working? Is there anything in your life that might be blocking transmission? If so, do everything you can to get rid of it.

Pray in the best of times, the worst of times, and the OKest of times. Have patience. Heavenly Father is there and wants to communicate with you.

THE POWER IS IN YOU

This life is the time to prepare to meet God (see Alma 34:32). That's your mission. You already chose to accept it. The risks are many, but so are the blessings. You have the power to choose how you will act today and who you will become tomorrow. You are an agent of agency. That gives you high security clearance to any guidance you need to be successful in any situation. Use your resources, stay close to Heavenly Father, and choose now to always serve the Lord.

This message will self-destruct in five seconds. Good luck. **NE**

NOTES

1. Robert D. Hales, “Making Righteous Choices at the Crossroads of Life,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 10.
2. Elaine S. Dalton, “Guardians of Virtue,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 123.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 41.

How is it fair that most people throughout history haven't had the gospel? And how will they be judged?

This life is a test of our obedience (see Abraham 3:24–26), but most people haven't necessarily had all of God's commandments. So, what are they being tested on? "God judges men according to the use they make of the light which He gives them" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 405).

Those without the gospel still have the Light of Christ (or a conscience), which tells us right and wrong. They will be judged by how they used this Light and any truths they received. "Those who have lived without law, will be judged without law" (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 404), and after hearing the gospel in the spirit world, those "who would have received [the gospel] . . . shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom" (D&C 137:7).

And on the question of fairness, remember that at the Council in Heaven "we were all present and saw . . . the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it" (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 209). We knew what we were agreeing to, regardless of where and when and in what circumstances we would be born. "We shall all of us eventually have to confess that the Judge of all the earth has done right" (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 404). **NE**



When it comes to clothing, how tight is "tight"?

Prophets have counseled us, "Immodest clothing is any clothing that is tight, sheer, or revealing in any other manner" (*For the Strength of Youth* [2011], 7). What does "tight" mean? Do all clothes have to be loose-fitting?

As Elder David A. Bednar has said, you may need to "elevate the question." Instead, you might ask, "What signal do I want to send to God through how I dress?" Elder Bednar also reminded us that as baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we have the right to the gift of the Holy Ghost, who can help us find answers to these questions (see "Face-to-Face with Elder and Sister Bednar," [lds.org/youth/activities](https://www.lds.org/youth/activities)).

Study the principles of modesty, sincerely desiring the blessings of following the prophets' counsel. Talk with parents and leaders. And remember that as you seek the Spirit's guidance and make your own choices, this same Spirit will help you allow those around you to make *their* own choices and receive *their* own answers as we all strive to keep our covenants. **NE**

“I feel inadequate to be a Young Women class president. How can I be a better leader?”

If you feel inadequate when you receive a calling, you’re in good company. Jeremiah, Enoch, and Joseph Smith were all young and all felt inadequate when they received their prophetic calls, but the Lord still used them to further His kingdom. Just as the Lord used prophets of old to accomplish great things, as you pray and rely on Him, He can use you.

Perhaps the best thing you can do for your class members is be their friend. Learn their names. You could pray for them daily and maybe even fast for them if they are struggling. Consider asking about their lives outside of church, smiling and greeting them whenever you see them, and sitting by them at church or at school. Be on the lookout for those who may need extra love and support.

And don’t be afraid to ask for help. Heavenly Father won’t leave you alone—He has given you parents, counselors, and adult advisers. They will help you, and so will He.

As President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said: “Get on your knees and ask for the blessings of the Lord; then stand on your feet and do what you are asked to do. Then leave the matter in the hands of the Lord. You will discover that you have accomplished something beyond price” (“To the Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 114). **NE**

Be a Friend

As a class president, I too felt unqualified. But it’s important to try to make the young women feel loved and included. Be a supportive friend and listen to your counselors when making decisions. Set a righteous example and strive to live the Young Women values, but don’t expect yourself to be perfect. All that Heavenly Father expects is for you to try. If you call on Him, He will give you the strength and direction you need.

