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# TRUE GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS

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*May we always remember to bring gifts to Him who has given His all for us.*

**W**hen I was very young I lived in Czechoslovakia, and the rich, centuries-old traditions of Christmas were everywhere around us. Although many years have passed, I still look back on those days with fondness and tenderness.

One year, when I was perhaps four years old, I was in the room where we kept our Christmas tree. It was decorated with lovely, shining ornaments. Silver tinsel draped over the branches, catching the light of real wax candles that flickered all around me. Nearby was a window that looked out onto the street; its curtains shimmered in the light, adding a certain mystery and magic to the scene.

It was on that day that I made two eventful discoveries.

The first was that if I held a lit wax candle behind the curtains, the light sparkled beautifully through the delicate fabric.

The second thing I discovered was that

curtains are flammable. As you might guess, the flame from the candle caught the fabric of the drapes and spread quickly, threatening the walls and ceiling of our home.

I screamed in fright. My parents ran in from the other room and quickly pulled down the drapes and stamped out the fire, preventing what could have been a terrible tragedy.

Once the danger was over, the charred remains of our once-beautiful window trimmings littered the floor; the now-bare window loomed behind me, cold and condemning; and I stood timidly in front of my mother and father without explanation or excuse.

I knew, with all the certainty of a four-year-old boy, that I had ruined Christmas!

## THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Nearly seven decades have passed since that fateful day. And as a result of my one and

only brush with arson, I have learned some important things.

First, don't ever play with fire—an important message with literal and figurative implications for everyone, not only children.

Second, even though I nearly turned our apartment into a pile of ash and smoke, I did not ruin Christmas. Looking back, I think my fear that I had ruined Christmas came from an incomplete understanding of what Christmas really is. And I've noticed that it's not only four-year-olds who have this misunderstanding.

If we are only willing to open our hearts and minds to the spirit of

Christmas, we will recognize wonderful things happening around us. It is usually something small—we read a verse of scripture; we hear a sacred carol and really listen, perhaps for the first time, to its words; or we witness a sincere expression of love. In one way or another, the Spirit touches our hearts, and we see that Christmas, in its essence, is much more sturdy and enduring than the many minor things of life we too often use to adorn it.

### OUR GIFTS TO CHRIST

Christmas and some of the cherished traditions of the season remind us that we, like the Wise Men of old, should

seek the Christ and lay before Him the most precious of gifts: a broken heart and a contrite spirit. We should offer Him our love. We should give Him our willingness to take upon ourselves His name and walk in the path of discipleship. We should promise to remember Him always, to emulate His example, and to go about doing good (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; Acts 10:38).

We cannot offer Him the gift of perfection in all things because this is a gift beyond our capacity to give—at least for now. But He does require that we bring as gifts our best efforts to walk in the ways He has prepared and taught.





# “THE SAVIOR’S GIFTS TO US ARE BREATHTAKING.”

## CHRIST’S GIFTS TO US

And what are the Savior’s gifts to those who are willing to bring these gifts to Him?

This may be the most one-sided gift exchange in the history of the universe. The Savior’s gifts to us are breathtaking.

Let us begin with immortality. Because the Savior overcame death, all men and women—both the just

and the unjust—will live forever (see John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Doctrine and Covenants 76:17).

Then, forgiveness—even though our sins and imperfections be as scarlet, they can become white as snow because of Him (see Isaiah 1:18).

And finally, eternal life—the greatest gift of all (see Doctrine and Covenants 14:7). Because of the Atonement of Christ, not only are we guaranteed an

infinite quantity of life, but He offers the possibility of an unimaginable quality of life as well (see 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Some of His divine gifts are reserved for that glorious future day when we return to His presence. But He extends many gifts and His grace to us every day. He promises to be with us, to come to us when we need comfort (see John 14:18; Doctrine and Covenants 88:63), to lift us when we stumble, to carry us, to mourn and rejoice with us. Every day He offers to take us by the hand and help transform ordinary life into extraordinary spiritual experiences.

## POINT YOUR HEART TOWARD THE SAVIOR

Of course, we do not need a Christmas holiday to remember Jesus Christ, our Savior. But the celebrations of Christmas can help remind us of Him and be an opportunity to recommit to keep the fire of the Spirit and the glory of the Son of God burning in our hearts every day throughout the year.

This is a wonderful time of the year. It may not be perfect. But if Christmas can point our hearts toward our Savior, we can rejoice even in the imperfections of the season. May we always remember to bring gifts to Him who has given His all for us. And may each Christmas season remind us to lift up our voices and fill our hearts with joy and gratitude that Christ lives! He is real. He is our Redeemer at Christmas and always. **NE**

*From an address delivered at the 2011 First Presidency Christmas Devotional.*