

YOU WERE THE ANGELS

My heart jumped as I read the poster: “Handel’s *Messiah* performed by the Swansea Orchestra and Welsh Choir.”

I had been on my mission in Swansea, Wales, for six months and felt the longing that often comes to new missionaries during the Christmas

season. We had many family traditions during the holidays, but my favorite was going to hear Handel’s *Messiah*. My mother had played the organ for many such performances. I would sit, listen, and feel the music.

With permission from the mission president, I purchased tickets for the missionaries in our area. The night of the performance, our group bundled up against the cold and

walked to the concert hall. I silently prayed that we would all feel the sacredness of the inspiring music.

When we arrived, I realized that we were late and that the performance had already started. We weren’t going to be allowed inside until intermission! As I listened to the music through the

doors, I could not hold back the tears.

An usher must have noticed my desperation and decided to let us in. He told us to stand in the back until the intermission so that we didn’t interrupt the singing. He slowly opened the doors, and we all quietly stepped inside.

Walking into the hall was like walking into heaven. The feeling of

peace and joy overwhelmed me. It wasn’t long, however, before we noticed people turning their heads, pointing and staring at us. All of us had entered quietly and didn’t know what we had done to bring attention to ourselves. As soon as the intermission began, we found our seats.

When the oratorio resumed, the music filled my soul. I wept during the “Hallelujah Chorus” and when the soprano sang “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth.” The missionaries beside me also felt the power of the music and grabbed their handkerchiefs. The experience was something we would always remember. But it wasn’t until the performance had ended that the truly memorable moment came.

As we were leaving the building, people were still whispering and pointing, but no one said anything until we

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I DEFENDED THE PROPHET JOSEPH

were outside. A man then approached us, saying, “It was you! It was you!”

We all waited for an explanation.

“During the first part of the performance, we felt a change in the room—a strong feeling that Christ was there,” the man said. “So we turned to see what had caused the change. When we looked to the back of the auditorium, we saw seven figures glowing as if they were angels. When you came into the room, you brought the Holy Ghost. You were there to represent Christ; you were the angels.”

As he spoke, I looked down at my missionary name tag and read the bold lettering under my name: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” How humbled I was at that moment and to have silently testified of Him that night before thousands of people. ■ Heidi Windish Fernandez, Oregon, USA

In 1978 I had a memorable dream in which two people appeared to me. As I spoke with them in this dream, I felt an amazing sense of joy. The happy feeling persisted even after I woke up the next morning.

That very day two Latter-day Saint missionaries knocked on the door of our home and asked if they could share a message. Remembering my dream, I agreed and invited them in. My husband was reluctant, but he consented when I told him that I couldn’t bear to let them go away without talking to them.

Among other things, the missionaries taught me about prophets that day. I was familiar with the prophets of the Bible, such as Abraham and Moses, but the missionaries also taught me about a modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith. At the end of our lesson, the elders asked if they could return for more discussions. I said yes.

After additional discussions the missionaries invited me to be baptized. I liked what I had learned, but before being baptized, I wanted to gain a testimony of Joseph Smith. Of all the things the missionaries had taught me, his story was the most difficult for me to accept. But I knew that if I was sincere in seeking such a testimony, Heavenly Father would confirm the truth to me.