Rebecca N., 16, New Hampshire, USA



Serve Willingly

I felt the same thing, since I was the Mia Maid class president.

I can still remember the feeling I had when I entered the bishop’s office for the interview. I could have declined, but I knew that it was not an assignment from my bishop—it was a calling from God. Heavenly Father will help us fulfill our callings if we willingly submit ourselves to Him and are humble.

Nicole P., 16, Philippines

Love Those You Serve

To become a better leader, you must really love those you serve. Letting go of any grudges and forgiving is therefore necessary. You can pray to see their worth as God does. Pray to feel the love He has for you as well as for your class members. I know from experience that Personal Progress can

help you develop the qualities and values necessary to fulfill your calling. God will give you the power you need if you'll ask for that help.

Mary B., 16, Washington, USA



Start Where You Are

You can be a better leader by exercising the qualities you want to

have. Pray for the Spirit to be with you when you make decisions. Pray to pay attention to the needs of the young women. There's a lot you could do to become a better leader, but I found that the first step is always believing that you can.

Savanna P., 15, Texas, USA

Attend the Temple

When I was a newly called deacons quorum president, I wasn't sure how to increase my spirituality. I started doing family history, usually each Sunday. I have been going to the temple every Saturday morning. My goal was to take male baptism and confirmation names as often as I could. After I went to the temple each week, I would feel a little more spiritual, and that way I was able to help my quorum better.

Josh B., 13, Utah, USA

Act on Inspiration

If the Lord has extended a calling to you, it's because there is a work that you can do. We need to ask of God,

as James 1:5 says. By the power of the Holy Ghost, it will be revealed to us what we should do (see 2 Nephi 32:5). With His help, we can "know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:5). Then we need to follow the inspiration we receive. I have a deep conviction that since it's the Lord who guides us, we can all magnify our callings.

Lucy D., 17, France



Plan Edifying Activities

Hold regular meetings with your presidency and plan edifying

activities that meet the girls' needs and interests. When a young woman in your class does not attend, let her know that you missed her. One of the scriptures that has helped me is Mosiah 18:9.

Karen P., 16, Mexico

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



THE LORD CHOSE YOU

"You are called of God. The Lord knows you. He knows whom He would have serve in every position in His Church. He chose you. . . . The person who was inspired to recommend you for this call didn't do it because they liked you or because they needed someone to do a particular task. They prayed and felt an answer that you were the one to be called. . . ."

"You are called to represent the Savior. Your voice to testify becomes the same as His voice, your hands to lift the same as His hands."

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, "Rise to Your Call," Ensign, Nov. 2002, 76.

UPCOMING QUESTION

"I want to invite my cousins to church, but I'm scared their parents will get mad. How can I share my testimony with my cousins?"

Send your answer and photo by January 15, 2016.

Go to newera.lds.org, click "Submit Your Work." Sign in with your LDS Account and then select "New Era" under "Choose Magazine." Click "Add File" to select your file and photos, and then click "Submit" to upload and send us your file.

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.



