



Home for Christmas

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There was a song I heard first when I was a little boy—a song about Christmas and home. Those were days of war when many people were away from their homes and family—a dark time for those who feared that they might not be reunited with loved ones in this life. I remember my feelings for home and family when I walked by one house on the way to school at Christmastime and saw a little flag with a gold star on it hung in the window. It was the home of a girl I knew in school. Her brother, not much older than I, had been killed in the war. I knew his parents and felt some of what they did. On the way home after school, I would feel grateful anticipation for the glad welcome I knew awaited me.

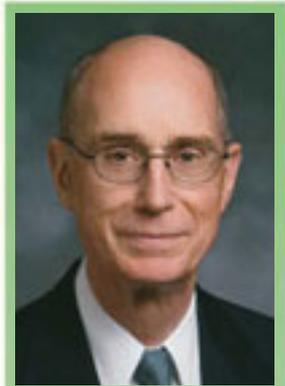
When I turned on the radio in our living room during the Christmas season, I would hear words and music that still echo in my

mind. A few lines of that song touched my heart with a yearning to be with family. I was living with my parents and my brothers in a happy home, so I knew somehow that the yearning I felt was for more than to be in a house or in the family life I then enjoyed. It was about some future place and life, even better than I knew or had yet imagined.

The line of the song that I remember best is “I’ll be home for Christmas / If only in my dreams.”¹ The house in which I decorated Christmas trees with my mother and father in those happy days of my childhood still stands, largely unchanged. A few years ago I went back and knocked on the door.

Strangers answered. They allowed me to step into the rooms where the radio had been and where our family had gathered around the Christmas tree.

I realized then that the desire of my heart was not about being in a house. It was about being with my family, and it was a desire to



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feel enveloped in the love and the Light of Christ, even more than our little family had felt in the home of my childhood.

Longing for Eternal Love

What all of us long for in our hearts, at Christmastime and always, is to feel bound together in love with the sweet assurance that it can last forever. This is the promise of eternal life, which God has called His greatest gift to His children (see D&C 14:7). That is made possible by the gifts to us of His Beloved Son: the Savior's birth, Atonement, and Resurrection. It is through the Savior's life and mission that we have the assurance that we can be together in love and live forever in families.

The feeling of longing for home is born into us. That wonderful dream cannot become real without great faith—enough for the Holy Ghost to lead us to repentance, baptism, and the making and keeping of sacred covenants with God. This faith requires enduring bravely the trials of mortal life. Then, in the next life, we can be welcomed by our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son to that home of our dreams.

Even in this life we can have an assurance of the coming of that day and feel some of the joys we will know when at last we arrive home. The celebration of the Savior's birth at Christmas gives us special opportunities to experience those joys in this life.

Finding the Promised Joy

Many of us have lost loved ones to death. We may be surrounded by individuals who seek to destroy our faith in the gospel and the Lord's promises of eternal life. Some of us are troubled with illness and with poverty. Others may have contention in the family or no family at all. Yet we can invite the Light of Christ to shine on us and let us see and feel some of the promised joys that lie before us.

For instance, as we gather in that heavenly home, we will be surrounded by those who have been forgiven of all sin and who have forgiven each other. We can taste some of that joy now, especially as we remember and celebrate the Savior's gifts to us. He came into the world to be the Lamb of God, to pay the price of all of the sins of His Father's children in mortality so that all might be forgiven. In the Christmas season we feel a greater desire to remember and ponder the Savior's words. He warned us that we cannot be forgiven unless we forgive others (see Matthew 6:14–15). That is often hard to do, so you will need to pray for help. This help to forgive will come most often when you are allowed to see that you have given as much or more hurt than you have received.

When you act on that answer to your prayer for strength to forgive, you will feel a burden lifted from your shoulders. Carrying a grudge is a heavy burden. As you forgive, you will feel the joy of being forgiven. At this Christmastime you can give and receive the gift of forgiveness. The feeling of happiness that will come will be a glimpse of what we can feel at home together in the eternal home for which we yearn.

Feeling the Joy of Giving

There is another glimpse of that joyful future home that we can see more easily at Christmastime. It is the feeling of giving with a generous heart. This can come as we feel the

needs of others more than our own and when we sense how generous God has been to us.

It helps to see the kindness of others at Christmastime. How many times have you gone to leave a gift on a doorstep, hoping not to be noticed, only to find more than one unmarked gift already there? Have you felt, as I have, the impression to help someone only to find that what you were inspired to give was exactly what someone needed at that very moment? That is a wonderful assurance that God knows all of our needs and counts on us to fill the needs of others around us.

God sends those messages to us with more confidence at Christmastime, knowing that we will respond because our hearts are more sensitive to the Savior's example and to the words of His servants. At Christmastime, we are more likely to have read recently and been touched by the words of King Benjamin. He taught his people, and he teaches us, that the overwhelming gift of forgiveness that we receive should make us feel an overflowing generosity toward others:

“And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

“And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another.

