

TUMBLEWEEDS & CHRISTMAS STARS

*Our Christmas as missionaries wasn't like the ones we were used to,
but the light of the season was as bright as it had always been.*

By Andrew L. Sorenson

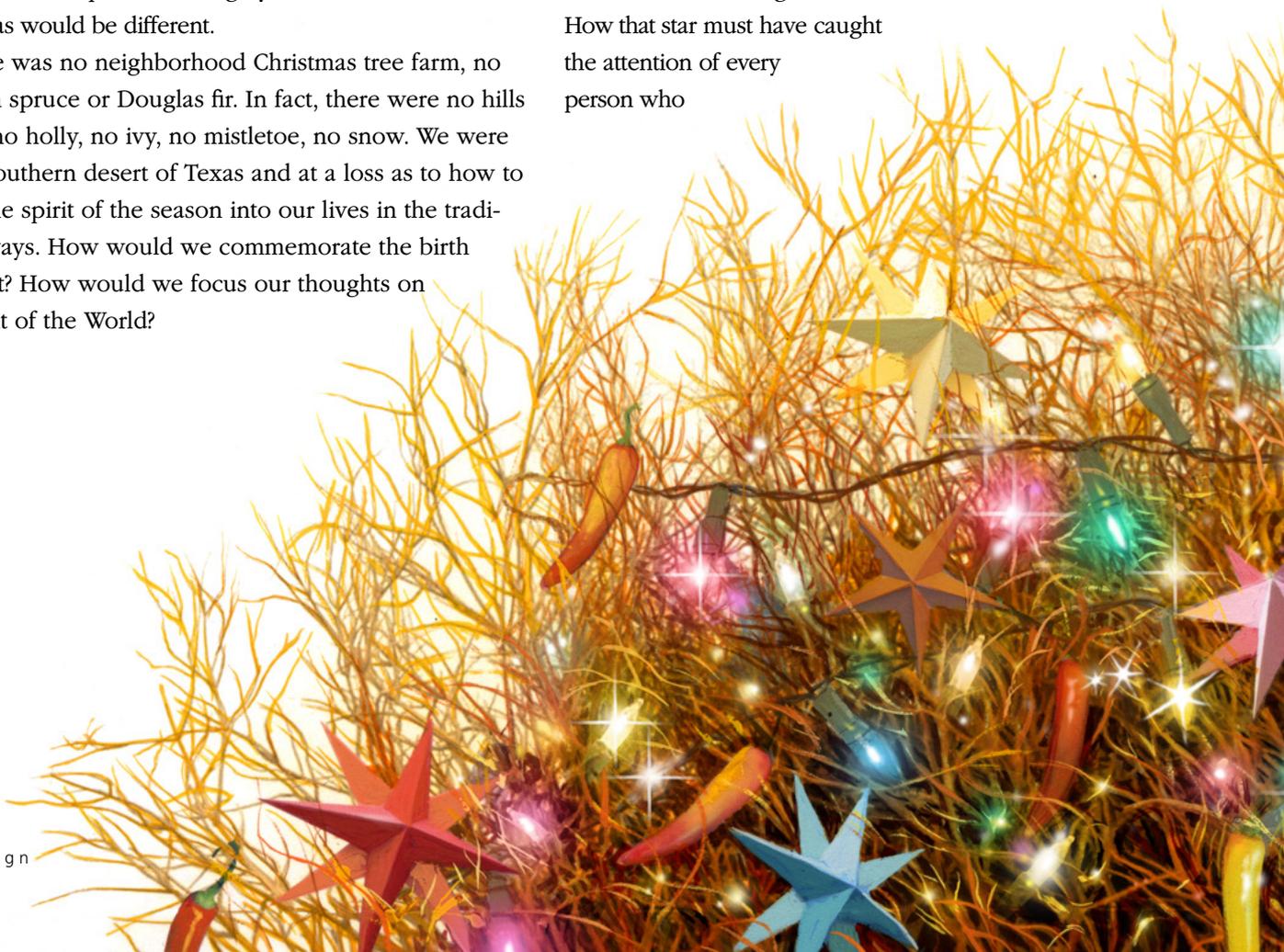
One of the most memorable Christmases of my early life occurred during my first December away from home while I lived in Eagle Pass, Texas, USA. This sleepy border town—flat, hot, featureless—was the spot where I was laboring with three other missionaries. As December arrived and we recognized a need for some Christmas cheer in our surroundings, we considered our options thoroughly and realized that this Christmas would be different.

There was no neighborhood Christmas tree farm, no hill with spruce or Douglas fir. In fact, there were no hills at all—no holly, no ivy, no mistletoe, no snow. We were in the southern desert of Texas and at a loss as to how to invite the spirit of the season into our lives in the traditional ways. How would we commemorate the birth of Christ? How would we focus our thoughts on the Light of the World?

The Light of Christmas

No doubt Heavenly Father had many options for alerting the world to the birth of His Son, but in the end He chose a most impressive sign for those who would look: the star of Bethlehem—“a new star . . . , such an one as ye never have beheld,” said Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 14:5). God put in the darkness of night a physical and metaphorical declaration that the Light of the World had arrived. How that star must have caught the attention of every person who

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chanced to glance at the sky! And “when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matthew 2:10).

Today, with all the surrounding artificial light, many of us can hardly make out stars in the night sky, but in Jesus’s time, everyone would have looked with familiarity toward the heavens when darkness fell. Thus, God chose light, one of the most evocative symbols, to represent His Only Begotten Son. Christmas lights have become the modern and ubiquitous symbol of Christmas.

A Makeshift Christmas Tree

Which brings me back to Eagle Pass, Texas, and our unadorned apartment. Without family and with limited funds, we would need to be creative. That’s when it hit us—we finally took notice of the one locally abundant timber and knew we had partially solved our problem. The tumbleweed did not require an axe or saw; we just picked it up, brought it inside, and began to decorate it.

With a few homemade ornaments and some red chili peppers, our tumbleweed became a nice burst of Christmas cheer. But it was still missing something—our little sapling needed lights! Without lights, it would not call

out from the darkness, light the room through the night, or capture our wandering gaze. With lights, our tumbleweed would remind us of the Light of the World, His birth, and His message of hope, confidence, and comfort. So we found a string of Christmas lights, wrapped them around the little “tree,” and propped up our creation in the corner window, where it would shine all through the night. Everyone in the neighborhood could see it, our welcoming wonder, with lights and all. We had our symbol of the season—the Christmas tumbleweed of Eagle Pass, Texas.

Remembering the Light

Although that Christmas was many years ago, it still serves as a reminder to me of how Christ lights the darkness of our lives. As Christmas approaches and the nights are illuminated by so many Christmas lights, let us remember the new star that broke through the dark skies more than two millennia ago to announce the birth of the Son of God, even the Light of the World. And let us also remember that Heavenly Father still speaks! He may not use a star, but He communicates with us just as surely as He communicated with men and women who came before.

His message to all the world is that Jesus Christ is “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16), “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), and that “he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). It is this Light that brings us out of personal darkness into a brightness filled with hope. ■

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