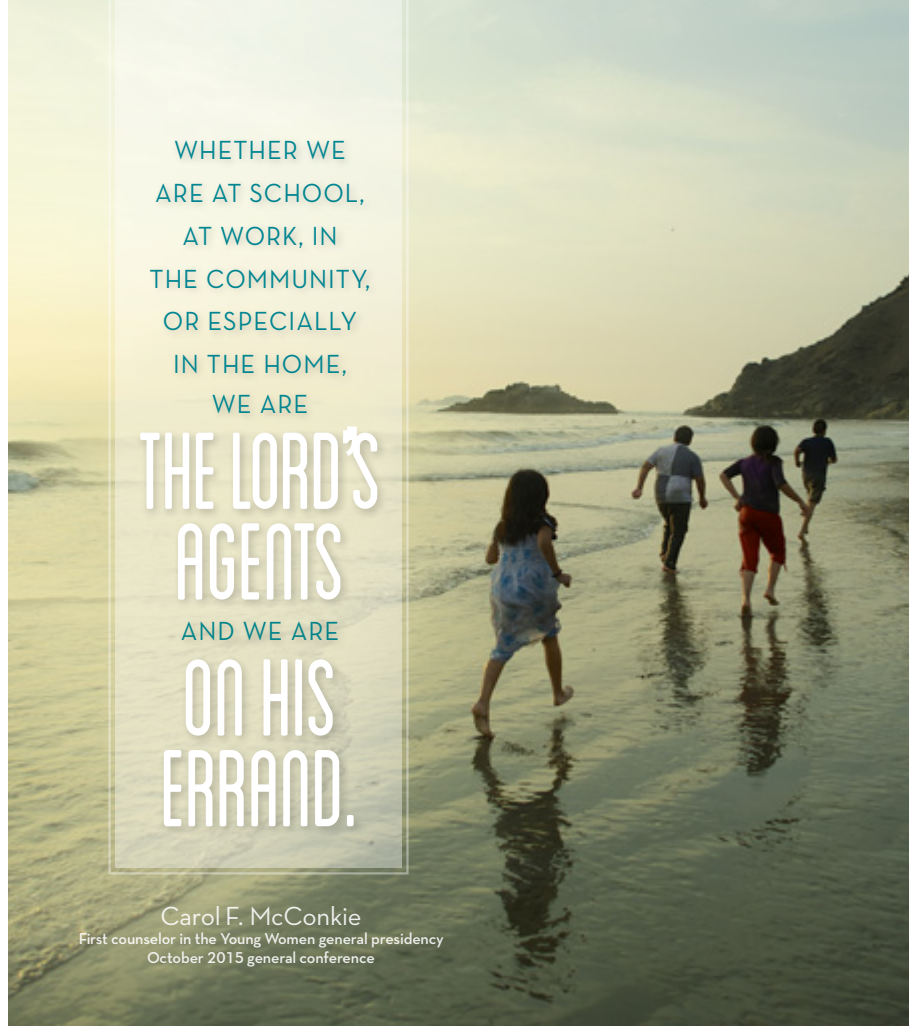
Building the Kingdom of God in the Latter Days

You'll be studying about building the kingdom of God in your Sunday classes this month. As you study and discuss this topic, you may ponder these questions: What does building the kingdom of God mean? What's my role in building God's kingdom in the latter days?

For some answers to these questions, read the scriptures listed in the Topical Guide under "Kingdom of God, on Earth," as well as the entry in the Bible Dictionary under "Kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God." You'll also find teachings on this topic in October 2015 general conference talks at conference.lds.org.

Share These Cards

Give yourself an easy reminder to think about this month's theme. Just place these cards in your scriptures, locker, or bedroom. You can also download or share them online at lds.org/go/cards12NE.



WHETHER WE
ARE AT SCHOOL,
AT WORK, IN
THE COMMUNITY,
OR ESPECIALLY
IN THE HOME,
WE ARE

THE LORD'S
AGENTS
AND WE ARE
ON HIS
ERRAND.