“And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

“I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world” (Mosiah 4:20–23).

You have already felt the joy of giving alms and receiving them. That joy in this life is a glimpse of what we will feel in the life to come if we are generous here out of faith in God. The Savior is our great exemplar. At the Christmas season we contemplate anew who He is and what generosity He extended to us by coming into the world to be our Savior.

As the Son of God, born to Mary, He had the power to resist all temptation to sin. He lived a perfect life so that He could be the infinite sacrifice, the unblemished Lamb promised from the foundation of the world (see Revelation 13:8). He suffered the agony of the guilt of our sins and all the sins of the children of Heavenly Father that we might be forgiven and go home clean.

He gave us that gift at a price we cannot fathom. It was a gift He did not need for Himself; He was without the need for forgiveness. The joy and gratitude we feel for His gift now will be magnified and will last forever as we honor and worship Him in our heavenly home.

The Christmas season gives us encouragement to remember Him and His infinite generosity. Remembering

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His generosity will help us feel and respond to the inspiration that there is someone who needs our help, and it will let us see the hand of God reaching to us when He sends someone to succor us, as He so often does. There is joy in giving and in receiving the generosity that God inspires, especially at Christmas.

Blessed with His Light

There is another glimpse of heaven that becomes easier to see at Christmastime. It is of light. Heavenly Father used light to announce the birth of His Son, our Savior (see Matthew 2; 3 Nephi 1). A new star was visible in both the Eastern and the Western Hemispheres. It led the Wise Men to the child in Bethlehem. Even wicked King Herod recognized the sign; he feared it because he was wicked. The Wise Men rejoiced because of the birth of the Christ, who is the Light and the Life of the World. Three days of light without darkness was the sign God gave to the descendants of Lehi, heralding the birth of His Son.

We remember at Christmastime not only the light that announced the birth of Christ into the world but also the light that comes

from Him. Many witnesses have confirmed that light. Paul testified that he saw it on the road to Damascus:

“I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

“And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul,

why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

“And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26:13–15).

The boy Joseph Smith testified that he saw a marvelous light in a grove of trees in Palmyra, New York, at the beginning of the Restoration:

“Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

“It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17).

Such light will be visible in our heavenly home. It will bring us joy then. Yet even in this life you have been blessed with a part of that wonderful experience, through the Light of Christ. Every person born into the

world receives that light as a gift (see Moroni 7:16). Think of the times you have had an experience that makes you a witness that the Light of Christ is real and precious. You will recognize from this wonderfully assuring scripture that you have been guided by that light:

“And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.

“That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.

“And . . . I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you” (D&C 50:23–25).

In a world that is being darkened by evil images and dishonest messages, you have been blessed to recognize more easily the flashes of light and truth. You have learned for yourself that light grows brighter as you receive it gladly. It will become brighter and brighter until the perfect day when we will be in the presence of the Source of the light.

That light is easier to discern at Christmastime, when we are more likely to pray to know what God would have us do and more likely to read in the scriptures and so more apt to be on the Lord’s errand. When we forgive and feel forgiveness, when we are lifting the hands that hang down (see D&C 81:5), we are being lifted ourselves as we move toward the Source of the light.

You remember that the Book of Mormon describes a glorious time when the Savior’s faithful disciples reflected His light for others to see (see 3 Nephi 19:24–25). We use lights to celebrate the Christmas season. Our worship of the Savior and our service for Him brings light into our lives and into the lives of those around us.

We can with confidence set a goal to make this Christmas brighter than the last and each year that follows brighter still. The trials of mortality may increase in intensity, yet for us, darkness need not increase if we focus our eyes more singly on the light that streams down on us as we follow the Master. He will lead us and help us along the path that leads upward to the home for which we yearn.

IDEAS FOR TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

As you prepare to teach from this message, be sure to seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost to help you tailor your approach to the needs of those you teach. You might consider ideas such as these:

1. When you read the material under the heading “Longing for Eternal Love,” do you feel within yourself the longing for your eternal home? Discuss together what you are doing to prepare to return to that home.
2. Does the material under “Finding the Promised Joy” help you see how you can find joy in this life? Discuss what we can do to find joy now, day to day.
3. Under the heading “Feeling the Joy of Giving,” we learn of the Savior’s unmatched gifts that can allow us to have eternal life. Discuss what we could give to help others receive this gift as well.
4. How does President Eyring’s message help us see what we may do to be more open to the light offered by the Savior and to share it with our families and others?

There have been times, often at Christmas, when we have felt parts of what we will experience when we at last come home to the Father who loves us and answers our prayers and to the Savior who has lighted our lives and lifted us up.

I testify that because of Him, you may have an assurance that you can go home not only at Christmastime but also to live forever with a family whom you love and who love each other. ■

NOTE

1. James “Kim” Gannon, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” (1943).