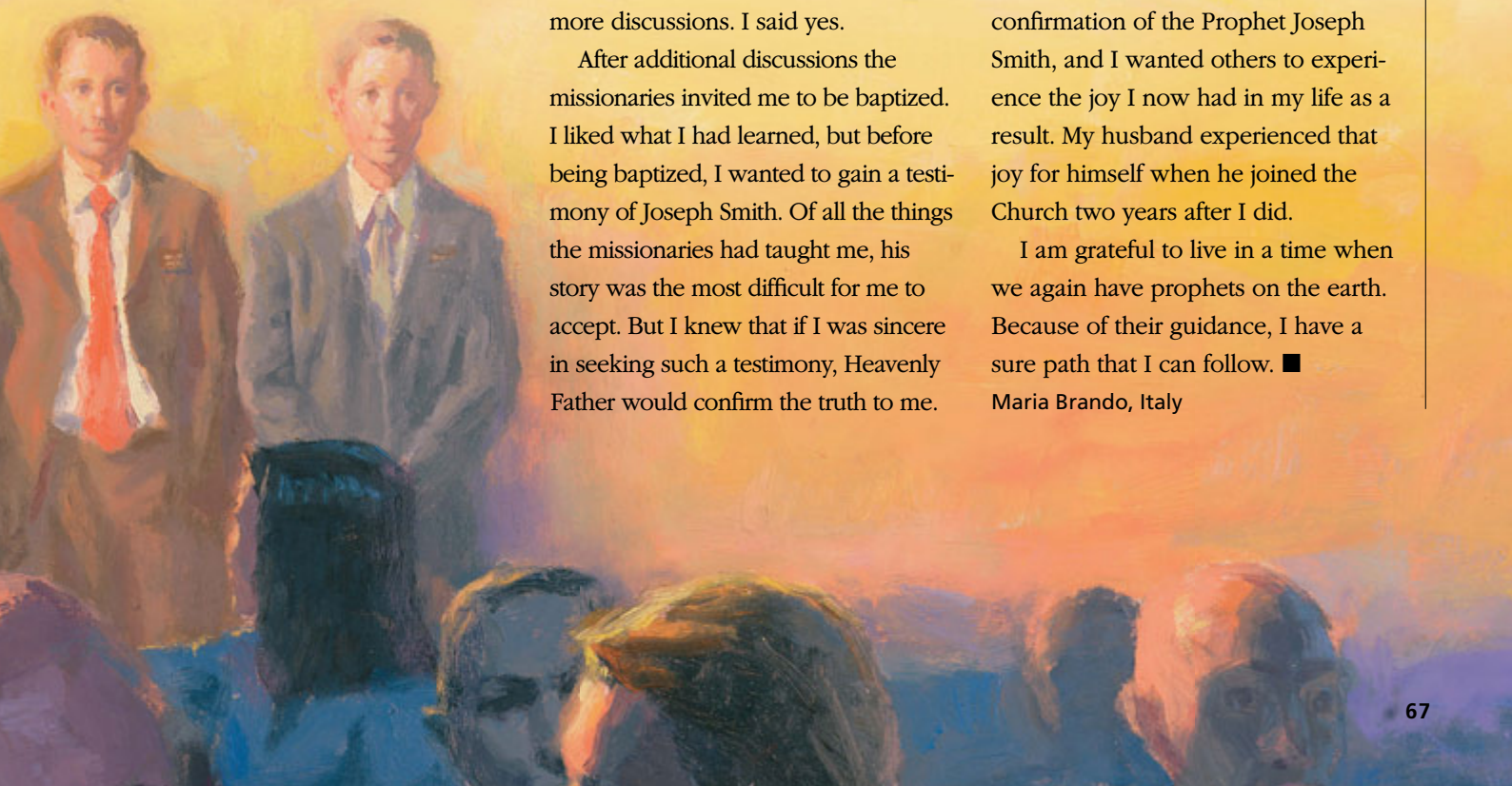
I went to see a member of the clergy in the church I had been raised in. I told him what the missionaries had taught me and expressed a great desire to meet with them again. Before I could say anything else though, he told me that Joseph Smith was crazy, that he was a visionary.

Suddenly, I heard a voice tell me, “Joseph Smith is a true prophet.” My heart started beating strongly within me, and even though I had not yet been baptized into the Church, I found myself defending the Prophet of the Restoration.

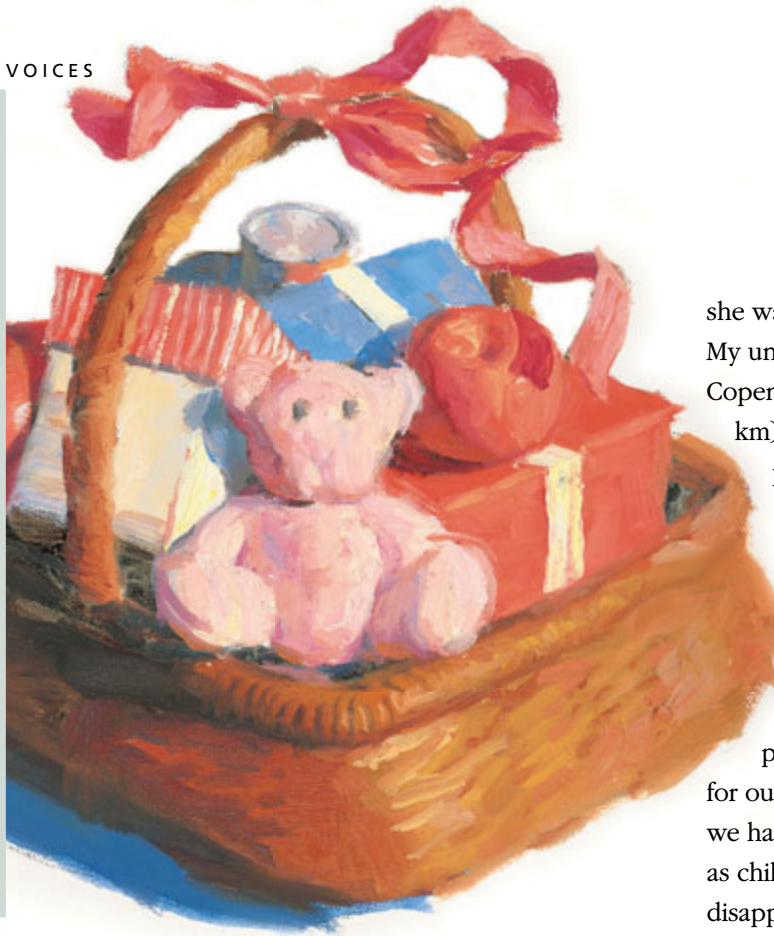
The feeling of confirmation grew even stronger as I left the clergyman’s office. I had received my answer and knew in which church I should raise my sons.