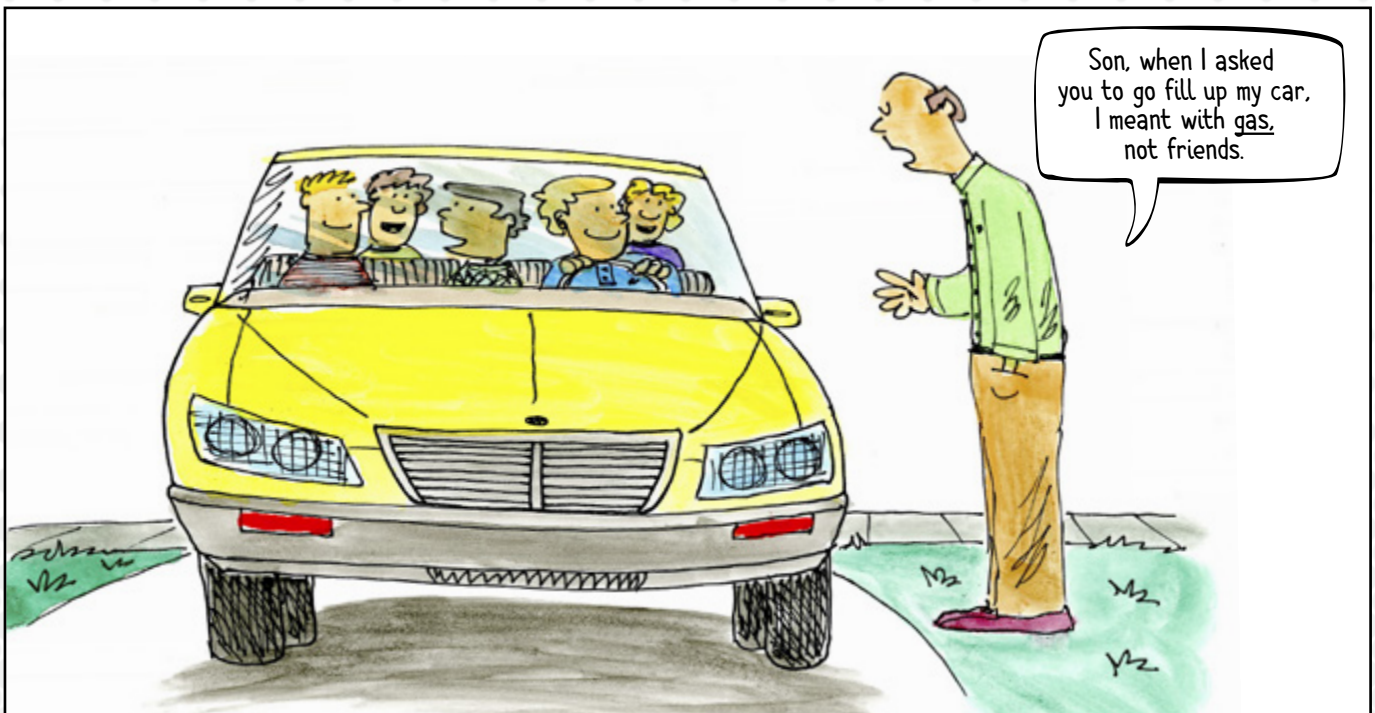
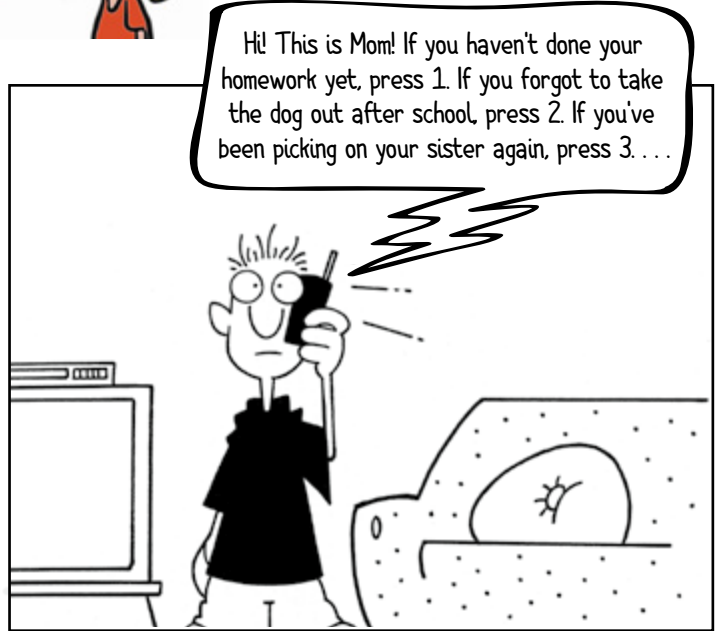
Carol F. McConkie
First counselor in the Young Women general presidency
October 2015 general conference



THIS RELIGION IS NOT CONCERNED
ONLY WITH SELF; RATHER, WE ARE ALL

CALLED TO SERVE.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
October 2015 general conference





A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHARITY

Of all of the passengers on the crowded train, one man caught my eye. He wasn't like the other passengers, who turned their backs to him. He was older, his head was bowed, and he was sitting alone.

I tried to ignore the pulsing of my heart, as the Spirit told me to do something for him. I thought of what I might be able to give him. I didn't have any money, and he already had a jacket. I didn't have anything to give. But the Spirit kept prompting me.

With my heart in my throat, I sat down next to the old man, introduced myself, and we began talking. We were still talking when we pulled into the station.

"This is my stop. It's a pleasure meeting you." I shook his calloused hand. It was a little cold, but it was the gentlest thing I have ever held.

"It was a pleasure talking to ya," he replied.

My heart began to hurt as I turned to leave.

I always thought of charity as giving things to those in need, but I learned how to give pure love and received much more. I realized that charity doesn't revolve around money. Charity is answering the Lord's call to help someone in need.

Amanda D., California, USA

PROM DISASTER AVERTED

On the east coast, it was common to drive down to the New Jersey shore and go to the beach at night after prom. We had the location mapped out and the cars and drivers prepared to make the trip. As the date approached I thought it would be a good idea to run these plans by my mother. She could see I was filled with enthusiasm, but with no hesitation she said, "I don't think it's a good idea. Can you do me a favor and pray about it?"

"Pray about it?" I said. "Why would Heavenly Father care if I go to the beach after the prom?"

I went upstairs and turned on some music, but I wasn't going to pray. I was going to the beach anyway, no matter what she said. But as I lay on my bed, I began to feel a little guilty. So I turned off the music and sat there for a moment pondering the conversation I had had with my mother. I dropped to my knees on the side of my bed and began to pray. I told Heavenly Father about my prom plans, and I asked if He approved of them. Then came a very uncomfortable stupor of thought. I felt like Heavenly Father was saying no. Wow, I thought to myself. I just received personal revelation through prayer.

MY GIFT FROM THE GHETTO

I was wearing the embarrassing Santa Claus sweatshirt and jingle bell necklace my mom had picked out. My mother had served as a chair of an organization that provided limited resources to homeless children. This year she talked me into volunteering at the Christmas party.

When we arrived the director of the program led us into the room where several volunteers were already helping children decorate Christmas cookies, make ornaments for a Christmas tree, and paint stars and angels on white T-shirts.

After we had all sung Christmas carols, eaten the cookies, and read the Christmas story from the Bible, it was time to go. As I sadly waved good-bye from the front door, a little boy ran forward.

I handed him the jingle bell necklace. His wide eyes filled with tears and he whispered in awe, "For me? This is the best Christmas ever!" He wrapped his arms around my neck and said, "I love you."

As he ran off to show his friends his new toy, an overwhelming feeling of the true meaning of Christmas filled my heart with love.

Though the small gift I gave Markus did not cost a lot, his gift of love toward me was priceless. Moroni 7:47 says that "charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever."

That Christmas, a five-year-old boy allowed me to sample the greatest gift of all.

Autumn M., Utah, USA



It was not exactly the answer I was looking for, but I *had* received an answer, so I followed it. As it turned out, there was immorality, drugs, and alcohol that night after prom. It was not where I needed to be. The most important event that night was when a 17-year-old boy received an answer to his prayers and gained more faith in his Heavenly Father's plan.

E. J. C., Utah, USA



By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf
Second Counselor in
the First Presidency

HOW TO SEE THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

When we prepare for Christmas by pondering its real meaning, we prepare to experience the Christ and His message. May I suggest three things we may want to study, ponder, and apply in this season of preparation.