I was baptized a short time later, and I felt a great desire to share what I had found. I had received a spiritual confirmation of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and I wanted others to experience the joy I now had in my life as a result. My husband experienced that joy for himself when he joined the Church two years after I did.

I am grateful to live in a time when we again have prophets on the earth. Because of their guidance, I have a sure path that I can follow. ■ Maria Brando, Italy



On our porch we found a large basket containing food and other necessities as well as some toys. We were sure it had been delivered to the wrong house.



MY BEST CHRISTMAS

One December when I was a child, my mother became very ill. The medication she was taking made her extremely tired, and she slept about 18 hours a day.

Since my mother was single, my older sister and I tried to keep the household running as best we could, but we were young and inexperienced, and we weren't very successful. Several days into our mother's illness, we were looking for something to eat. As we searched through the kitchen, the doorbell rang.

A sister from our ward was on the porch, meal in hand. She hadn't known of our need, but there she was with dinner. She asked us how long our mother had been ill and

how we had been coping for so long on our own. We assured her that we were managing as best we could, but we were grateful for her kindness in sharing a meal with us.

When she left our home, this sister called the Relief Society president and informed her of our family's situation. The next day and for many days thereafter, members of the ward brought meals to our home. We were so grateful! What we didn't eat right away we froze, and because of our ward's kindness, our family had more than enough to eat for the next three months. But the kindness others showed didn't stop there.

Christmas was approaching, and Mom was slowly getting better, but

she was not back to her usual self. My uncle came to our home from Copenhagen, about 40 miles (65 km) away, to help with holiday preparations. He was generous in doing what he could, providing a Christmas tree and some food for our family's celebration. He also bought a few presents for my sister and me. We, in turn, had purchased a few modest gifts for our mother and uncle. We knew we had much to be grateful for, but as children we were still feeling a bit disappointed with how this Christmas was turning out.

On Christmas Eve, our doorbell rang. I looked out the window but couldn't see anyone. I concluded that it must be a prank, but my sister told me to open the door anyway. On our porch we found a large basket containing food and other necessities as well as some toys. We were sure it had been delivered to the wrong house. We went to the neighbors' house to ask if the basket should have gone to their home, but they were gone. Then we noticed that all of the gifts were labeled with our names. There were even items for my uncle. Someone had thought about *us*.

The anonymous generosity shown my family that year made what had been a dark and sad Christmas the best Christmas of my life. The kindness and love we felt from others continue to touch me today. ■

Morten Sønderskov, Denmark

WHO WILL BE THE PRESENT?

In 1982, the second Christmas after we were married, Cleto and I decided to establish family traditions. Because we were the first members of the Church in our families, our former Christmas celebrations—though they brought us happy memories—lacked genuine compassion and service. Moreover, our first baby, eight-month-old Diego, was reason enough to improve ourselves in this way.

We were quite busy with university studies, household chores, Church callings, and our crash course in first-time parenthood, but we still devoted ourselves to preparing for a special occasion. We used each family home evening in December to make decorations and to come to a better understanding of the symbols and colors we saw everywhere. We also planned

on preparing a simple dinner, and we thought up useful and inexpensive gifts. As we undertook a scripture study program, we realized that the true change in our manner of celebrating Christ's birth would involve choosing a gift for the Savior.

We wondered, "What do you give someone who has heaven and earth at His disposal?" The scriptures provide the answer, declaring that anything we do "unto one of the least of these" (Matthew 25:40) we do unto Him. Because Christmas is a season of friendship and a time of love, we wanted to invite a member of the Church to experience the warmth and sweet spirit we felt in our home.

We looked hard to find someone who needed some cheering up and whom helping could be our Christmas present to the Savior.

Each time we invited a ward or stake brother or sister to our home, we were happy to discover that the person was already involved in other activities. But Christmas Eve soon arrived, and we still had not found someone with whom to share our Christmas.

Resigned to our failure, we were getting ready for dinner when the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, I was elated to find a friend we had not seen for some time. Avelar had recently gone through the disappointment of an upsetting separation. He was sad and alone and had felt a strong desire to be with us.

We received Avelar with love, and he told us that he had found the environment he needed to be consoled in the midst of his trials. We told him of our preparations to serve and help someone in need so that he could recognize the Lord knew him and loved him.

For all of us, it was wonderful to realize that the Savior had sent us someone we could not find: our friend Avelar. We realized the overriding importance of relationships among Heavenly Father's sons and daughters. For that reason, on subsequent Christmases we and our three children always remember that the purpose of the season is to strengthen bonds of unity, love, and friendship. ■

Ana Márcia Agra de Oliveira,
Pernambuco, Brazil

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