First, **rejoice in the birth of our Savior.** We celebrate the birth of the Son of God, the Creator, our Messiah. We rejoice that the King of kings came to earth, was born in a manger, and lived a perfect life. When Jesus was born, the joy in heaven was so great it could not be contained (see Luke 2:8–14).

Second, **ponder His influence in our lives today.** Christmas is a time for remembering the Son of God and renewing our determination to take upon us His name. It is a time to reassess our lives and examine our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Let this be a time of remembrance, of gratitude, and a time of forgiveness. Let it be a time to ponder the Atonement of Jesus Christ and its meaning for each of us personally. Let it especially be a time of renewal and recommitment to live by the word of God and to obey His commandments. By doing this, we honor Him far more than we ever could with lights, gifts, or parties.

Third, **look steadfastly for His coming.** While the Christmas season is typically a time for looking back and celebrating the birth of our Lord, it seems to me that it should also be a time of looking to the future. Let us look forward. Let us prepare for that blessed day when He will come again. Let us be as wise as those ancients who watched for His coming.

I pray that during this season and always, we will **see the purity of the story** of the Savior's birth and **feel sincere gratitude** for His life, teachings, and saving sacrifice for us. May this gratitude cause us to **renew our determination** to follow Him. May it also lead us to **draw closer** to our family, our church, and our fellowmen. And may we look steadfastly forward to that blessed day when the resurrected Christ will walk the earth again as our Lord, our King, and our blessed Savior. **NE**

From the 2010 First Presidency Christmas Devotional.



HOW HAVE YOU APPLIED THIS?


Several Christmases ago, my grandma asked all her children and grandchildren to serve others on her behalf. My sisters knitted baby hats and served at an animal sanctuary, and my brother put up a widow's Christmas lights. I found family names and took them to the temple. We all wrote Grandma letters describing our experiences—tears shone in her eyes as she read them on Christmas morning. I felt grateful for my grandma's example and realized that as I had "by love serve[d]" others (Galatians 5:13), I had gained more charity and felt closer to family members both living and dead.

Amanda S., Utah, USA



Share Your Experience

Share how you see the real meaning of Christmas and read the experiences of other youth at lds.org/go/real12NE.

A lighthouse stands on a rocky island, illuminated by the warm, golden light of a setting or rising sun. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds, and the sea below is dark with white-capped waves crashing against the rocks. The lighthouse is a tall, cylindrical structure with a spiral staircase winding around its exterior. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

AS WE NAVIGATE
THE SEAS OF LIFE,
FOLLOWING THE IMPRESSIONS
OF THE
Holy Ghost
IS ESSENTIAL.

THE SPIRIT WILL HELP US
AVOID TEMPTATIONS AND DANGERS,
AND COMFORT AND LEAD US
THROUGH CHALLENGES.

Elder Quentin L. Cook
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
October 2015 general conference

WHAT'S ONLINE



Watch the devotional again at
.....
lds.org/go/devotional12NE.

FIRST PRESIDENCY'S CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

Feel the magic of the Christmas season through words and music focused on the Savior. This month is a great time to share messages about Jesus Christ with family and friends in a natural way, so if you've wanted to share the gospel with someone, this is an easy opportunity to invite them. Watch the devotional on December 6 at 6:00 p.m. MST at lds.org/go/devotional12NE.



CHECK OUT
12 DAYS OF ACTIVITIES

facebook.com/NewEra.magazine

CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN

Keep Christ in your Christmas celebrations with a simple thought each day! On December 13-24, the *New Era* Facebook page will help you experience the true meaning of Christmas with 12 days of activities and inspiring messages. Enjoy Christmas quotes, videos, posters, and more. It could be the start of a family or friends' tradition.

A STORY OF MODERN-DAY WISE MEN

The Wise Men visited the Christ child 2,000 years ago, and each of us can still walk in their footsteps to seek Him. Think about what you can do to seek the Christ child, and find inspiration in a video about modern-day wise men.

Wise men still seek Him.

WATCH
THE CHRISTMAS VIDEO AT

lds.org/go/wise12NE



THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS