

Liahona



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Christmas Spirit, p. 15

There Was Room in the Inn, p. 8

Amazed at His Love, p. 28

Cutout: Art for Your Own Nativity
Scene, p. F8

Official international magazine of
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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For subscriptions and prices outside the United States and
Canada, contact your local Church distribution center or
ward or branch leader.

Send manuscripts and queries to *Liahona*, Rm. 2420, 50 E.
North Temple St., Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA; or
e-mail: liahona@ldschurch.org.

The *Liahona*, [a Book of Mormon term meaning "compass"
or "director"] is published in Albanian, Armenian, Bislama,
Bulgarian, Cambodian, Cebuano, Chinese, Croatian,
Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Fijian, Finnish,
French, German, Greek, Haitian, Hindi, Hungarian,
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Tahitian, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tongan, Ukrainian, Urdu, and
Vietnamese. (Frequency varies by language.)

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The *Liahona* can be found in many languages on the Internet
at www.lds.org. For English, click on "Gospel Library." For
other languages, click on "Languages."

For Readers in the United States and Canada: December
2008 Vol. 32 No. 12. *LIAHONA* (USPS 311-480) English
(ISSN 1080-9554) is published monthly by The Church of
Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 50 E. North Temple St., Salt
Lake City, UT 84150. USA subscription price is \$10.00 per
year; Canada, \$12.00 plus applicable taxes. Periodicals
Postage Paid at Salt Lake City, Utah. Sixty days' notice
required for change of address. Include address label from
a recent issue; old and new address must be included. Send
USA and Canadian subscriptions to Salt Lake Distribution
Center at address below. Subscription help line: 1-800-537-
5971. Credit card orders (Visa, MasterCard, American
Express) may be taken by phone. (Canada Poste Information:
Publication Agreement #40017431)

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Salt Lake
Distribution Center, Church Magazines, PO Box 26368, Salt
Lake City, UT 84126-0368.

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40 I Remember Joseph

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FAMILY HOME EVENING IDEAS

*These teaching suggestions can be
used in the classroom as well as in the
home. You may tailor these
ideas to your family or class.*

"Room in the Inn," p. 8:
Huddle together under a
blanket, pretending you
are in the vehicle in the
story. Tell the story. Discuss what
it would have been like to spend
Christmas Eve in the van. Discuss
how the innkeeper served the family.
Prayerfully plan a way your family can
serve others this Christmas season.



"A Christmas Miracle," p. 12:
Share the missionaries' story with
your family. Discuss the joy the sing-
ing brought to the people on
the train. Plan a Christmas
project your family could do
for someone.

**"Consecrate Thy
Performance,"** p. 20: Choose five
items to use as stepping-stones,
such as rocks or paper. Label each
item with the section titles from the
article. Step from stone to stone as
you discuss the section. Consider

As you look for the Portuguese CTR ring hidden in this issue, think of how you can choose the right by showing love to your family.



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ON THE COVER

The Nativity, by Jon McNaughton.

THE FRIEND COVER

Christmas Eve Pageant, by Margie Seager-Olsen.

reading scriptures from the article. Discuss the stumbling blocks we face in our lives. Conclude by reading the last few paragraphs of the article.

"Amazed at the Love Jesus Offers Me," p. 28: Read the section "Rejoicing in Reunion" to the point that the missionary begins to approach his family. Have members of your family guess who will be the first to rush forward to meet the missionary. After finishing the story, discuss the love parents have for

their children and the love Heavenly Father has for all of us.

"The Secret Giver," p. F14: Share David's story with your family. What did David learn? Using his example of becoming an undercover Secret Giver, consider doing one of the following: (1) Prayerfully select individuals or a family in your area who may be lonely or in need. Plan appropriate acts of service for them. (2) Write the names of family members on pieces of paper. Choose a name, and secretly serve that person this week.

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The Baby Jesus, by Jeremy Winborg

Jesus Christ "shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God" (Alma 7:10).





The Best Christmas Ever

BY PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON

At this season of the year, the airways are filled with the music of Christmas. My heart often turns to home and to Christmases past as I listen to some of my favorite Christmas songs, such as this one:

*Oh, there's no place like home
For the holidays, 'cause no matter
How far away you roam
If you want to be happy in a million ways
For the holidays, you can't beat
Home, sweet home.¹*

One writer said: "Again Christmas, abiding point of return. Set apart by its mystery, mood and magic, the season seems, in a way to stand outside time. All that is dear, that is lasting, renews its hold on us: we are home again."²



President David O. McKay (1873–1970) declared: "True happiness comes only by making others happy—the practical application of the Savior's doctrine of losing one's life to gain it. In short, the Christmas spirit is the Christ spirit, that makes our hearts glow in brotherly love and friendship and prompts us to kind deeds of service.

"It is the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ, obedience to which will bring 'peace on earth,' because it means—good will toward all men."³

Giving, not getting, brings to full bloom the Christmas spirit. Enemies are forgiven, friends remembered, and God obeyed. The spirit of Christmas illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world's busy life and become more interested in people than things. To catch the real meaning of the "spirit of Christmas," we need only drop the last syllable, and it becomes the "Spirit of Christ."

Remembering Him

When we have the spirit of Christmas, we remember Him whose birth we commemorate at this season of the year. We contemplate that first Christmas day, foretold by the prophets of old. You, with me, recall



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Margaret
and Nellie
pulled
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was heavenly chaos,
with the Kozicki
children picking
whatever clothes
and footwear they
wanted.

the words from Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"⁴—meaning "God with us."

On the American continent, the prophets said: "The time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent . . . shall dwell

in a tabernacle of clay. . . . He shall suffer temptations, and pain. . . . And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God."⁵

Then came that night of nights when the shepherds were abiding in the fields and the angel of the Lord appeared to them, announcing



the birth of the Savior. Later, Wise Men journeyed from the East to Jerusalem, "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. . . .

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."⁶

Times change; years speed by; but Christmas continues sacred. In this marvelous dispensation of the fulness of times, our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given. There are deeds to be done. There are souls to be saved.

A Gift of Christmas

In the early 1930s, Margaret Kisilevich and her sister Nellie gave a Christmas gift to their neighbors, the Kozicki family, which was remembered by them all their lives and which has become an inspiration to their families.

Home to Margaret back then was Two Hills, Alberta, Canada—a farming community populated largely by Ukrainian and Polish immigrants who generally had large families and were very poor. It was the time of the Great Depression.

Margaret's family consisted of her mother and father and their 15 children. Margaret's mother was industrious and her father was enterprising—and with all those children, they had a built-in labor force. Consequently, their home was always warm, and despite their humble circumstances, they were never hungry. In the summer they grew an enormous garden, made sauerkraut, cottage cheese,

sour cream, and dill pickles for barter. They also raised chickens, pigs, and beef cattle. They had very little cash, but these goods could be exchanged for other commodities they could not produce themselves.

Margaret's mother had friends with whom she had emigrated from the old country. These friends owned a general store, and the store became a depot for folks in the area to donate or trade surplus hand-me-down clothing, shoes, etc. Many of these used items were passed along to Margaret's family.



Alberta winters were cold, long, and hard, and one particularly cold and difficult winter, Margaret and her sister Nellie noticed the poverty of their neighbors, the Kozicki family, whose farm was a few miles away. When the Kozicki father would take his children to school on his homemade sleigh, he would always go into the school to warm himself by the potbelly stove before returning home. The family's footwear consisted of rags and gunny sacks cut into strips and

wrapped about the legs and feet, stuffed with straw, and bound with twine.

Margaret and Nellie decided to invite the Kozicki family, by way of the children, for Christmas dinner. They also decided not to tell anyone in their family of the invitation.

Christmas morning dawned, and everyone in Margaret's family was busy with the preparations for the midday feast. The huge pork roast had been put in the oven the night before. The cabbage rolls, doughnuts, prune buns, and special burnt sugar punch had been prepared earlier. The menu would be rounded out with sauerkraut, dill pickles, and vegetables. Margaret and Nellie were in charge of getting the fresh vegetables ready, and their mother kept asking them why they were peeling so many potatoes, carrots, and beets. But they just kept peeling.

Their father was the first to notice a team of horses and a sleigh packed with 13 people coming down their lane. He, being a horse lover, could recognize a team from a long distance. He asked his wife, “Why are the Kozickis coming here?” Her response to him was, “I don’t know.”

They arrived, and Margaret’s father helped Mr. Kozicki stable the horses. Mrs. Kozicki embraced Margaret’s mother and thanked her for inviting them for Christmas. Then they all piled into the house, and the festivities began.

The adults ate first, and then the plates and cutlery were washed, and the children ate in shifts. It was a glorious feast, made better by the sharing of it. After everyone had eaten, they sang Christmas carols together, and then the adults settled down for another chat.

Charity in Action

Margaret and Nellie took the children into the bedroom and pulled from under the beds several boxes filled with hand-me-downs they had been given by their mother’s merchant friends. It was heavenly chaos, with an instant fashion show and everyone picking whatever clothes and footwear they wanted. They made such a racket that Margaret’s father came in to see what all the noise was about. When he saw their happiness and the joy of the Kozicki children with their “new” clothes, he smiled and said, “Carry on.”

Early in the afternoon, before it got too cold and dark with the setting sun, Margaret’s family bid farewell to their friends, who left well fed, well clothed, and well shod.

Margaret and Nellie never told anyone about their invitation to the Kozickis, and the secret remained until Margaret Kisilevich Wright’s 77th Christmas, in 1998, when she shared it with her family for the first time. She said it was her very best Christmas ever.

If we are to have the very best Christmas ever, we must listen for the sound of sandaled feet. We must reach out for the Carpenter’s hand. With every step we take in His footsteps, we abandon a doubt and gain a truth.

It was said of Jesus of Nazareth that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”⁷

Do we have the determination to do likewise? One line of holy writ contains a tribute to our Lord and Savior, of whom it was said, He “went about doing good . . . ; for God was with him.”⁸

My prayer is that at this Christmas season and all the Christmastimes to come, we may follow in His footsteps. Then each Christmas will be the best Christmas ever. ■

NOTES

1. Al Stillman and Robert Allen, “Home for the Holidays.”
2. Elizabeth Bowen, “Home for Christmas,” in Mary Engelbreit, *Believe: A Christmas Treasury* (1998), 27.
3. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 551.
4. Isaiah 7:14; see also Matthew 1:18–25.
5. Mosiah 3:5, 7–8.
6. Matthew 2:2, 10–11.
7. Luke 2:52.
8. Acts 10:38.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Ask a family member to read aloud the quote by President McKay. If we are to have the best Christmas ever, we must follow in the Savior’s footsteps. Have the family members trace their feet. Then invite the family to take some time after your visit to prayerfully write an act of service on each footprint that the family members could do for others. Suggest that they place the footprints so they lead to a picture of the Savior, illustrating how acts of service help us come closer to Him.

2. Invite family members to share a few memorable Christmas experiences. What made these experiences great? Read or tell the experience of the Kozicki family. Invite the family to find ways this month to serve others, helping them enjoy the Christmas season.

God So Loves You



That He Gave His Only Begotten Son.
(See John 3:16.)



Room in the Inn

BY ELDER NEIL L. ANDERSEN

Of the Presidency of the Seventy

On a bright, crisp winter afternoon we pointed our van toward the mission home in Bordeaux, France. It was December 24, 1990, and we were on our way home for Christmas.

My wife, Kathy, and I, along with our four children—Camey, age 14, Brandt, 13, Kristen, 10, and Derek, 8—had just experienced a week to remember. Because of the distances involved in our mission, we had not brought the missionaries together for a Christmas celebration. Rather, we had traveled as a family to every city in the mission, bringing a feeling of family togetherness, involving the children in sharing a special Christmas program. Our family had rejoiced with each of the missionaries in the great privilege of sharing the restored gospel of Christ at this glorious time of year.

On our final day we had been joined by four wonderful missionaries. The large blue van, now full, was filled as well with the

Christmas spirit, and Christmas carols and favorite stories made the travel time pass quickly. Kristen and Derek were becoming more excited with each hour as they anticipated the surprises Christmas morning would bring. We could almost smell the turkey dinner being prepared at the mission home by a wonderful missionary couple awaiting our return. The feeling of Christmas was in the air.

It was not until late in the afternoon that we realized there might be a problem. For much of the morning we had experienced some difficulty in shifting our van from one gear to another. We had stopped to check the level of the transmission fluid, but all seemed to be in order. Now, with darkness setting in and our van still two hours from Bordeaux, third, fourth, and fifth gears stopped functioning altogether.

We limped along the tree-lined country road in second gear. It would



*At a time when only
our Heavenly Father
could bring us home,
He had heard our
prayers.*



be impossible to drive to Bordeaux in this condition, and we looked for possible help. Our first hope was a convenience store just preparing to close. I asked about possible rental-car locations or train stations nearby. We were far from any city of any size, however, and my questions brought little response.

I returned to the van. The concern and disappointment showed on the faces of our younger children. Would they not be home for Christmas Eve? Would they spend this most special night of the year in a crowded mission van? After they had brought happiness and cheer to missionaries far from home, would their Christmas come alongside a forgotten French country road far from their own home?

Kristen knew to whom we could appeal, and she immediately suggested a prayer. Many times as a family we had prayed for those in need—for the missionaries, the investigators, the Church members, our leaders, the French people, our own family. We bowed in prayer and humbly asked for help.

By now it was dark. The van crept forward, moving at a jogger's pace through the pine forest. We were hoping to reach a little town just three miles (5 km) ahead. Soon our lights caught a small sign with an arrow directing us to Villeneuve-de-Marsan.

We had driven the two-lane road from Pau to Bordeaux many times, but never had we journeyed off the highway to the little town of Villeneuve-de-Marsan. As we hobbled into the town, the scene was like many small French villages. Homes and small shops were attached one to another, crowding the narrow road leading into town. People had closed their window shutters early, and the streets were dark and deserted. The lights in the ancient Catholic church in the center of town showed the one sign of life as they glowed in preparation for the traditional midnight mass. We rolled past the church, and the van hesitated and then stopped. Fortunately, we found ourselves in front of a lovely country inn. The lights were on,

and we determined that this was our last chance for help.

To avoid overwhelming those in the inn, Kathy, Casey, and the missionaries stayed in the van while I took the three younger children inside. I explained our situation to the young woman at the front desk. She could see the beleaguered faces of my children, and she kindly asked us to wait while she called the innkeeper, Mr. Francis Darroze.

Casey came in to see how we were doing. As we waited for Mr. Darroze to arrive, I silently said a prayer of thanksgiving. We might not make it back to Bordeaux for the night, but how good of our Father in Heaven to lead us to a clean hotel! I shuddered as I realized how easily we could have spent the night in the van in a remote area of France. I could see a restaurant in the next room, and I was amazed to see it open on Christmas Eve. We would have a good meal, a hot shower, and a comfortable sleep.

Mr. Darroze arrived in the clothing of a traditional French chef, with his double-breasted chef's coat buttoned all the way up to his chin. He was the owner of the hotel, a man of importance in the community. His warm eyes and quick smile communicated that he was a gentleman as well.

I told him of our dilemma, of the 10 of us in the van, and of our destination in Bordeaux. As he noticed my accent, I added that we were Americans and in one sentence told him why we were in France.

He instantly sought to help us. About 10 miles (16 km) away was a medium-sized city with an active train schedule. He called to ask about the next train to Bordeaux but found that it would not leave until 10:15 Christmas morning. All rental-car companies in that larger city were closed.

The disappointment was evident in the faces of my young children. I asked Mr. Darroze if he would have room in the inn for our family and the four missionaries to spend the night. Although we wouldn't make it home,





Mr. Darroze quickly shook his head and his finger in disapproval. The spirit of Christmas giving filled his soul. "No," he said, "I will take nothing."

at least it was a great blessing to have found such suitable accommodations.

Mr. Darroze looked at the children. He had known us only a few minutes, but his heart was touched with the brotherhood that crosses all oceans and makes us one family. The spirit of Christmas giving filled his soul. "Mr. Andersen," he said, "of course I have rooms here that you can rent. But you do not want to spend Christmas Eve here in the inn. Children should be home as they await the excitement of Christmas morning. I will lend you my car, and you can go to Bordeaux tonight."

I was amazed at his thoughtfulness. Most people would view strangers, especially foreigners like us, with caution. I thanked him but explained that there were 10 of us and a small French car would never be sufficient.

He hesitated momentarily, but his hesitation was not to diminish the gift but to expand it.

"At my farm about 10 miles from here I have an old van. It is used for farming and has only the two seats in front. It will travel at only about 45 miles per hour (70 kph), and I

am not certain the heater works well. But if you want it, I will drive you the 10 miles to my farm to get it."

The children jumped for joy. I reached into my pocket for my cash or credit cards. He quickly shook his head and his finger in disapproval.

"No," he said, "I will take nothing. You can bring my van back to me when you get time after Christmas. It is Christmas Eve. Take your family home."

Sometime shortly after midnight the lights of Bordeaux came into view. The children and the missionaries had fallen asleep in the back of the innkeeper's van. As we drove the familiar streets leading to our home, Kathy and I thanked our kind Heavenly Father for our own Christmas miracle. At a time when only He could bring us home, He had heard our prayers.

We were home on Christmas Eve, even though in Villeneuve-de-Marsan there was room in the inn. ■

"Room in the Inn" was originally printed in Christmas Treasures (Deseret Book, 1994).





A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

BY RYAN CAMPBELL

Winter is a cold time of year in the Russia Moscow Mission. To a missionary this sometimes seems true of not only the weather but also the people. They become introverted. Everybody seems to be rushing home after work. People are ill, the roads are terribly slick, and the cold ruthlessly bites every exposed piece of skin. Smiles are rare.

My companion and I found ourselves in these conditions during the winter of 2005. We wanted to cheer people up by sharing our message of faith, hope, and love, but nobody wanted to listen. And to be honest, my mood wasn't all that great. I couldn't help but feel discouraged. Day after day we walked the cold streets in search of people to teach, freezing our feet to the bone. In spite of the discouraging circumstances, we didn't want to give up. Christmas was getting close, and we wanted to help people feel the Christmas spirit. But how?

One evening as we were on the train returning home, a small group of musicians walked into the railcar. They played wonderfully, but to my surprise, their performance didn't have an effect on anybody. Maybe a person or two gave them some pocket change, but the rest just stared out the frosty windows. I felt bad for the performers and gave them a few coins.

Soon we arrived at the station near our apartment and ran home. As soon as I closed the apartment door, the phone rang. I picked it up and recognized the voice of our district leader. That day we were supposed to have thought

of ideas for celebrating the Christmas season as missionaries. I had totally forgotten, but I didn't want him to know that. Straining for an idea, I remembered the group of musicians and suggested that our district could sing Christmas hymns on the trains. I could accompany them on the violin. To my surprise and perhaps dismay, our district leader loved the idea. We decided on a day. "What was I thinking!" I said to myself, remembering that three of the missionaries in our district were tone-deaf.

The day came, and the missionaries met on the platform. The sun had set long ago, and it was terribly cold. My feet were already numb. We rehearsed for about five minutes until the train crept slowly up to the platform. We gladly entered its open doors, getting out of the cold wind and snow. I took my violin out of its case and silently prayed that God would touch the hearts of the listeners.

As we boarded the train, most of the people didn't pay any attention to us. My fingers hadn't warmed up yet, so when I started to play, the tone of the violin sounded very simple but very piercing. Suddenly the mood in the railcar changed. It was almost as if something could be felt in the air. The passengers seemed to hold their breath. The other missionaries joined with me, singing the words to "Silent Night":

*Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.*



*Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace;
Sleep in heavenly peace.¹*

While I played and the other missionaries sang, nobody in the railcar spoke a single word. When we finished the hymn, I looked around at people's faces. *Everybody* was looking attentively at us. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of several women. It was silent for a minute as nobody wanted to interrupt the moment. Finally a man standing in the back of the railcar exclaimed, "They are Saints, genuine Saints!" Everyone began to applaud.

As we walked down the aisle, many people wanted to give us money. When we didn't accept it, they became all the more surprised. I heard somebody saying under his breath, "This just doesn't happen." One man even tried to give us a thousand rubles and was shocked when we refused the money. Instead, we offered him a pass-along card, which he gladly took. Soon other passengers began asking for pass-along cards. They also asked about the Church and us. It seemed like wherever we looked, our eyes were met

with smiling faces and warm greetings. At the end of the railcar, we wished the passengers a merry Christmas and waved good-bye to our new friends.

On the other side of the door, we looked at each other in disbelief. "What just happened?" we asked. Then, with twice as much energy, we entered the next door. At first the passengers didn't pay any attention to us, but after we performed the hymn, they had the same miraculous reaction. For the rest of the evening, we made our way through the railcars, experiencing the same thing in each one. Never before had I seen such acceptance and love.

Returning home that night, I realized that I had experienced a miracle wrought by music, a message about the Savior, and the spirit of Christmas. Even in the coldest times of our lives, we can be comforted by the Lord's presence. How blessed I was to have seen how drastically people can change under the influence of the Spirit. I will always remember that evening and treasure it in my heart. May the Spirit forever work such miracles! ■

NOTE

1. "Silent Night," *Hymns*, no. 204.

PROPHECIES OF CHRIST'S COMING

You can prepare for Christmas now by remembering how others prepared for Him then.

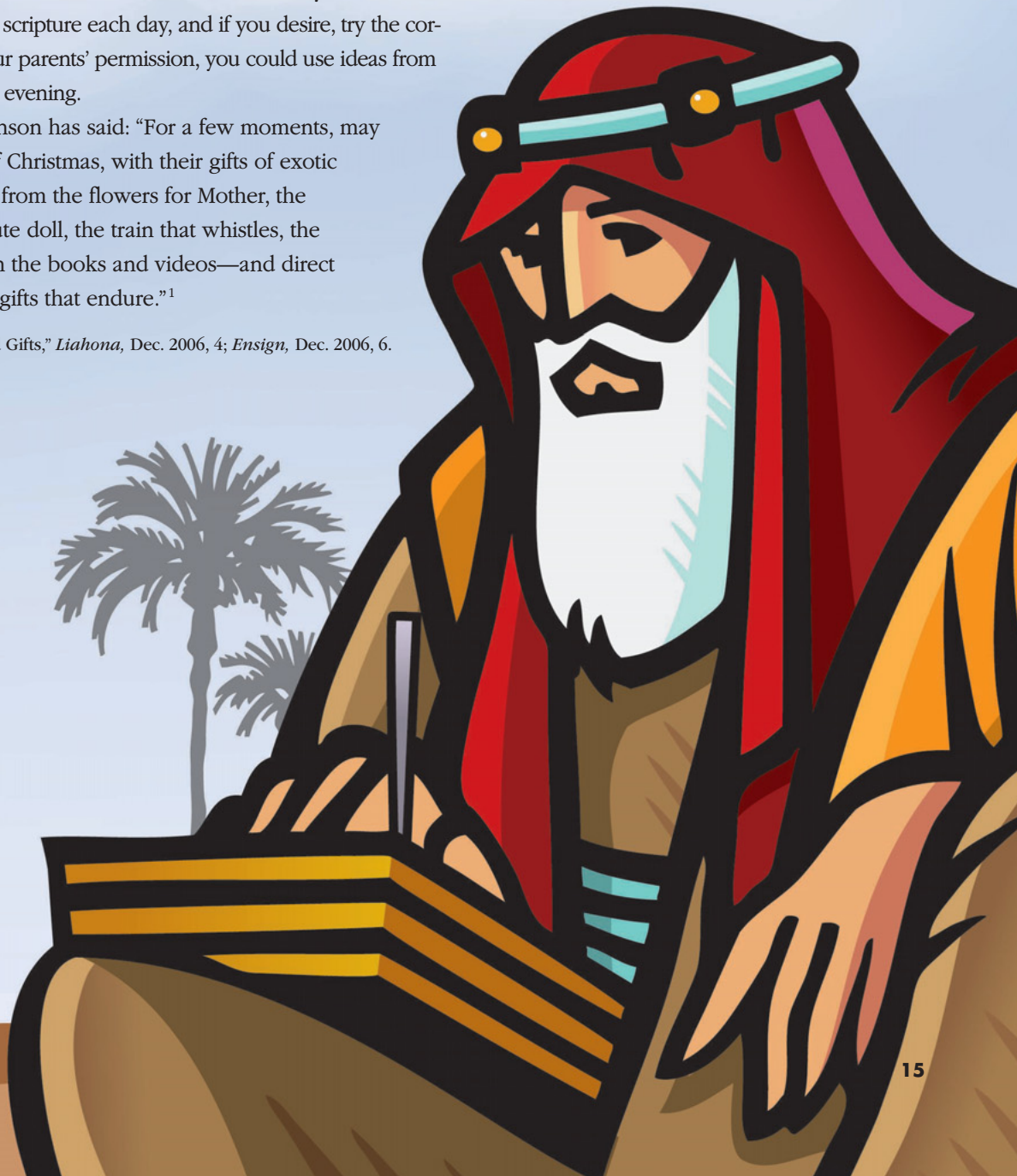
Many prophets in the Bible and Book of Mormon foretold Jesus Christ's birth and ministry hundreds of years before the actual event. For the 12 days before Christmas, this advent calendar will serve as a reference to scriptures about the birth and life of the Savior and activities you can do to be more Christlike. Read the scripture each day, and if you desire, try the corresponding activity. With your parents' permission, you could use ideas from this calendar in family home evening.

President Thomas S. Monson has said: "For a few moments, may we set aside the catalogs of Christmas, with their gifts of exotic description. Let's even turn from the flowers for Mother, the special tie for Father, the cute doll, the train that whistles, the long-awaited bicycle—even the books and videos—and direct our thoughts to God given gifts that endure."¹

NOTE

1. Thomas S. Monson, "Treasured Gifts," *Liahona*, Dec. 2006, 4; *Ensign*, Dec. 2006, 6.

When the Christmas season comes to a close, keep what you've learned in your mind and heart, and celebrate Christmas all year round by serving others.



December 13

Isaiah, a prophet in the Old Testament, prophesied that a pure woman would give birth to Heavenly Father's Son. These scriptural accounts were written more than 700 years before His birth.

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14; see also 2 Nephi 17:14).

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6; see also 2 Nephi 19:6).

Prayerfully pick a friend, family member, or ward or branch member. Secretly leave him or her a small gift, like a treat, thought from the scriptures, or a Christmas card.

December 14

Nephi saw in a vision the virgin Mary and baby Jesus:

"And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

"And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!

"And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.

"And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!" (1 Nephi 11:18–21).

Make a Christmas list of things you'd like to give instead of things you'd like to get.

December 15

Prophets testified of Christ's mission on the earth. The following is an account by the prophet Abinadi, who lived around 150 B.C.:

"And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

"And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, . . .

". . . he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father" (Mosiah 15:5–7).

Make a Christmas treat, and give it to a family in your ward or branch. Giving will help increase ward unity and friendship.



December 16

Alma prophesied the following to the people of Gideon around 83 B.C.:

“The Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. . . .

“And behold, he shall be born of Mary, . . . she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

“And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of the people.

“And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy” (Alma 7:9–12).

Give the gift of service to someone in need. Invite your family to help you in identifying the service you could give.

December 17

Jesus Christ loves each of God’s children and would never forget a single one. Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord would be a shepherd and gather His lost sheep.

“For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.

“As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places. . . .

“And I will bring them out from the people . . . and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel” (Ezekiel 34:11–13).

Spend time with a younger sibling, relative, or friend. Read to him or her the Christmas story in Luke 2.

December 18

Although Jesus Christ was perfect, He still needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. The following is an account of Lehi’s prophecy, recorded by Nephi:

“And my father said he [John the Baptist] should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and he also said he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water.

“And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 10:9–10).

Give the gift of time by spending time with a sick, elderly, or widowed person in your ward or neighborhood. Ask him or her to tell you about a favorite Christmas.



December 19

Samuel the Lamanite prophesied of the signs surrounding the birth of the Savior:

“Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.

“... There shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. . . .

“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 14:2–3, 5).

Write in your journal what Christmas means to you and what your family’s holiday traditions are.

December 20

Before Christ’s birth, the angel Gabriel visited Mary.

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

“To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

“And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. . . .

“... For thou hast found favour with God.

“And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus” (Luke 1:26–28, 30–31).

Gather family members and friends to go caroling around the neighborhood, or sing Christmas carols in your own home.

December 21

Nephi, the grandson of Helaman, faithfully waited for the Lord’s coming. But the unbelievers said to him, “The time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain” (3 Nephi 1:6).

Then Nephi “went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to God in behalf of his people” (v. 11).

The Lord told Nephi, “Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets” (v. 13).

In your prayers, express thanks to Heavenly Father for the gift of His Son.





December 22

Finally, the prophecies of Christ's birth were fulfilled.

"And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken. . . .

"And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, . . . for the sign which had been given was already at hand. . . .

"And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. . . .

"And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word" (3 Nephi 1:15–16, 19, 21).

Jesus Christ gave us the greatest gift of all, His life. Show your appreciation to your parents by writing a letter thanking them for the good things they have done for you.

December 23

On the night of Christ's birth, an angel appeared to righteous shepherds in Bethlehem to proclaim the news of Christ's birth.

"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 inn.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:7–11).

Make a resolution to be a happier and kinder person.

December 24

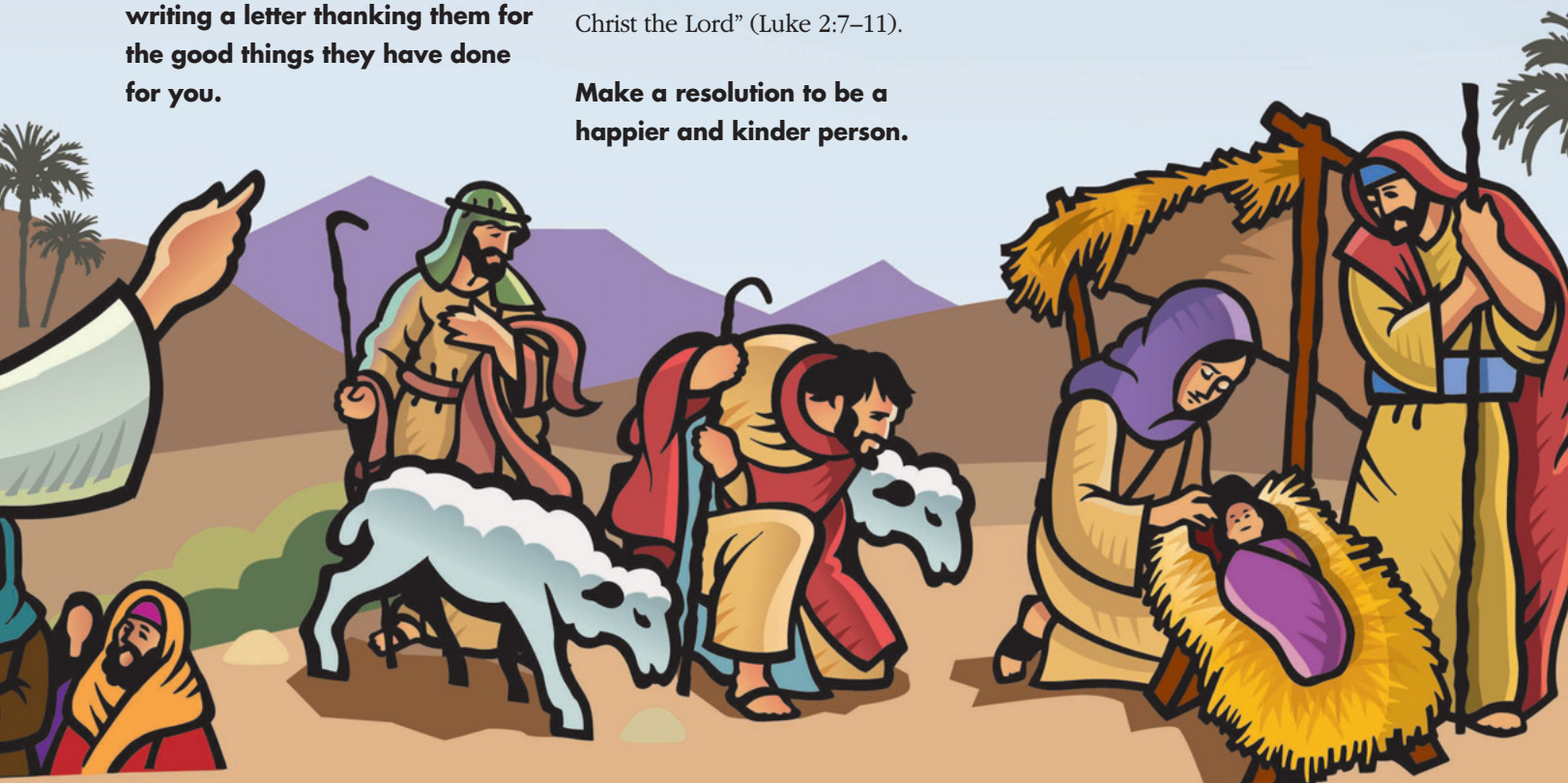
We, as Christians, stand as witnesses of Jesus Christ every day of the year through faith and good works. The Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon give this witness:

"And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

"For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

"That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (D&C 76:22–24).

Share your testimony of the Savior at the next appropriate occasion, such as fast and testimony meeting. ■



Consecrate Thy Performance



In pondering and pursuing consecration, understandably we tremble inwardly at what may be required. Yet the Lord has said consolingly, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

BY ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL (1926–2004)
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Neal A. Maxwell served for two years as an Assistant to the Twelve and for five years in the Presidency of the Seventy before being sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on October 3, 1981. He died on July 21, 2004, in Salt Lake City after an eight-year battle with leukemia. Elder Maxwell delivered this timeless sermon on consecration during general conference in April 2002.

These remarks are addressed to the imperfect but still striving in the household of faith. As always, my immediate audience is myself.

We tend to think of consecration only as yielding up, when divinely directed, our material possessions. But ultimate consecration is the yielding up of oneself to God. *Heart, soul, and mind* were the encompassing words of Christ in describing the first commandment, which is constantly, not periodically, operative (see Matthew 22:37). If kept, then our performances will, in turn, be fully consecrated for the lasting welfare of our souls (see 2 Nephi 32:9).

Such totality involves the submissive converging of feelings, thoughts, words, and deeds, the very opposite of estrangement: “For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13).

Many ignore consecration because it seems too abstract or too daunting. The conscientious among us, however, experience divine discontent because of progression mixed with procrastination. Hence, loving counsel is given with the confirmation of this direction, encouragement to continue the journey, and consolation as we experience individually the inherent degrees of difficulty.

Be Fully Submissive

Spiritual submissiveness is not accomplished in an instant, but by the incremental improvements and by the successive use of stepping-stones. Stepping-stones are meant to be taken one at a time anyway. Eventually our wills can be “swallowed up in the will of the Father” as we are “willing to submit



Breathtaking
submissiveness
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“would that [He]
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shrink.”

... even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 15:7; 3:19). Otherwise, though striving, we will continue to feel the world’s prop wash and be partially diverted.

Illustrations involving economic consecration are relevant. When Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions, they “kept back part of the price” (see Acts 5:1–11). So many of us cling tenaciously to a particular “part,” even treating our obsessions like possessions. Thus,

whatever else we may have
already given, the
last portion is the
hardest to yield.

Granted, partial surrender is still commendable, but it resembles, more than faintly, the excuse, “I gave at the office” (see James 1:7–8).

We may, for instance, have a specific set of skills which we mistakenly come to think we somehow own. If we continue to cling to those more than to God, we are flinching in the face of the consecrating first commandment. Since God lends us “breath . . . from one moment to another,” hyperventilating over these distractions is not recommended! (Mosiah 2:21).

A stumbling block appears when we serve God generously with time and checkbooks but still withhold portions of our inner selves, signifying that we are not yet fully His!

Some have difficulty when particular tasks enter their sunset phase. John the Baptist is a model, however, saying of Jesus’s growing flock, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Mistakenly regarding our present assignments as the only indicator of how much God loves us only adds to our reluctance to let go. Brothers and sisters, our individual worth is already divinely established as “great”; it does not fluctuate like the stock market.

Other stepping-stones remain unused because, like the rich, righteous young man, we are not yet willing to confront what we yet lack (see Mark 10:21). A residue of selfishness is thereby exposed.

Shrinking occurs in so many ways. The terrestrial kingdom, for example, will include the “honorable,” clearly not bearers of false witness. Yet they were still “not valiant in the testimony of Jesus” (D&C 76:75, 79). The best way to valiantly testify of Jesus is to become steadily more like Him, and it is that consecration that carves out the emulative character (see 3 Nephi 27:27).



Do Not Put Other Gods before God

In meeting these recited challenges, spiritual submissiveness is fortunately and helpfully adroit—sometimes helping us to “let go” of things, even mortal life, other times to “hold fast,” and still other times to use the next stepping-stone (see 1 Nephi 8:30).

But if we lack proportion, the next few yards can seem so formidable. Though aware of how God blessed ancient Israel to escape from mighty Pharaoh and his hosts, myopic Laman and Lemuel still lacked faith in God to help them with a mere local Laban.

We can also be deflected if we are too anxious to please those who are ascendant in our professional and avocational niches. Pleasing “other gods” instead of the real God still violates the first commandment (Exodus 20:3).

We sometimes even defend our idiosyncrasies, as if these protrusions somehow constituted our individuality. In a way, discipleship is a “contact sport,” as the Prophet Joseph testified:

“I am like a huge, rough stone . . . and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force. . . . Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty.”¹

Since knees often bend long before minds, holding back this “part” deprives God’s work of some of mankind’s very best intellects. Far better to be meek like Moses, who learned things he “never had supposed” (Moses 1:10). Yet, sadly, brothers and sisters, in the subtle interplay of agency and identity, there is so much hesitation. The surrender of the mind is actually a victory, because it then introduces us to God’s stretching and “higher” ways! (Isaiah 55:9).

Ironically, inordinate attention, even to good things, can diminish our devotion to God. For instance, one can be too caught up in sports and the forms of body worship we see among us. One can reverence nature and yet neglect nature’s God. One can have an exclusionary regard for good music and similarly with a worthy profession. In such circumstances, the “weightier matters” are often omitted (Matthew 23:23; see also 1 Corinthians 2:16). Only the Highest One can fully guide us as to the highest good which you and I can do.

On the two great commandments, Jesus declared emphatically, everything else hangs, not vice versa (see Matthew 22:40). The first commandment is not suspended just because of our vigorous pursuit of a lesser good, for we do not worship a lesser god.

Acknowledge God’s Hand

Before enjoying the harvests of righteous efforts, let us therefore first acknowledge God’s hand. Otherwise, the rationalizations appear, and they include, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:17). Or, we “vaunt” ourselves, as ancient Israel would have done (except for Gideon’s deliberately small army), by boasting that “mine own hand hath saved me” (Judges 7:2). Touting our own “hand” makes it doubly hard to confess God’s hand in all things (see Alma 14:11; D&C 59:21).

At a place called Meribah, one of the greatest ever, Moses, was fatigued by people clamoring for water. Momentarily, Moses “spake unadvisedly,” saying, “Must we fetch you water?” (Psalm 106:33; Numbers 20:10; see also Deuteronomy 4:21). The Lord mentored remarkable Moses through the pronoun problem and further magnified him. We would do well to be as meek as Moses (see Numbers 12:3).

Jesus never, never, never lost His focus! Though He went about doing so very much good, He always knew that the Atonement awaited, pleading with perspective, “Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour” (John 12:27; see also 5:30; 6:38).

As you and I develop additional love, patience, and meekness, the more we have to give God and humanity. Moreover, no one else is placed exactly as we are in our opportune human orbits.

Granted, the stepping-stones take us into new territory which we may be very reluctant to explore. Hence, the successful users of the stepping-stones are powerful motivators for the rest of us. We usually pay more attention to those we quietly admire. The hungry prodigal son remembered the menus in his home, but he was also drawn by other memories, declaring, “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18).

Consecration Returns to God What Is His

In striving for ultimate submission, our wills constitute all we really have to give God anyway. The usual gifts and their derivatives we give to Him could be stamped justifiably “Return to Sender,” with a capital S. Even when God receives this one gift in return, the fully faithful will receive “all that [He] hath” (D&C 84:38). What an exchange rate!

Meanwhile, certain realities remain: God has given us our lives, our agency, our talents, and our opportunities; He has given us our possessions; He has given us our appointed mortal spans complete with the needed breaths (see D&C 64:32). Guided by such perspective, we will avoid serious errors of proportion. Some of these are far less amusing than would be hearing a double quartet and mistaking it for the Tabernacle Choir!

No wonder President [Gordon B.] Hinckley . . . stressed our being a covenant people, emphasizing the covenants of the sacrament, tithing, and the temple, citing sacrifice as the “very essence of the Atonement.”²

Jesus’s Example of Submissiveness

Breathtaking submissiveness was achieved by the Savior as He faced the anguish and agonies of the Atonement and “would that [He] might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink” (D&C 19:18). On our small, imperfect scale, we face tests and wish that these would somehow be taken away.

Consider this: What of Jesus’s ministry if He had performed additional miracles but without the transcending miracle of Gethsemane and Calvary? His other miracles brought blessed extensions of life and lessened suffering—for some. But how could these miracles possibly compare with the greatest miracle of the universal Resurrection? (see 1 Corinthians 15:22). The multiplying of

the loaves and fishes fed a hungry multitude. Even so, recipients were soon hungry again, while those who partake of the Bread of Life will never hunger again (see John 6:51, 58).

In pondering and pursuing consecration, understandably we tremble inwardly at what may be required. Yet the Lord has said consolingly, “My grace is sufficient for you” (D&C 17:8). Do we really believe Him? He has also promised to make weak things strong (see Ether 12:27). Are we really willing to submit to that process? Yet if we desire fulness, we cannot hold back part!

Having our wills increasingly swallowed up by the will of the Father actually means an enhanced individuality, stretched and more capable of receiving “all that [God] hath” (D&C 84:38). Besides, how could we be entrusted with His “all” until our wills are much more like His? Nor could His “all” be fully appreciated by the partially committed.

Frankly, it is our prospective selves we betray by holding back whatever the “part.” No need therefore to ask, “Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:22). Rather, let us inquire about our individual stumbling blocks, “Lord, is it this?” We may have known the answer for a long time and may need resolve more than His response.

The greatest happiness in God’s generous plan is finally reserved for those who are willing to stretch and to

pay the costs of journeying to His regal realm. Brothers and sisters, “come, let us anew [this] journey pursue.”³

In the name of the Lord of the outstretched arm (see D&C 103:17; 136:22), even Jesus Christ, amen. ■

Subheads added; spelling, style, and source citations standardized.

NOTES

1. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 1:185.
2. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 147.
3. “Come, Let Us Anew,” *Hymns*, no. 217.

The multiplying of the loaves and fishes fed a hungry multitude. Even so, recipients were soon hungry again, while those who partake of the Bread of Life will never hunger again.



Jesus Christ Is the Light, Life, and Hope of the World



Teach the scriptures and quotations that meet the needs of the sisters you visit. Bear testimony of the doctrine. Invite those you teach to share what they have felt and learned.

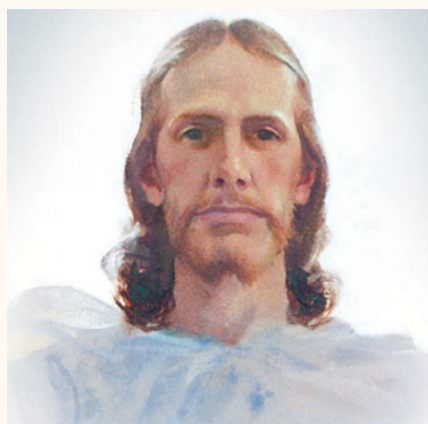
How Is Jesus Christ the Light and the Life of the World?

1 Nephi 17:13: “I will also be your light in the wilderness; . . . wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Jesus Christ is the light and the life of the world. All things were made by him. Under the direction and according to the plan of God the Father, Jesus Christ is the Creator, the source of the light and the life of all things. . . .

“Jesus Christ is the *light* of the world because he is the source of the light which ‘proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space’ (D&C 88:12). His light is ‘the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (D&C 93:2). His example and his teachings illuminate the path we should walk. . . .

“Jesus Christ is the *life* of the



world because of his unique position in what the scriptures call ‘the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death’ (2 Nephi 11:5). His Resurrection and his Atonement save us from both physical and spiritual death” (“The Light and the Life,” *Liahona*, Dec. 1997, 42–43; see *New Era*, Dec. 1996, 6).

How Can I Find Hope in Jesus Christ?

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

“The gospel of Jesus Christ has the divine power to lift you to great heights from what appears at times to be an unbearable burden or weakness. The Lord knows your circumstances and your challenges. He said to Paul and to all of us, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’ And like Paul we can answer: ‘My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly

therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me’ (2 Corinthians 12:9)” (“Have We Not Reason to Rejoice?” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 19).

Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president: “Mormon asks, ‘What is it . . . ye shall hope for?’ His answer tells us of the three great hopes: ‘Ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal’ (Moroni 7:41).

“When you were baptized, you became participants in the first great hope, the Atonement of Christ. Every time you worthily partake of the sacrament, you have the opportunity to begin again. . . . Your hope and faith in the Savior will increase as you repent and make personal changes. . . .

“The second great hope is the Resurrection. You are all promised that through our Savior Jesus Christ you will be resurrected. . . .

“With the hope of the Atonement and the Resurrection, you have a third great hope, the hope of eternal life. . . . Because you have a Savior, you also believe in a happy, eternal life of creating, serving, and learning. You are already in the strait and narrow path, and there is hope smiling brightly before you. . . . You just need to stay in, pressing forward with a brightness of hope” (“There Is Hope Smiling Brightly before Us,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2003, 103–5). ■

“What can I do to make my prayers less repetitive and more meaningful?”

The scriptures clarify that *vain* repetition is the problem (see Matthew 6:7). Sometimes you will need to repeat important things in your prayers. But if you repeat words without thinking, you’re not really communicating with Heavenly Father. To avoid vain repetition, learn to pray with “real intent” (see 2 Nephi 31:13; Moroni 7:9; 10:4)—that is, pray with sincerity and with the intent to act in faith.

In 3 Nephi the Savior’s disciples prayed “without ceasing,” yet “they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray” (3 Nephi 19:24). The Holy Ghost can guide your prayers and make them more meaningful (see Romans 8:26). It also helps to make time to pray in a quiet place when you are not hurried.

Finally, think of the many different things you can pray about. You enjoy many blessings each day, and you need heavenly help in many situations. Thank Heavenly Father for your blessings, and pray for things you need. You can pray for forgiveness, help in trials, a stronger testimony, and protection against temptation.



Unselfish Prayers

Sometimes when we pray, I think we are selfish—just thinking of ourselves and what we want. Think of others and their needs too. Count every blessing, and thank

Heavenly Father for them. Prayer is not just for Heavenly Father to listen to our wants and complaints but also for us to listen to Him. How are we to receive revelation if we just quickly say what we want and then hop into bed? Ask Him what He would want you to do. You will become a better person.

Rebecah W., 16, Idaho, USA



Let the Holy Ghost Guide You

Take time to ponder which things you are most grateful for and which things are of greatest need in your life. The Spirit will guide you and will give you answers and suggestions that will come as ideas, thoughts, promptings. You might also keep a journal in which you can record these thoughts and ideas for future reference.

Elder Sebo, 21, Texas Houston Mission

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



Reflect on Your Day

When I pray at night, I think of what I read in the scriptures. I try to remember what I

was able to do right and what I need to improve on. I can ask Heavenly Father to help me with that day's difficulties. I ask Him to always help me remember His counsel and give me strength to follow it. Since every day is different, even if we have a routine, different things will always happen. That being the case, upon reflecting about our day, we will always have different things to ask for and be thankful for.

Kétia F., 20, Palmas, Brazil



Pray Aloud

Find a time and place where you can be alone and pray out loud.

When you pray vocally, it feels so much more personal and meaningful. It's easier to avoid vain repetitions and to prevent your mind from wandering. It's really like a conversation with Heavenly Father.

Elder Marra, 20, Colorado Springs Mission

Pray and Then Listen

As you feel the need to trust in the Lord and improve the quality of your relationship with Him, think about what you want and kneel down in prayer. Imagine Heavenly Father, and talk to Him like your Father, which He is. Tell Him everything you feel. Have a sincere conversation, heart to heart. Trust in Him, thank Him, ask Him for forgiveness, enjoy His

companionship, express your love to Him, and then listen closely for answers.

Raúl A., 20, Mexico City, Mexico



Pray for Specifics

Planning ahead, even if just for a few minutes to compose your thoughts and most

sincere desires, ensures that you will focus more on the words you are saying to your Heavenly Father. Think of your family, extended family, and others who may need your prayers. There are so many people who need help, guidance, and protection.

Focusing on specific blessings and praying in detail can change the usual "Please bless me to have a good day" to "Please guide me in my decisions to set a positive example for others." Those are the prayers you will hold dear to your heart because they are more Christlike—the way they are supposed to be.

Hannah T., 14, Maryland, USA



PRAY WITH SINCERITY

"As we pray, let us really communicate with our Father in Heaven. It is easy to let our prayers become repetitious, expressing words with little or no thought behind them. When we remember that each of us is literally a spirit son or daughter of God, we will not find it difficult to approach Him in prayer. He knows us; He loves us; He wants what is best for us. Let us pray with sincerity and meaning, offering our thanks and asking for those things we feel we need. Let us listen for His answers, that we may recognize them when they come. As we do, we will be strengthened and blessed."

President Thomas S. Monson, "How Firm a Foundation," Liahona and Ensign, Nov. 2006, 67.

NEXT QUESTION

"My parents aren't members. I'm afraid to talk to them about the Church. How can I share the gospel with them without offending them?"

Send your answer by January 15, 2009, to:

**Liahona, Questions & Answers 1/09
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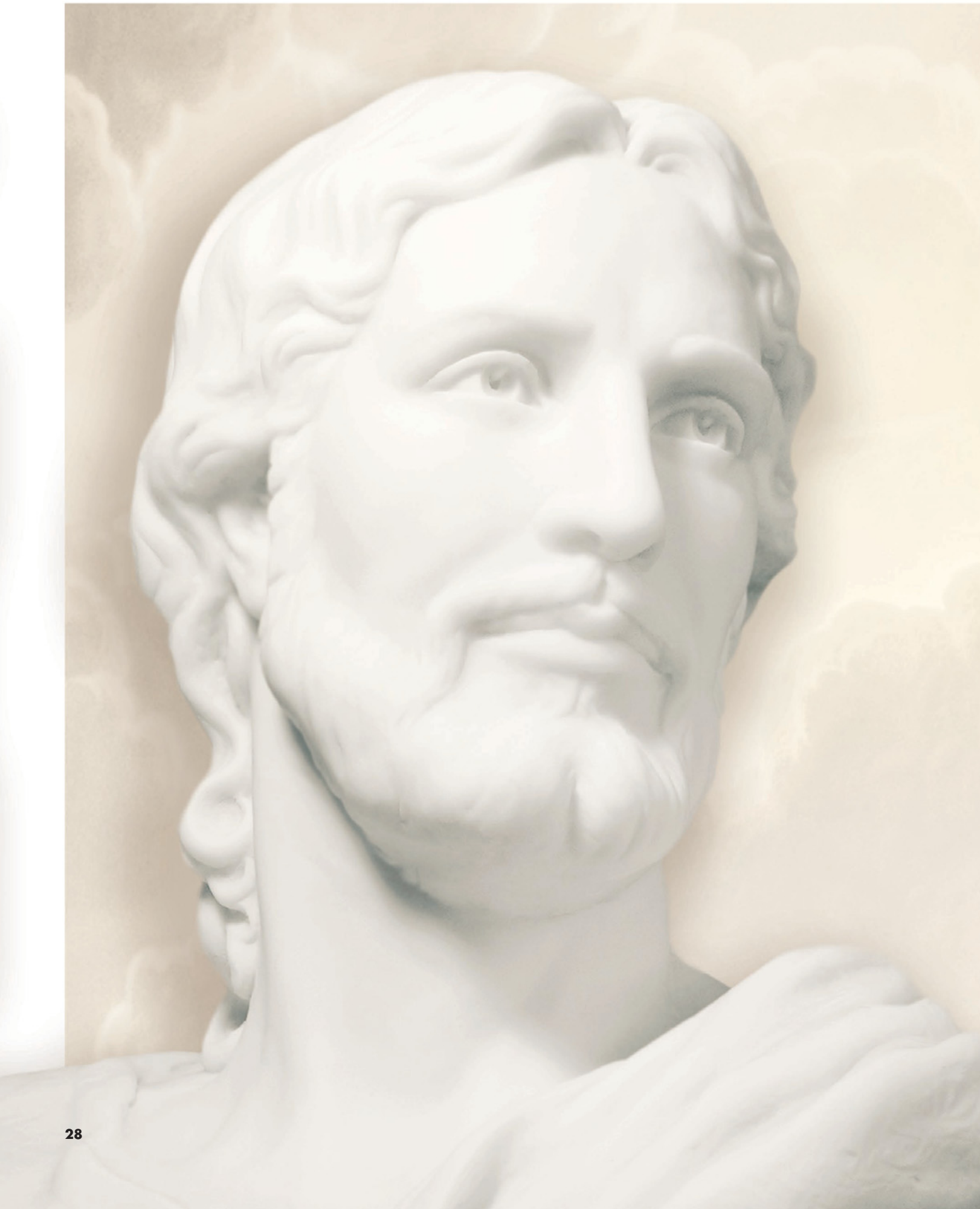
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I Amazed at the LOVE Jesus Offers Me

BY ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

One of our favorite hymns begins with the words “I stand all amazed.”¹ As we think about Christ’s life, we are amazed in every way. We are amazed at His premortal role as the great Jehovah, agent of His Father, Creator of the earth, guardian of the entire family of man. We are amazed at His coming to earth and the circumstances surrounding His advent.

We are amazed that at only 12 years of age He was already about His Father’s business. We are amazed at the formal beginning of His ministry, His baptism and spiritual gifts.

We stand all amazed to know Jesus cast out and defeated the forces of evil everywhere He went, even as He made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the infirm to stand. When I consider the Savior’s ministry, I wonder, “How did He do it?”

He Is Forgiving

I am most amazed at the moment when Jesus, after staggering under His load to the crest of Calvary, said, “Father, forgive

them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

If ever there is a moment when I indeed stand all amazed, it is this one. When I consider Him bearing the weight of all our sins and forgiving those who would nail Him to the cross, I ask not “How did He do it?” but “Why did He do it?” As I examine my life against the mercifulness of His, I find how I fail to do as much as I should in following the Master.

For me, this is a higher order of amazement. I am startled enough by His ability to heal the sick and raise the dead, but I have had some experience with healing in a limited way. We are all lesser vessels, but we have seen the miracles of the Lord repeated in our own lives and in our own homes and with our own portion of the priesthood. But mercy? Forgiveness? Atonement? Reconciliation? Too often, that is a different matter.

How could He forgive His tormenters at that moment? With all that pain, with blood having fallen from every pore, still He was thinking of others. This is yet one more amazing evidence that He really was perfect and intends us to be also. In the Sermon on the Mount, before He stated that perfection is



As we think about Christ’s life, we are amazed in every way. He was the purest and only perfect person who ever lived.

our goal, He gave something of a last requirement. He said all must “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

This is one of the most difficult things to do.

Jesus Christ was the purest and only perfect person who ever lived. He is the one person in all the world from Adam to this present hour who deserved adoration and respect and admiration and love, and yet He was persecuted, abandoned, and put to death. Through it all, He would not condemn those who persecuted Him.

He Is the Perfect Sacrifice

When our first parents, Adam and Eve, had been cast out of the Garden of Eden, the Lord commanded them to “worship the Lord their God, and . . . offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5). The angel told Adam, “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7).

Sacrifice served as a constant reminder of the humiliation and suffering the Son would pay to ransom us. It was a constant reminder of the meekness and mercy and gentleness—yes, the forgiveness—that was to mark every Christian life. For all these reasons and more, those firstborn lambs, clean and unblemished, perfect in every way, were offered on those stone altars year after year and generation after generation, pointing us toward the great Lamb of God, His Only Begotten Son, His Firstborn, perfect and without blemish.

In our dispensation, we are to partake of the sacrament—a symbolic offering that reflects our broken heart and contrite spirit (see D&C 59:8). As we partake, we promise to “always remember him and keep his commandments . . . ; that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77).

The symbols of the Lord’s sacrifice, in Adam’s day or our own, are to help us remember to live peacefully and

obediently and mercifully. These ordinances are to help us remember to demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in our long-suffering and human kindness one for another, as He demonstrated it for us on that cross.

But over the centuries, too few have used these ordinances in the proper way. Cain was the first to offer an unacceptable sacrifice. As the Prophet Joseph Smith noted: “Abel offered to God a sacrifice that

was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted, because he . . . could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for man, for this was the plan of redemption, and without the shedding of blood was no remission. And as the sacrifice was instituted for a type by which man was to discern the great Sacrifice which God had prepared, to offer a sacrifice contrary to that, no faith could be exercised, because redemption was not purchased in that way, nor the power of atonement instituted after

that order. . . . Certainly, the shedding of the blood of a beast could be beneficial to no man, except it was done in imitation, or as a type, or explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself.”²

And so others in our day, a little Cain-like, return home after partaking of the sacrament to argue with a family member or lie or cheat or be angry with a neighbor.

Samuel, a prophet in Israel, commented on how futile it is to offer a sacrifice without honoring the meaning of the sacrifice. When Saul, king in Israel, had defied the Lord’s instructions by bringing back from the Amalekites “the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord [his] God,” Samuel cried: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:15, 22).

Those firstborn lambs, clean and unblemished, perfect in every way, were offered on those stone altars year after year, pointing us toward the great Lamb of God, His Only Begotten Son, His Firstborn, perfect and without blemish.

Saul offered sacrifice without comprehending the meaning of his sacrifice. Latter-day Saints who faithfully go to sacrament meeting but are no more merciful or patient or forgiving as a result are much the same. They go through the motions of the ordinances without an understanding of the purposes for which these ordinances were established. Those purposes are to help us be obedient and gentle in our search for forgiveness of our sins.

Remembering His Sacrifice

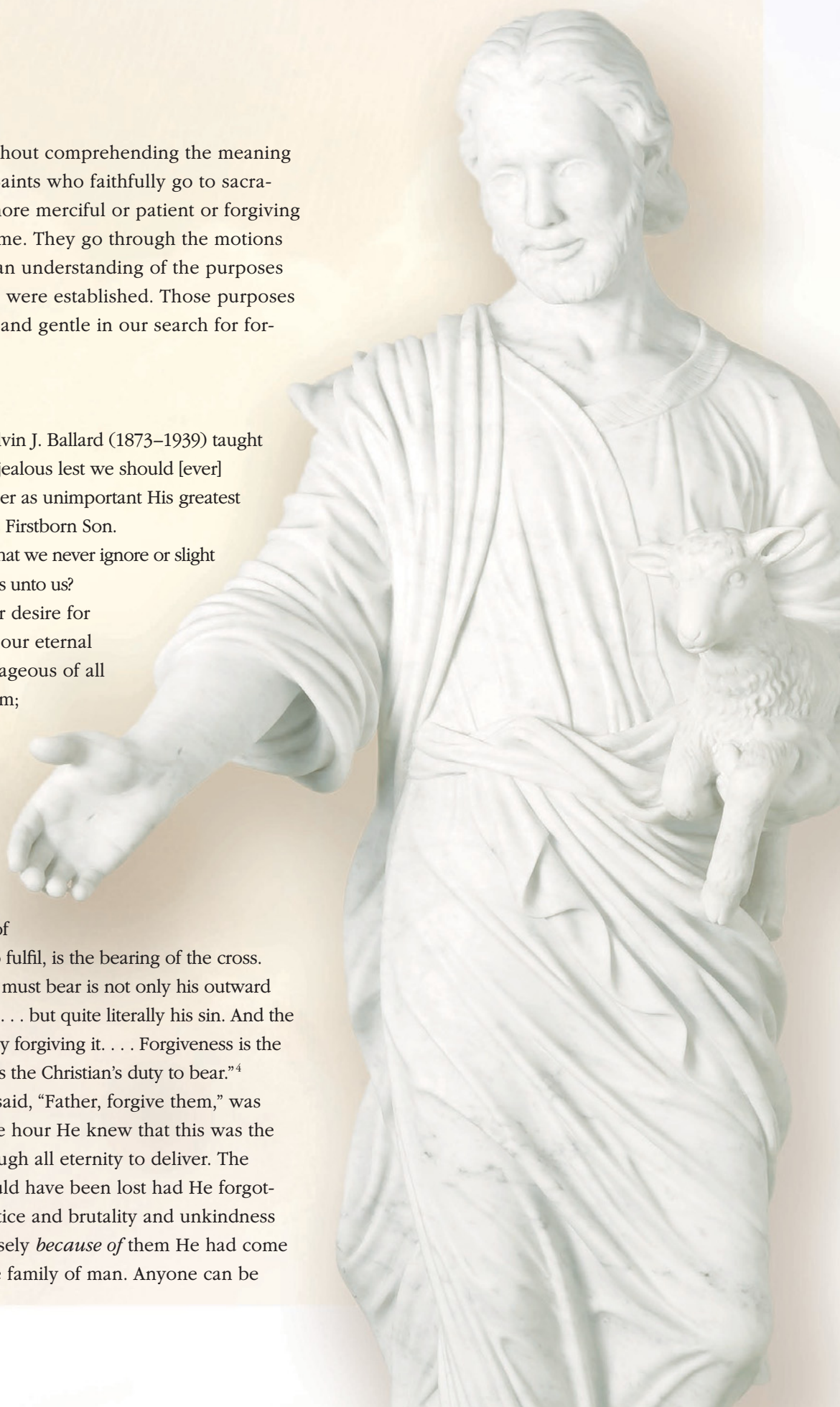
Many years ago, Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) taught that God “is a jealous God—jealous lest we should [ever] ignore and forget and consider as unimportant His greatest gift unto us”³—the life of His Firstborn Son.

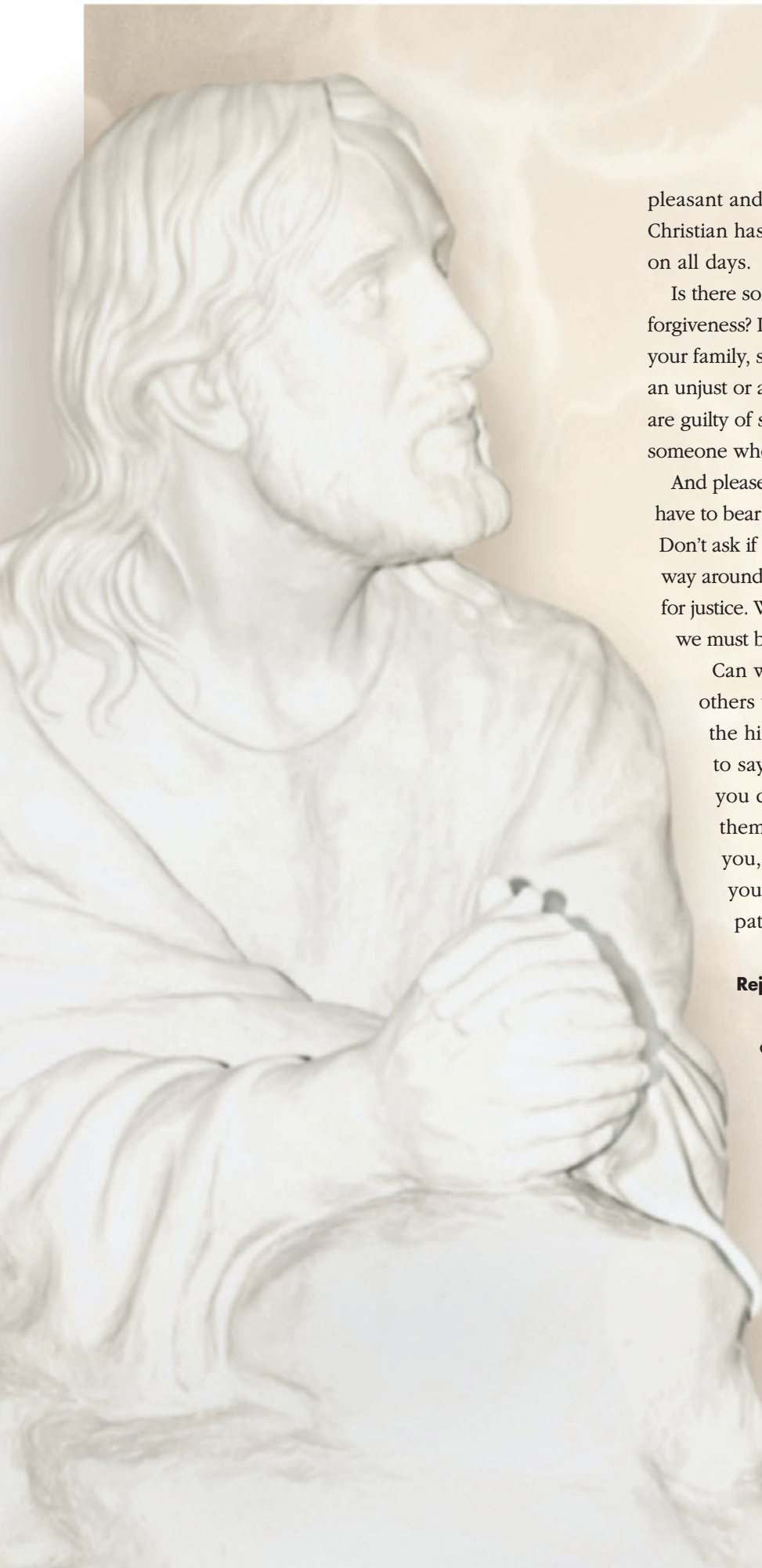
So how do we make sure that we never ignore or slight or forget His greatest of all gifts unto us?

We do so by showing our desire for a remission of our sins and our eternal gratitude for that most courageous of all prayers: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” We do so by joining in the work of forgiving sins.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2) [Paul commands us]. . . . The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfil, is the bearing of the cross. My brother’s burden which I must bear is not only his outward situation [and circumstance], . . . but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it. . . . Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian’s duty to bear.”⁴

Surely the reason Christ said, “Father, forgive them,” was because even in that terrible hour He knew that this was the message He had come through all eternity to deliver. The entire plan of salvation would have been lost had He forgotten that not *in spite of* injustice and brutality and unkindness and disobedience but precisely *because of* them He had come to extend forgiveness to the family of man. Anyone can be





pleasant and patient and forgiving on a good day. A Christian has to be pleasant and patient and forgiving on all days.

Is there someone in your life who perhaps needs forgiveness? Is there someone in your home, someone in your family, someone in your neighborhood who has done an unjust or an unkind or an unchristian thing? All of us are guilty of such transgressions, so there surely must be someone who yet needs your forgiveness.

And please don't ask if it is fair that the injured should have to bear the burden of forgiveness for the offender. Don't ask if "justice" doesn't demand that it be the other way around. When it comes to our own sins, we don't ask for justice. What we plead for is mercy—and that is what we must be willing to give.

Can we see the tragic irony of not granting to others what we need so badly ourselves? Perhaps the highest and holiest and purest act would be to say in the face of unkindness and injustice that you do yet more truly "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." That is the demanding pathway of perfection.

Rejoicing in Reunion

I recall a few years ago seeing a drama enacted at the Salt Lake International Airport. On this particular day, I got off an airplane and walked into the terminal. It was immediately obvious that a missionary was coming home because the airport was full of conspicuous-looking missionary friends and missionary relatives.

I tried to pick out the immediate family members. There was a father who did not look particularly comfortable in an awkward-fitting and slightly out-of-fashion suit. He seemed to be

a man of the soil, with a suntan and large, work-scarred hands.

There was a mother who was quite thin, looking as if she had worked very hard in her life. She had in her hand a handkerchief—and I think it must have been a linen handkerchief once, but now it looked like tissue paper. It was nearly shredded from the anticipation only the mother of a returning missionary could know.

Two or three younger brothers and sisters were running around, largely oblivious to the scene that was unfolding.

I found myself wondering as to who would be first to break away from the welcoming group. A look at the mother's handkerchief convinced me that she would probably be the one.

As I sat there, I saw the returning missionary appear. I knew he was the one by the squeals of excitement from the crowd. He looked like Captain Moroni, clean and handsome and straight and tall. Undoubtedly he had known the sacrifice this mission had meant to his father and mother.

As he neared the group, sure enough, someone couldn't wait any longer. It wasn't the mother, and it wasn't any of the children. It was Father. That big, slightly awkward, quiet, and bronzed giant of a man ran out and swept his son into his arms.

The missionary was probably 6'2" (188 cm) or so, but this big father grabbed him, lifted him off the ground, and held him for a long, long time. He just held him and said nothing. The boy put both arms around his dad, and they just held each other very tightly. It seemed like all eternity stood still. It was as if all the world had gone silent out of respect for such a sacred moment.

And then I thought of God the Eternal Father watching His Son go out to serve, to sacrifice when He didn't have to do it, paying His own expenses, so to speak,

costing everything He had saved all His life to give. At that precious moment, it was not too difficult to imagine that Father speaking with some emotion to those who could hear, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And it was also possible to imagine that triumphant returning Son saying, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

How do we make
sure that we
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by joining in the work
of forgiving.

Wonderful to Me

Even in my limited imagination, I can see that reunion in the heavens. And I pray for one like it for you and for me. I pray for reconciliation and for forgiveness, for mercy, and for the Christian growth and Christian character we must develop if we are to enjoy such a moment fully.

I stand all amazed that even for a man like me, there is a chance. If I've heard the "good news" correctly, there really is a chance—for me and for you and for everyone who is willing to keep hoping and to keep trying and to allow others the same privilege.

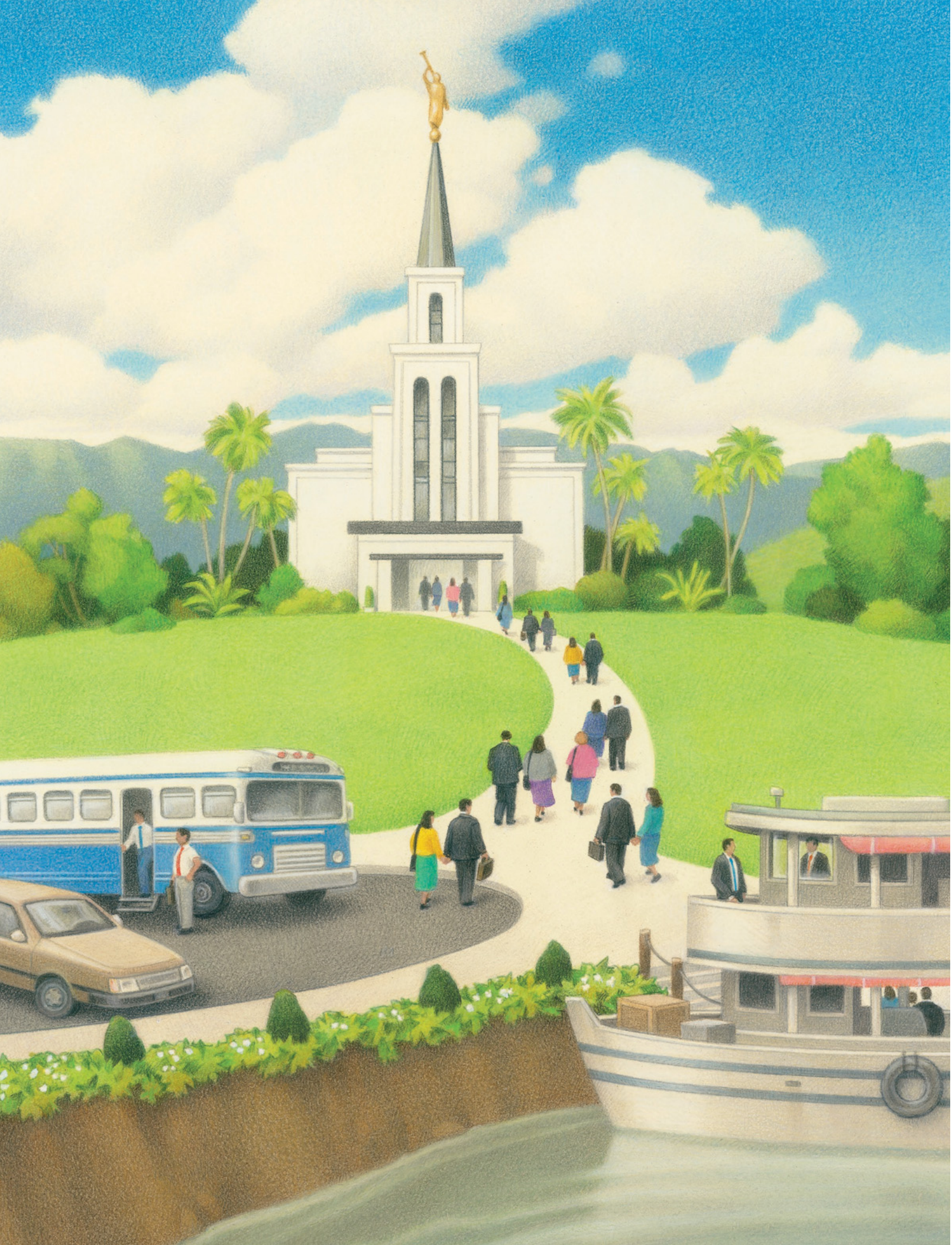
*I marvel that he would descend from his
throne divine*

*To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine. . . .
I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the debt!
Such mercy, such love, and devotion can I forget?
No, no, I will praise and adore at the mercy seat,
Until at the glorified throne I kneel at his feet. . . .
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!⁵ ■*

From an address given to Salt Lake Temple workers on November 24, 1985.

NOTES

1. "I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns*, no. 193.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 48.
3. *Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness* (1966), 136–37.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 2nd ed. (1959), 100.
5. *Hymns*, no. 193.



Gather to the TEMPLE

BY ELDER CLAUDIO R. M. COSTA

Of the Presidency of the Seventy

When Benedito Carlos do Carmo Mendes Martins decided to take his family to the nearest temple in 1992, he needed 15 days off work to make the arduous round-trip from his home in Manaus, in northern Brazil. It was a busy time for his company, however, and his boss refused to give him time off.

Because the family had prepared, sacrificed, and saved money to make the trip, they prayed that they might somehow still be able to go. Their prayers were soon answered.

"The day before the trip, I was diagnosed with parasites," Brother Martins said. "I was so happy to be sick!"

His doctor immediately prescribed medication and a two-week medical leave of absence from work, which, by law, his company was obligated to give. The next day the family left for the temple.

"I took my medicine with me, and during the trip I received injections," Brother Martins said. By the time he returned, the parasites were gone.

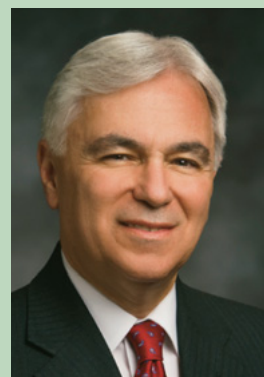
"I came home with faith in and a

testimony of the ordinances of the temple," he said, "especially the ordinance of being sealed to my wife and three children."

Before Manaus became part of the Caracas Venezuela Temple District in 2005, the nearest temple was the São Paulo Brazil Temple, located thousands of miles away in southeastern Brazil. Some Latter-day Saints in Manaus were so determined to go to the temple that they sold their homes, means of transportation, work tools—anything of value—to raise money.

To reach São Paulo, members would travel by boat on the Rio Negro to its nearby confluence with the Amazon and from there east to the Rio Madeira—a distance of about 70 miles (115 km). Then they would travel more than 600 miles (965 km) southeast on the Rio Madeira to the city of Pôrto Velho. From there they would board buses and trek another 1,500 miles (2,400 km) to São Paulo. After serving in the house of the Lord, they would make the seven-day return trip.

When Saints from Manaus prepared to make their first trip to the temple in



For many Latter-day Saints throughout the world, attending the temple requires great sacrifice. When Saints from Manaus, Brazil, made their first trip to the temple in Caracas, they were so happy they declared, "Now it takes us only 40 hours to get to the temple!"

Caracas, they were so happy they declared, “Now it takes us only 40 hours to get to the temple!” To get to Caracas, the Saints had to endure a 1,000-mile (1,600-km) bus ride that included traveling through unsettled parts of the Amazon jungle and changing from a larger bus to a smaller bus at Brazil’s border with Venezuela. The distance was shorter, but the trip still required substantial monetary sacrifice, with the added expense of obtaining passports.

As the Saints embarked, they sang, “Rise, Ye Saints, and Temples Enter.”¹ To maintain reverence and stay focused on the purpose of their trip, they held firesides on the bus and watched Church movies such as *The Mountain of the Lord*.

In a journal compiled by those who were part of that first trip, Church members recalled their blessings, not their sacrifices. One sister wrote: “Today I am going to the temple for the first time. Yesterday I celebrated my 20th anniversary as a member of the Church—so many hours, days, and years of waiting and preparing. My heart is full of gratitude and happiness for my friends, priesthood leaders, and especially Jesus Christ, His Atonement, and this opportunity to go to the house of my Heavenly Father.”

A brother who was sealed to his wife and children on that trip said the temple gave him a glimpse of eternity. “I have no doubt that if we keep the covenants we make in the temple, we will have a happier and more abundant life,” he wrote. “I love my family, and I will do all I can to have them with me in the celestial kingdom.”

The Brazil Manaus Mission was created on July 1, 1990, to take the gospel to six states in northern Brazil. At the time, the Church was relatively unknown in those states and had few members. But as the Lord declared in the Book of Mormon, those who repent and come unto Him



**Architectural rendering
of the temple to be built in
Manaus, Brazil.**

will be numbered among His people in the latter days (see 3 Nephi 16:13).

Today there are eight stakes in the city of Manaus, in Amazonas State, additional stakes in the other states, and seven districts within the mission boundaries. As I contemplate the growth of the Church and the role that temples play in the Lord’s efforts to gather His children, my mind is drawn to His promise in the Book of Mormon: “Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 21:28).

As a mission president in Manaus from 1990 to 1993, I saw many of the Amazon people embrace the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, join the Church, and “come in unto the covenant” (3 Nephi 21:22). As a result, the power of the priesthood began to bless their lives and their families—especially through the ordinances of the temple.

Church members in northern Brazil rejoiced in May 2007 when the First Presidency announced that a temple, Brazil’s sixth, would be built in Manaus. For the Martins family and the growing number of Latter-day Saints in northern Brazil, having a temple in Manaus will be a great blessing. For many Saints throughout the world, however, attending the temple will continue to require great sacrifice.

May those of us who live near a temple show our gratitude by increasing our temple attendance. And may we, like the Saints in northern Brazil, emulate the example of the Nephites who “did labor exceedingly” to gather to the temple “that they might be . . . where Jesus should show himself unto the multitude” (3 Nephi 19:3). ■

NOTE

1. *Hymns*, no. 287.



Temple Blessings

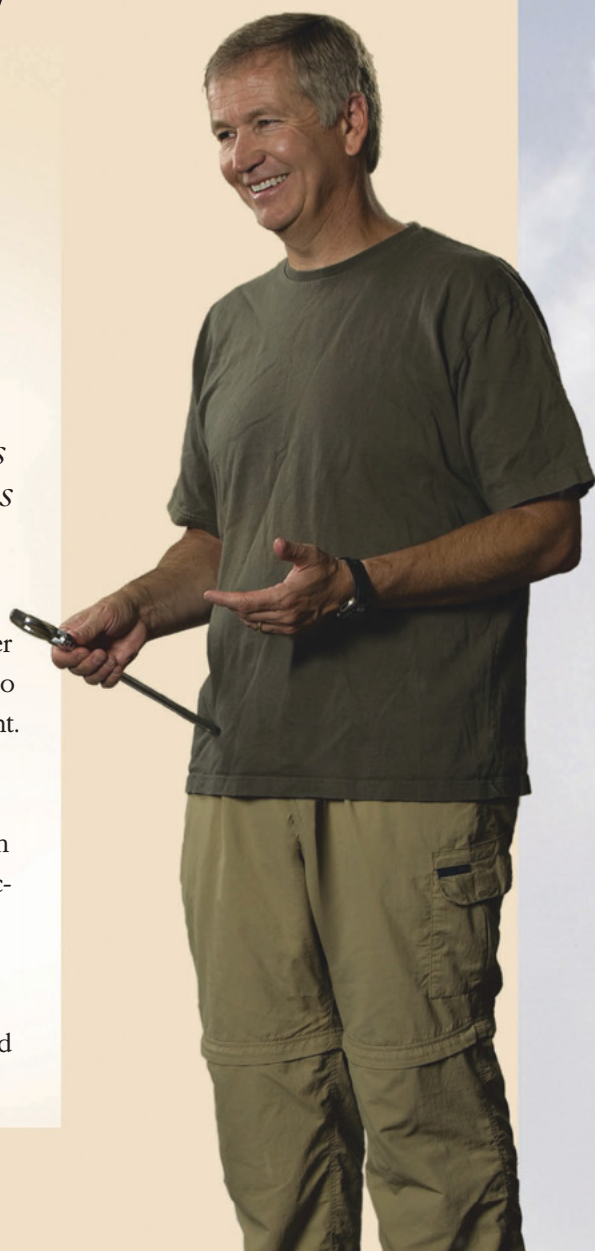
IN A

Part-Member Family

BY KAY PRZYBILLE

My temple attendance gave me insights that improved my relationships with my husband, who was not a Latter-day Saint, and our children.

In June of 1986 I drove my mother to the Cardston Alberta Temple so she could receive her endowment. I had already received my endowment, but my nonmember husband and I lived in a remote part of British Columbia, and I had allowed my recommend to expire. Therefore, I was able to walk with my mother to the recommend desk but could follow her no further. I went outside, leaned against the temple wall, and cried.



After that experience, I determined never to be left outside of the temple again. My husband supported me in my decision, and I was soon attending the temple as frequently as I could. There I learned principles that made a profound difference in my personal life and in relationships with family and friends.

Changes in My Life

First, I noticed a change in my patience level. I had spent years trying to keep my temper under control without much success. As my temple worship taught me about my relationship to my Heavenly Father and to other people, my attitude changed. I came to realize that my family and friends were people I knew before I came here. They were not in my life to thwart or annoy me but to work with me so I could learn life lessons. I gained understanding as I tried to learn what they were trying to teach me, and I gained patience to accept that they progressed at their own speed. I also realized that life was not a struggle to teach others to be perfect so that I could be happy; it is a happy journey toward perfection with people I love.

The second change was in my attitude toward my husband. Before our marriage, I had determined to place him as the head of the family and not to walk away from our relationship.

Despite my resolution, I struggled with accepting his choices and sometimes allowed his habits to affect my happiness. In the temple I learned that together we had the potential to be perfect eternal companions. From my new observation point, I saw that when we worked together, we were whole. Our weaknesses and strengths, interests and talents complemented each other's so well that we were stronger as a team than we were as individuals.

As I learned to accept my husband's differences, I became less critical and adopted a spirit of cooperation and teamwork in our marriage. I found I was growing more quickly into the person I wanted to be. Moreover, when my husband felt more cooperation from me, he was more loving toward me as well.

The third area of improvement was finding faith that I could allow our four children, who are now grown, to live their lives without my feeling responsible to make them live a certain way. Some of them were less active in the Church, but I still wanted to influence them for good without infringing on their agency. On one particular visit to the temple, I put their names on the prayer roll and prayed long and sincerely in their behalf. I received a profoundly peaceful assurance that all would be well with them.

When meditating on the experience later, I realized that Heavenly Father loved them even more than I did because He understood them better. He wants to bless them and have them return to Him, and He will provide them with learning opportunities. Now when I begin to worry, I remember that experience and do what I can, knowing the Lord will do the rest.

A fourth alteration in my life came as a sense of general peace settled over me, resulting in part from my temple attendance giving me a better eternal perspective. I am confident that the Lord is in charge, that there are enough resources on this earth for us to live comfortably, that there will be oases of virtue within the desert of evil. I no longer think of myself as being alone. The Holy Ghost is my companion, and I can talk to my Heavenly Father in prayer throughout my day. I used to agonize over decisions; now I seek the Spirit's promptings and act on them as I make choices. And since I no longer feel the need to require others to live the way I think they should, I have more time and energy to "work out [my] own salvation" (Mormon 9:27).

This new perspective lifted a great weight off my shoulders. The Lord meant it when He said:



In the temple, I learned that my husband and I had the potential to be perfect eternal companions. From this new observation point, I saw that we were stronger as a team than we were as individuals.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29–30).

Family Blessings

Continued temple attendance would be essential for me if the only blessings I received were the personal ones of peace, assurance, and patience. But there have been other experiences—many others—that have blessed me and my family.

- I have become involved in family history and have had many wonderful experiences involving family members, both mortal and those beyond the veil.

- In November 1993 our second daughter married in the temple, and I was able to attend the sealing.
- In May 2006, after 37 years of marriage, my husband joined the Church. In August 2007 he and I were sealed, and our second daughter was sealed to us. Our oldest daughter, who was sealed to her husband and daughter in November 2006, was sealed to us in August 2008.

I am forever grateful to a mother who led the way by being baptized when I was seven and who later inspired me to get my temple recommend again. Following her example has brought numerous personal blessings, and those blessings have extended to other members of my family. ■

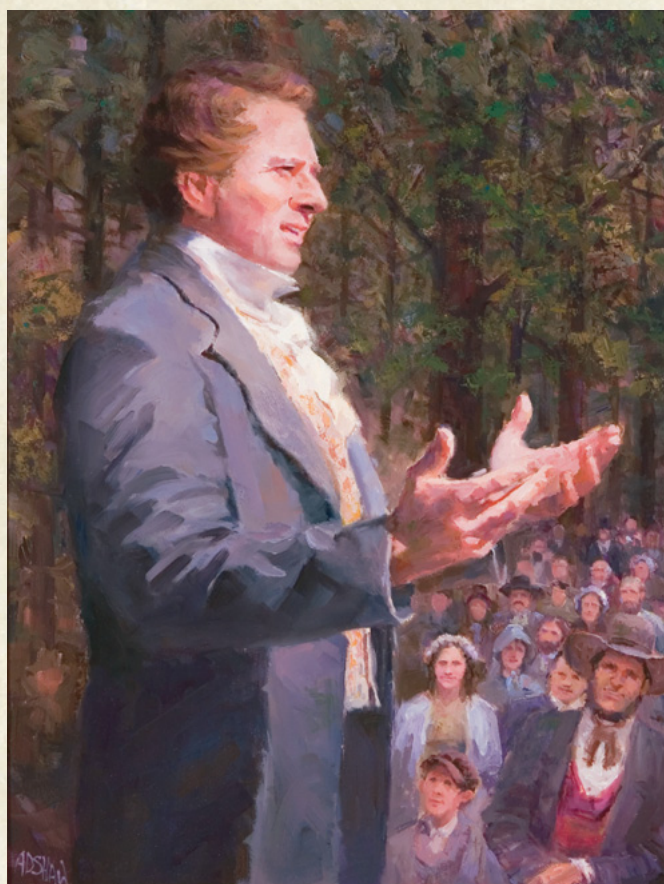
I REMEMBER *Joseph*



JOSEPH SMITH, BY WILLIAM WHITAKER, © DESERET MORNING NEWS, MAY NOT BE COPIED

Many who knew the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote of their experiences with him. Here, some of those accounts accompany artwork featuring the Prophet. Some accounts were written near the time of the event depicted in the art and others long after, but they all give insight into his life as a man and as a prophet of God.

Jesse N. Smith, the Prophet's cousin, said: "[Joseph Smith was] incomparably the most God-like man I ever saw. . . . I know that by nature he was incapable of lying and deceitfulness, possessing the greatest kindness and nobility of character. I felt when in his presence that he could read me through and through. I know he was all that he claimed to be."¹



JOSEPH IN THE GROVE, BY A. D. SHAW, COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART



JOSEPH SMITH REBUKING THE GUARDS IN RICHMOND JAIL, BY SAM LAWLOR

*Right: Emmeline Blanche Wells wrote: "In the Prophet Joseph Smith, I believed I recognized the great spiritual power that brought joy and comfort to the Saints. . . . The power of God rested upon him to such a degree that on many occasions he seemed transfigured. . . . The glory of his countenance was beyond description."*²

*Far left: A grove of trees often became the setting for the Prophet to speak to the Latter-day Saints. Amasa Potter recalled: "I remember the Prophet arising to preach to a large congregation in the grove west of the Temple in Nauvoo. . . . Joseph stated that every Latter-day Saint had a [spiritual] gift, and by living a righteous life, and asking for it, the Holy Spirit would reveal it to him or her."*³

Left: Parley P. Pratt wrote of the time the Prophet Joseph Smith and others were held as prisoners in the jail in Richmond, Missouri. They had listened for hours to the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of the guards. "On a sudden [Joseph] arose to his feet, and spoke in a voice of thunder, or as the roaring lion, uttering, as near as I can recollect, the following words:

"'SILENCE. . . . In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still.' . . .

*"The quailing guards . . . begged his pardon, and remained quiet."*⁴

MY SERVANT JOSEPH, BY LIZ LEMON SWINDLE, FOUNDATION ARTS, MAY NOT BE COPIED





FLOWERS FOR A LADY, BY LIZ LEMON SWINDLE, FOUNDATION ARTS, MAY NOT BE COPIED

BROTHERS, BY LIZ LEMON SWINDLE, FOUNDATION ARTS, MAY NOT BE COPIED

Above: Mercy R. Thompson wrote of the Prophet, "When riding with him and his wife Emma in their carriage I have known him to alight and gather prairie flowers for my little girl."⁵

Inset above: This painting depicts Hyrum and Joseph Smith pulling sticks. Mosiah L. Hancock wrote, "Brother Joseph offered to pull sticks with anyone—and he pulled them all up one at a time."⁶



JOSEPH MUSTERING THE NAUVOO LEGION, BY C. C. A. CHRISTENSEN, COURTESY OF BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART

Left: Eunice Billings Snow wrote: "I saw the 'Nauvoo Legion' on parade with the Prophet, . . . with his wife, Emma Hale Smith, on horseback at the head of the troops. . . . He so fair, and she so dark, in their beautiful riding-habits. He in full military suit, and she with her habit trimmed with gold buttons. . . . His favorite riding-horse was named Charlie, a big black steed."⁷

Right: Parley P. Pratt recalled, "On the 21st day of February, 1835, I took the oath and covenant of apostle-ship, and was solemnly set apart and ordained to that office; and as a member of that quorum under the hands of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer."⁸

Below: Lucy Walker Kimball wrote: "He well knew . . . that he must sacrifice his life for the principles God had revealed through him. . . . I have often heard him say he expected to seal his testimony with his blood."⁹ ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 499.
2. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 502.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 117.
4. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 351.
5. Mercy R. Thompson, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, July 1892, 399.
6. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 431.
7. Eunice Billings Snow, "A Sketch of the Life of Eunice Billings Snow," *Woman's Exponent*, Sept. 1910, 22.
8. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (1938), 95.
9. Lucy Walker Kimball, "Lucy Walker Kimball (Autobiography)," *Woman's Exponent*, Nov. 1910, 34.



JOSEPH SMITH ORDAINING PARLEY P. PRATT AS AN APOSTLE, BY WALTER RANE, © 2002 RI



THE PROPHET REINED HIS HORSE, JUST ONE LAST LOOK AT FAIR NAUVOO, BY HAROLD HOPKINSON, MAY NOT BE COPIED

What Little We Had Was Enough

By Sueli de Aquino

Christmas was coming, but this year we were not going to celebrate with an abundance of food and toys. Papa had passed away, and Mama had begun receiving a small pension as a widow, along with a little rent money.

We were in the living room of our apartment, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The room was quiet. Then suddenly we heard a sound as if someone had arrived outside the building.

I got up and looked through the blinds of the window, from which I could see the entrance to our building. I saw a homeless woman. She had a few bags and wore tattered clothes. I observed her for a few moments, curious to see what she would do. She opened a small paper sack, took out a few cookies, and began to eat them. Soon afterward she opened another little sack that contained a few coins and began to count them.

My young heart was moved, and I softly called to my mother, "There's an old woman outside. Come and see." My mother looked, and she also was moved. She asked me to get the can where we kept a little money, and without making a sound, she left our apartment and

We wept in gratitude that the little we had was enough to give joy to someone who had less.

silently dropped the bills from the building's hallway window.

I stayed by our window and watched the bills fall. The old woman saw one fall and then another and another. Trying to discover where the money had come from, she looked at the windows of the building. They were all closed. Then something

wonderful happened. She looked to heaven and extended her wrinkled hands. Then she placed her hands on her chest and gave thanks for the gift she had received.

Behind the blinds of the window, we wept in gratitude that the little we had was enough to give joy to someone who had less. ■



Carols across the Country

By Heather Beauchamp

Music and singing have always been very important to my family. While I was growing up, my sister would play the piano while my five other siblings and I gathered around and sang our favorite Church songs. These times are among my fondest memories.

After graduating from high school, I lived near my family until I married a wonderful man who was stationed in our town with the U.S. Air Force. A year and a half later, my husband and I, along with our two-month-old daughter, were transferred to a base across the country. We had another child, and with all the expenses that come with two babies, we had not been able to return to visit our families. With six children still at home, my parents couldn't afford to visit us either. Living so far away from my family and missing my husband due to his frequent military assignments, I was often subject to feelings of loneliness. Holidays were especially difficult.

On Christmas Eve in 1996, while my husband and I were taking part in our traditional Christmas Eve activities with our two young children, my thoughts kept turning to my parents and siblings. I gazed at

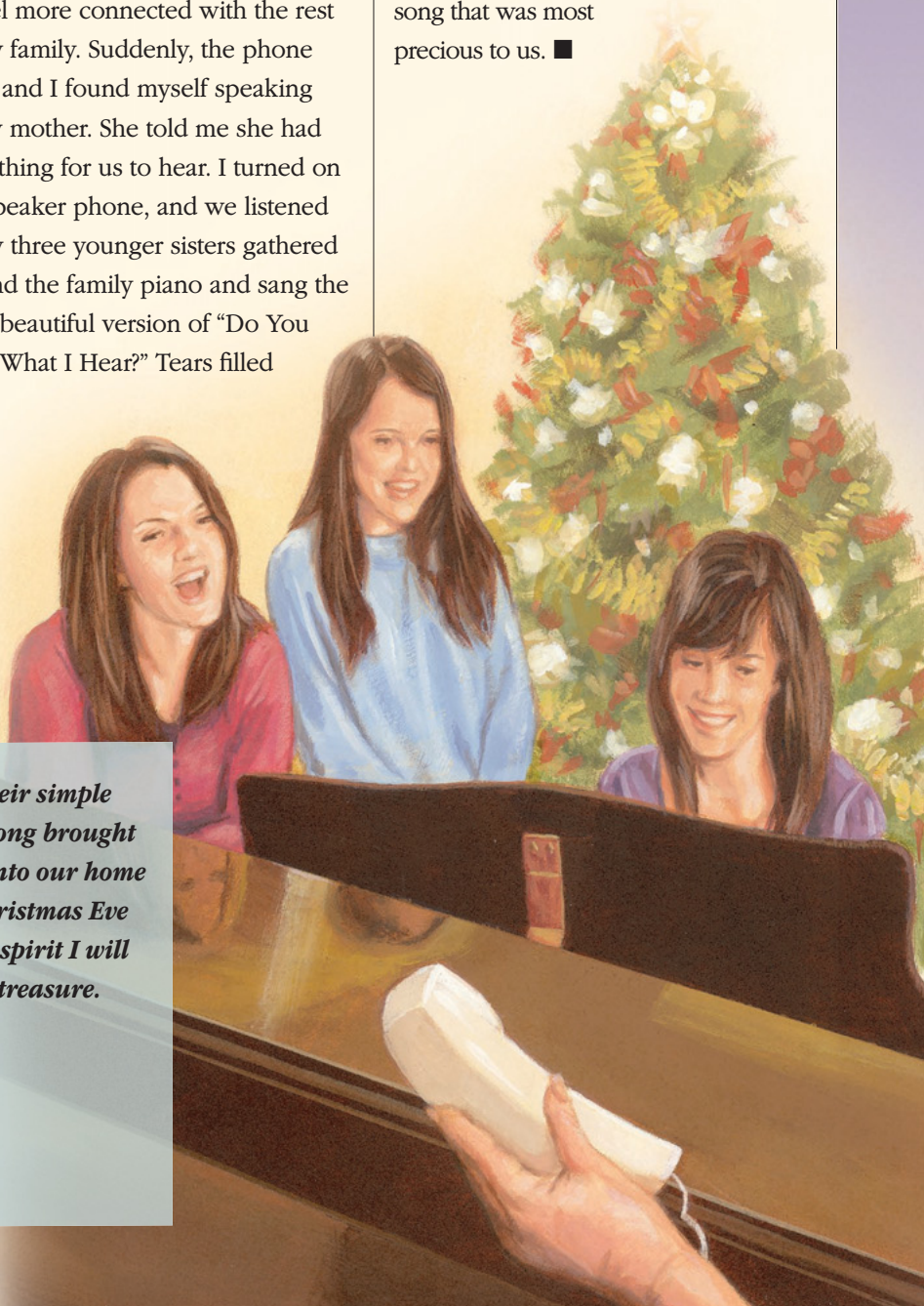
the clock and knew they would all be sitting down on a blanket laid carefully out on the floor and eating a "Christmas feast picnic" of fruit, little sausages, cheese, and crackers while my father read the account of Christ's birth from the scriptures. In my mind I pictured their faces. Mine would be the only one missing.

As I pondered, I prayed for a way to feel more connected with the rest of my family. Suddenly, the phone rang, and I found myself speaking to my mother. She told me she had something for us to hear. I turned on the speaker phone, and we listened as my three younger sisters gathered around the family piano and sang the most beautiful version of "Do You Hear What I Hear?" Tears filled

our eyes as my husband and I listened to the three-part harmony coming from our phone. We could almost feel my family in the room with us.

Their simple song brought into our home that Christmas Eve a sweet spirit I will always treasure. Of all the gifts we received that Christmas, many purchased from stores and carefully wrapped and labeled, it was that sweet song that was most precious to us. ■

Their simple song brought into our home that Christmas Eve a sweet spirit I will always treasure.



My Best Christmas Gift

By Ketty Teresa Ortiz de Arismendi

I was barely two years old when my mother became seriously ill. Because she had no one to leave me with, she took me with her to the hospital in Tupiza, Bolivia. She died shortly thereafter, leaving me all alone.

During my childhood and early teenage years, I was passed from one place to another, never knowing what it was like to have a family, never receiving any kind of gift—not even for my birthday or for Christmas.

Left on my own, I faced a lot of challenges and dangers while growing up. It was only later that I learned I was never really alone and that an invisible hand was watching over me.

When I was 15, I was invited to live with a Latter-day Saint family. Their daughter, slightly older than I, took me to Mutual. Everyone there welcomed me and paid attention to me. For the first time in my young life, people treated me with love and kindness.

I was introduced to the missionaries, who began teaching me. Soon I realized that I had a loving Heavenly Father, who had protected me throughout my life. I accepted the gospel and was

baptized on Christmas Eve 1978. That evening I received my first and still most cherished Christmas gift: membership in the Lord's Church.

Other gifts followed. Two years later I met a young man who was not a member of the Church. I took him to church with me, and after he made his own baptismal covenants, we were married. Later Heavenly Father blessed my husband and me with three children, who were sealed to us for time and all eternity in the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple.

When I was young, everyone called me “the poor little orphan girl.” When I recall this memory today, I feel grateful because I have the blessing of knowing that I have a Father, who has always loved me. I have also tasted of the Savior's infinite love. He restored His Church through the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was chosen in the premortal world and labored diligently to translate the Book of Mormon. I know that it contains the fulness of the gospel.

I received my first and best Christmas gift at age 15 and have enjoyed the Lord's tender mercies ever since. I still feel gratitude in my heart for that gift and strive to keep my gaze fixed on the next life, where I hope to thank the Father and the Son and live forever with my beloved family. ■

***That evening
I received
my first and
still most cherished
Christmas gift: mem-
bership in the Lord's
Church.***

An Unexpected Lesson

By Erin Wilson

After making a career move to New York City, I was out shopping one December evening for items for my new apartment. A storm had recently hit the city, and knee-deep snow lined the streets. I was bundled up in a warm down coat as I made my way to the train with a bustling crowd of holiday shoppers.

I waited impatiently for the train to arrive, thinking about my shopping list. When the train finally arrived, I stepped onto the car, scanning the seats for a place to sit. The nearest seat was directly across from an old homeless man. He had no warm coat or heavy clothing. He just had some plastic bags filled with trinkets.

I did not want to sit near his offensive odor, and his rugged appearance made me wonder if he was dangerous. Mostly, I did not want to be hit up for cash. I abruptly walked to the other end of the car and took a seat. All the other passengers also filed to the end of the car, leaving the man alone.

Soon a young man boarded the train and settled down in the seat directly in front of the homeless man. Without hesitation, the young

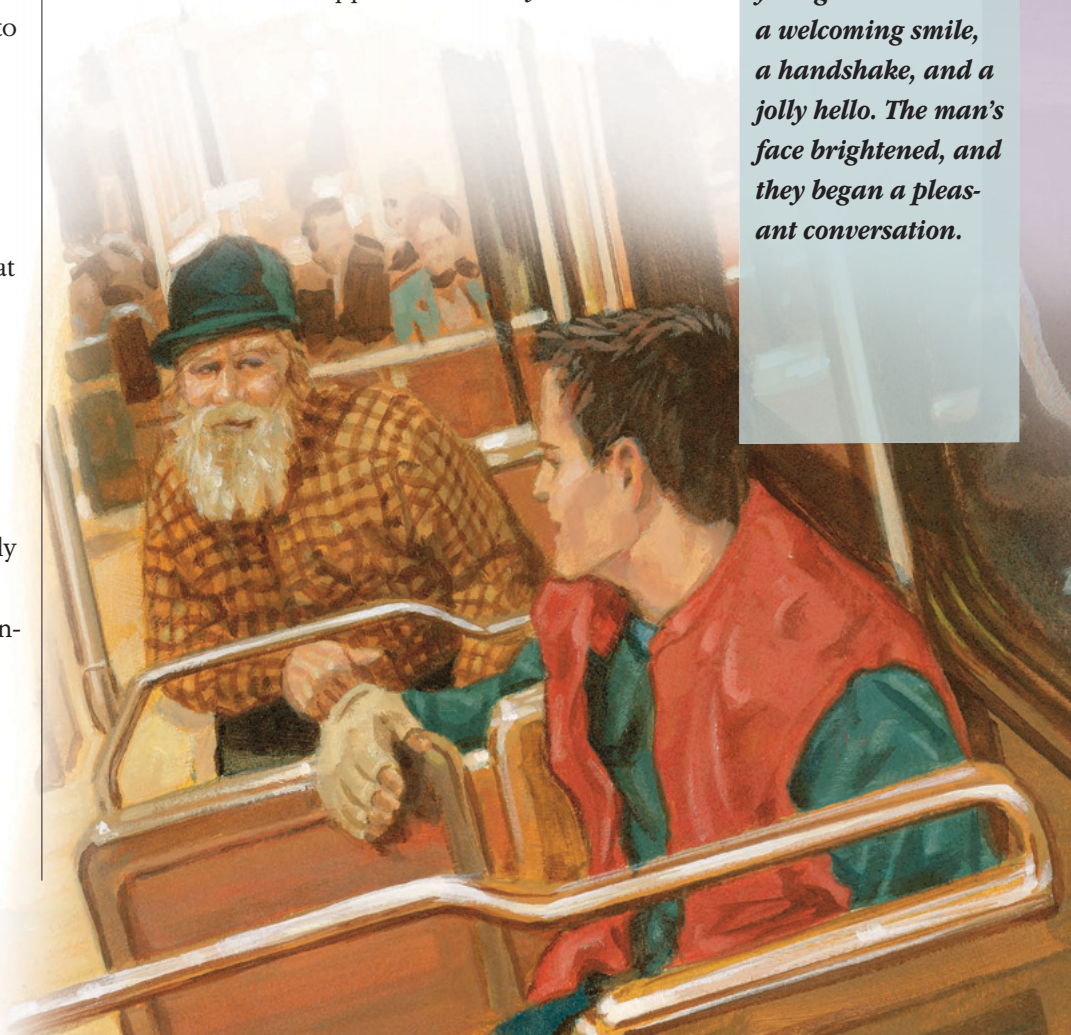
man extended a welcoming smile, a handshake, and a jolly hello. The man's face brightened, and they began a pleasant conversation. They talked for the next 15 minutes, enjoying each other's company.

As I watched, I was reminded of the true spirit of the Christmas season. While deeply engaged in conversation, the young man stood up and removed his vest, shirt, and a second long-sleeve shirt he was wearing underneath. Standing in his undershirt, he then handed the long-sleeve shirt to the homeless man. The old man accepted it graciously, and the two continued their conversation. I stepped off

the train at the next stop, touched by the young man's kindness. I felt guilty for my selfishness, but I had a desire to be a better person.

The King of kings came into the world in the most humble of circumstances, in a lowly stable. The world was given a precious, saving gift—the Son of God. I am grateful for the gift of the Savior in my life and for the reminder of His infinite love and compassion for God's children. That Christmas season, I felt a renewed desire to be kinder, more selfless, and more like my Savior, Jesus Christ. ■

Without hesitation, the young man extended a welcoming smile, a handshake, and a jolly hello. The man's face brightened, and they began a pleasant conversation.



Fortified by the Message

One day I was fasting because I was troubled by many difficulties, and I opened the July 2007 issue of the *Liahona*. I decided to read From the Life of President Spencer W. Kimball, the episode called “Resist Evil



Influences,” which I don’t usually read because it is in the children’s section. This story helped me flee from the bad influences that surrounded me that day, and I was fortified by the message. I encourage everyone to read all the sections of the *Liahona*.

The *Liahona* is a light and a protection for me. It is the first tool I use to proclaim the gospel to my friends.
Arlette Azi, Ivory Coast

The Best-Kept Secret

While preparing my Young Women lesson one day, I realized there were parts of the lesson that needed to be supplemented. That is when I turned to the best-kept secret of great youth leaders—the Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women Resource Guides. These guides contain references for updated stories and articles from the prophet and other General Authorities that can be added to the Young Men

and Young Women lessons to help the youth face today’s issues.

These resources are a great comfort to me as a leader because I know the stories and articles have come through the correct channels and contain true doctrine. They can be used freely to supplement, but not replace, the lessons.

Genell Wells, Utah, USA

Editors’ note: The resource guides used to be included in the Liahona. They will now be mailed to your ward or branch as part of the annual curriculum order.

My Favorite Section

It is a great blessing to have this wonderful publication, the *Liahona*. Thanks to this magazine, we are able to receive the words of the prophets and learn of the spiritual experiences of our brothers and sisters all over the world. My favorite section of the magazine is Latter-day Saint Voices. It is impossible not to feel the Spirit when I read these wonderful stories.

On my computer I save the PDF versions of the magazine that are found on the Church Web site. Before I begin my day, I read an article so I can be filled with the Spirit. Thank you for the *Liahona*.

Oscar Javier Álvarez Gómez, Colombia

An Effective Tool

I believe that the *Liahona* is an effective tool because it allows us to learn about the testimonies and experiences of members throughout the world. I also appreciate hearing

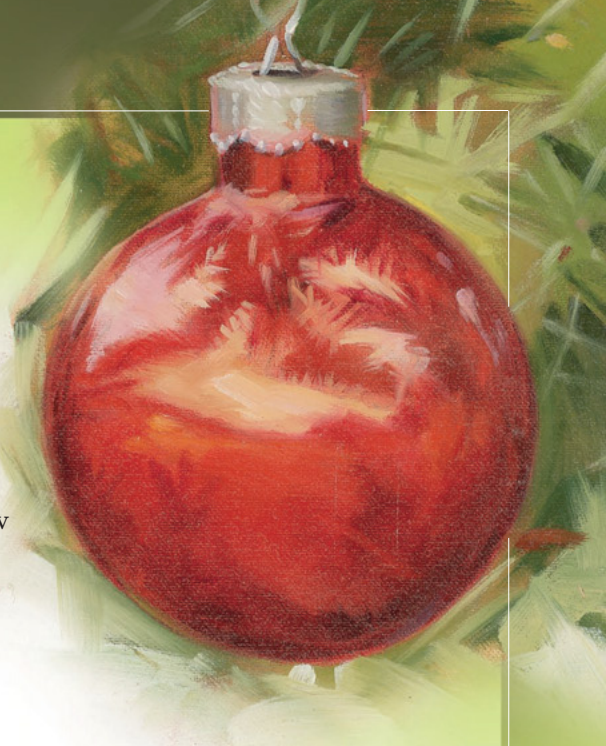
stories from other members as well as receiving counsel from our leaders. Their words serve as a real guide. The magazine is also a means by which we can appreciate the development and growth of the Church worldwide.

Darice Adolphe, Réunion Island

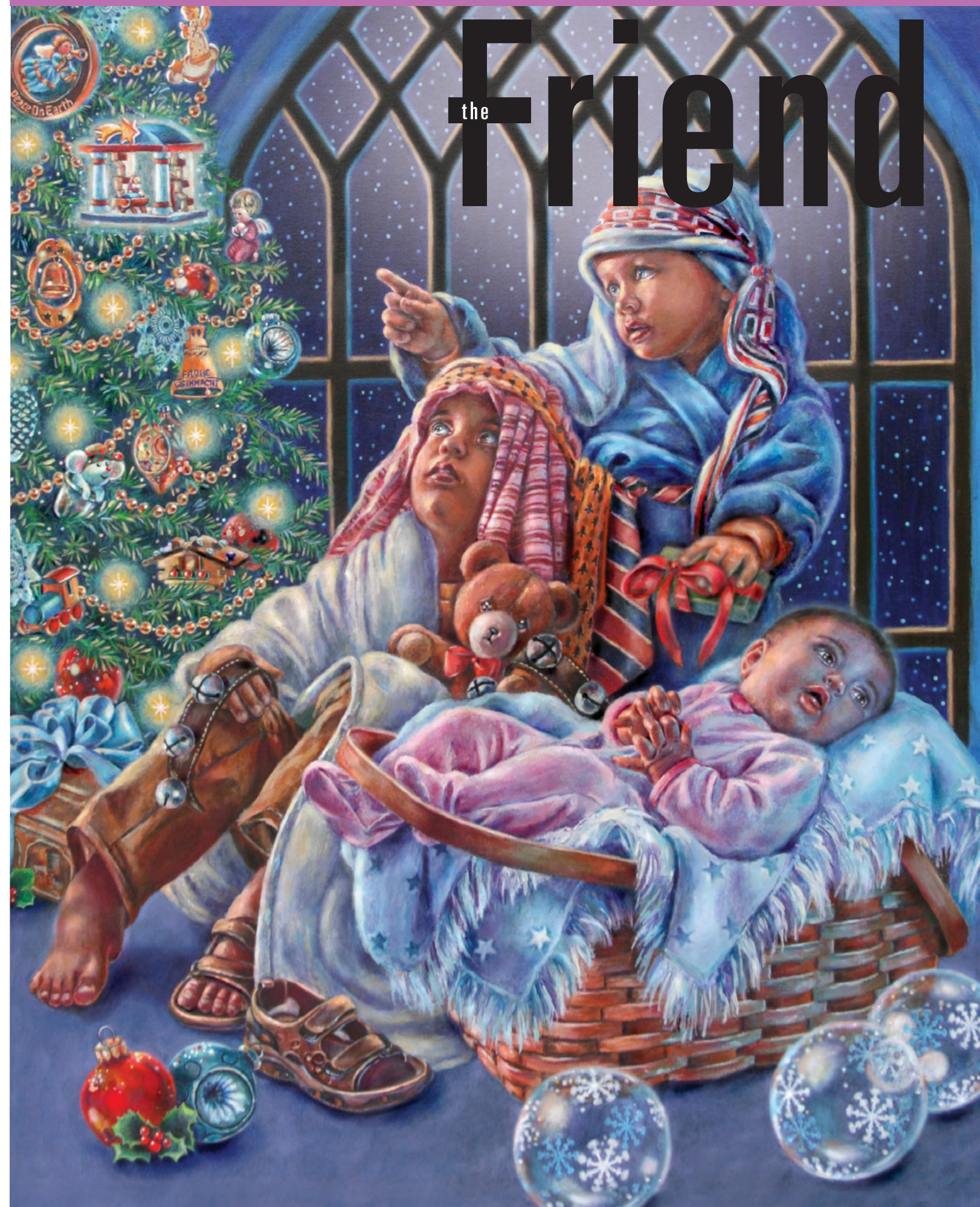
How Did You Know?

On so many occasions I have wanted to write to the First Presidency and General Authorities and ask them, “How did you know?” Time after time as I hear and then read the conference talks, it is as if the Lord is speaking directly to me about specific concerns I have. From these experiences I have learned how much Heavenly Father loves me and wants to help me be a better person. The conference messages have reached me wherever I have been, even in faraway places. Sometimes the messages have been a call to repentance, sometimes guidance, and sometimes comfort. I have often felt like Heavenly Father’s favorite child as I see how carefully He watches over me through these messages.

Charleen Crenshaw, Montana, USA



the Friend





A painting of a wise man on a camel following a star over a mountainous landscape. The scene is set in a vast, hilly landscape under a blue sky with a few stars. A large, rugged mountain peak is visible in the distance. In the foreground, a wise man in a white robe and turban is riding a brown camel. He is looking up at a bright star in the sky. The painting is done in a style that combines realism with a spiritual, ethereal quality. The colors are muted, with a lot of blues, greys, and earthy tones. The brushwork is visible, giving it a textured appearance.

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
TO THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

Following the Light

“**N**ow when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

“Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matthew 2:1–2).

The Wise Men followed the light of a star to find and worship the Savior. We worship Him by following the light of His example. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is perfectly obedient, merciful, and kind. He spent His time on earth in service, and He gave His life so we could repent and live eternally. Because He came to earth, we know who we are: beloved children of Heavenly Father.

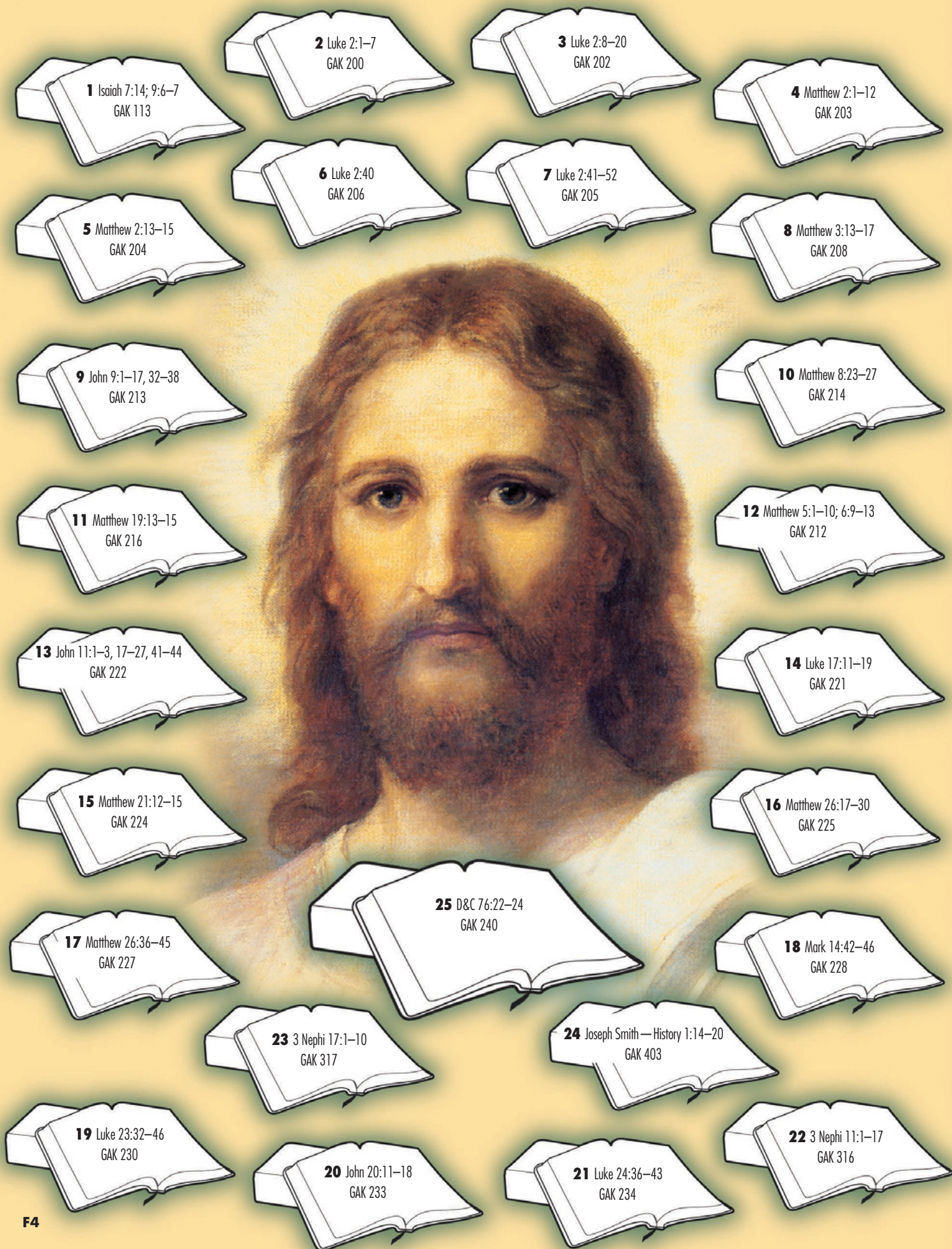
This Christmas, may we sing with joy, pray in gratitude, and carry out kind deeds. As we strive to become more like the Savior, we will have joy and happiness during this wonderful season and peace each day of the year.

President Thomas S. Monson

President Henry B. Eyring

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

EVEN THE WISE MEN OF THE EARTH MUST FOLLOW DIVINE DIRECTION, BY J. LEO FAIRBANKS, COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART



Stories of Jesus, Tell Them to Me

“And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies” (2 Nephi 25:26).

BY LINDA CHRISTENSEN



*Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear,
Things I would ask him to tell me if he were here.
Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea,
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.*

(“Tell Me the Stories of Jesus,” *Children’s Songbook*, 57)

What are your favorite stories of Jesus? Do you like the story of His birth? Have you read about how He calmed the stormy sea? Did you know He healed a blind man and raised His friend Lazarus from the dead? Have you read about how He loved the children?

Stories of Jesus are found in the scriptures. Nephi, a Book of Mormon prophet, wrote, “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies” (2 Nephi 25:26). Heavenly Father commanded His prophets to testify of His Son, Jesus Christ, and keep sacred records so we can learn about Jesus.

The prophets have asked you to read the scriptures every day. During the month of December, read about Jesus’s birth and the miracles He performed. Talk with your family about the precious gift of the Atonement. As you learn the stories of Jesus, you will be blessed to feel His love for you and your testimony of His gospel will grow.

Activity

Each day during December look up the scripture reference on that day’s set of small scriptures on page F4 and read the stories of Jesus. Then color the set of scriptures

for that day. Each day also lists a picture from the Gospel Art Picture Kit (GAK) that can accompany the story. Share your favorite stories of Jesus with your family.

Sharing Time Ideas

1. *Before sharing time, enlarge the picture from Primary 6, lesson 46, p. 211. Begin sharing time by holding up a Bible and a Book of Mormon. Ask the children to identify the two books. Play a simple guessing game by stating the name of a prophet and asking the children to identify which set of scriptures includes the teachings of that prophet. Place the enlarged copy of page 211 on the chalkboard. State the weekly gospel principle: “The prophets foretold Jesus Christ would come to the earth.” Read the names of the five prophets on the enlarged copy, and tell when they lived on the earth. Ask the children to identify which book of scripture each prophet is from. Invite individual children or assign classes to find the scriptures listed: Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Micah 5:2; 1 Nephi 11:18–21; Alma 7:9–10; and Helaman 14:1–6. Give each child a copy of the handout to color. Bear testimony that the scriptures are the word of God and that they testify of the birth of Jesus Christ.*

2. *Write the weekly gospel principle on the chalkboard, and read it together: “The prophecies were fulfilled. Jesus Christ was born and the righteous rejoiced.” Define the word prophecy. Use dramatizations to involve the children in learning about the events that occurred in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon at Jesus’s birth (see “Dramatizations,” Teaching, No Greater Call [1999], 165–66). Share scriptures from Luke 2 and 3 Nephi 1:8–21. Read the weekly gospel principle again. Ask the children to think about the stories of Jesus’s birth from the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Name some of the righteous who rejoiced at His birth. Help the children recognize that the righteous rejoice today as we celebrate Jesus’s birth. Talk about ways we can rejoice as we celebrate His birth. Teach the chorus of “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful” (Hymns, no. 202). Bear testimony of the scriptural accounts of Jesus’s birth. ●*

Note: This activity may be copied or printed from the Internet at www.lds.org. For English, click on **Gospel Library**. For other languages, click on **Languages**.

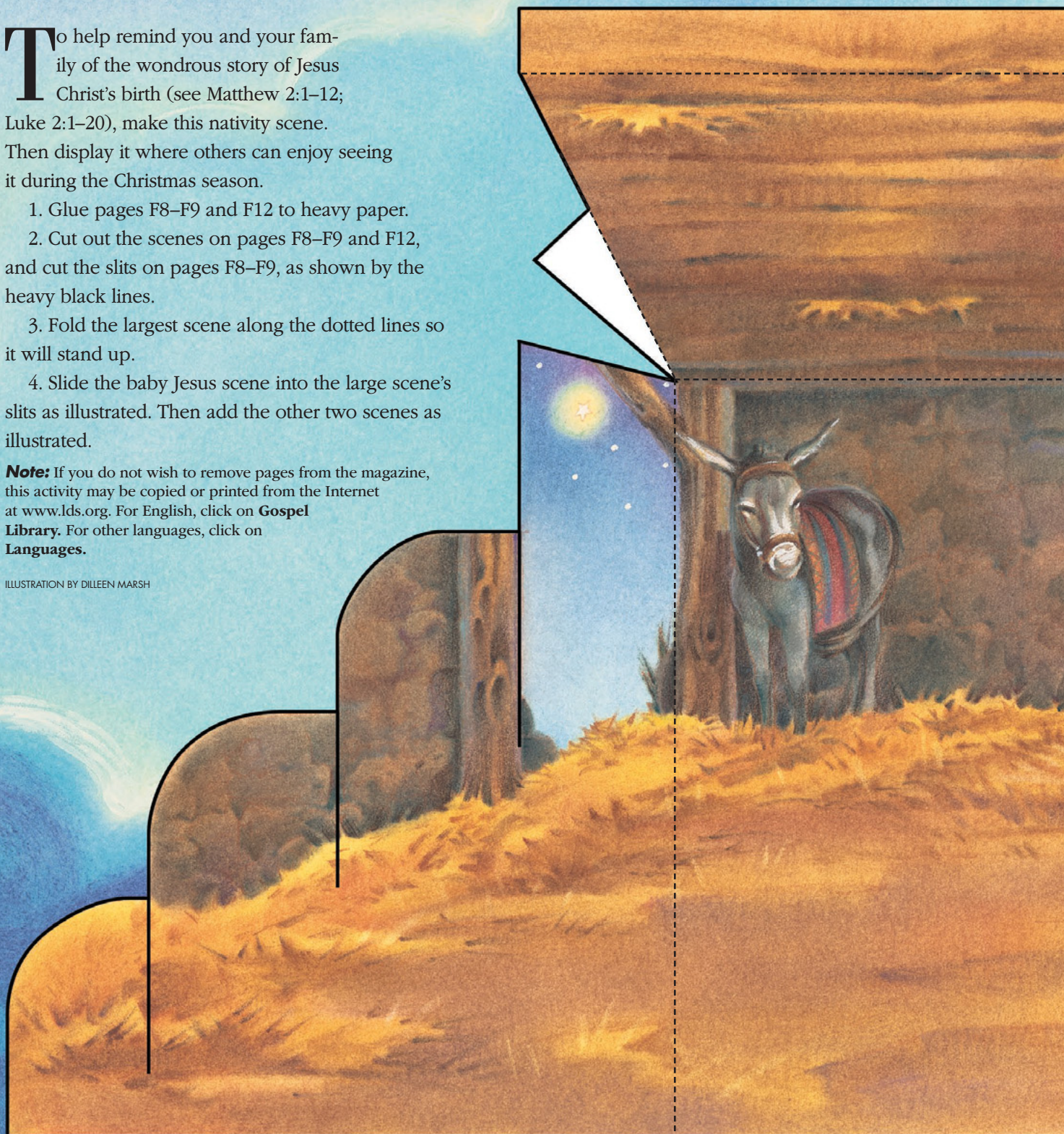
The Wondrous Nativity

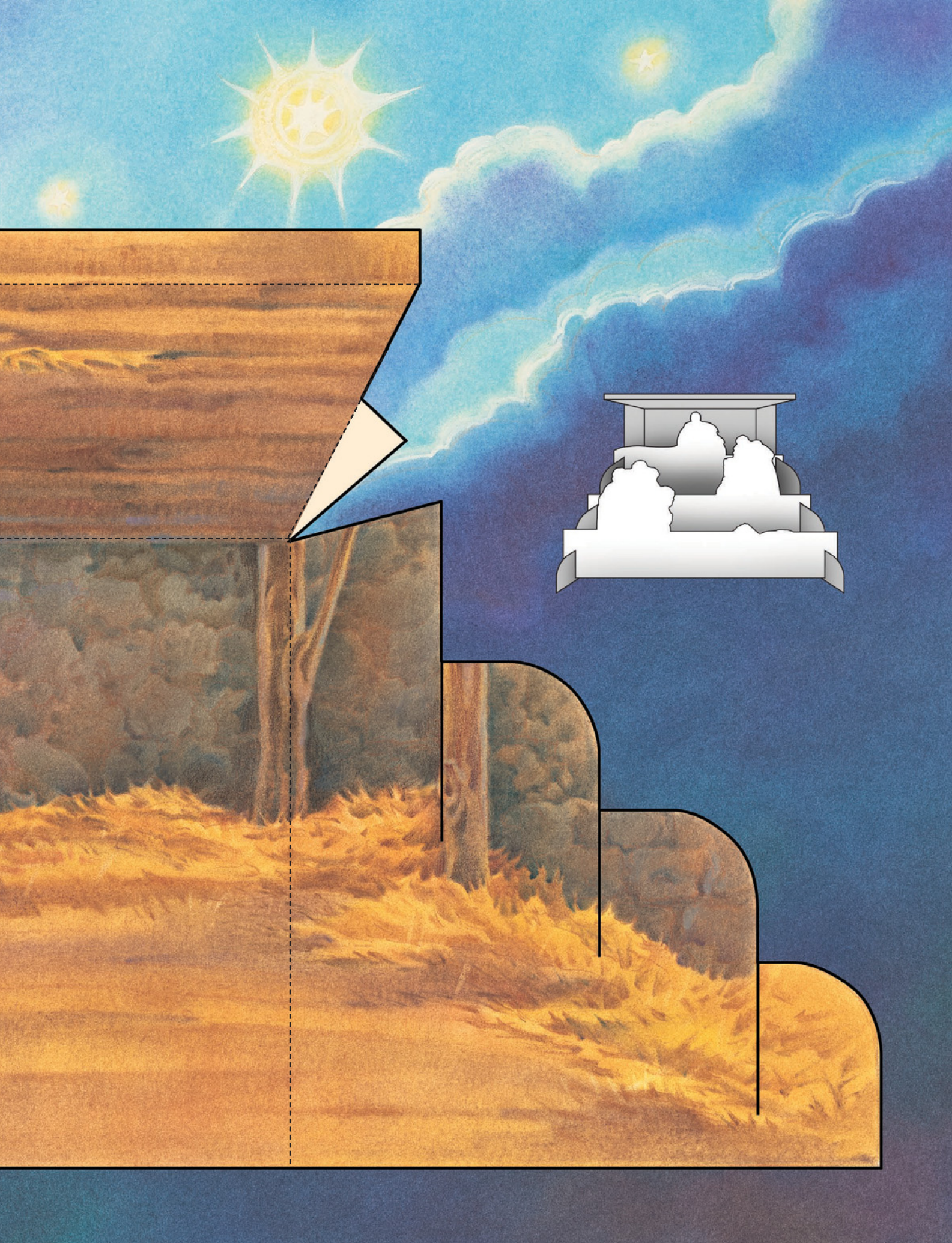
To help remind you and your family of the wondrous story of Jesus Christ's birth (see Matthew 2:1–12; Luke 2:1–20), make this nativity scene. Then display it where others can enjoy seeing it during the Christmas season.

1. Glue pages F8–F9 and F12 to heavy paper.
2. Cut out the scenes on pages F8–F9 and F12, and cut the slits on pages F8–F9, as shown by the heavy black lines.
3. Fold the largest scene along the dotted lines so it will stand up.
4. Slide the baby Jesus scene into the large scene's slits as illustrated. Then add the other two scenes as illustrated.

Note: If you do not wish to remove pages from the magazine, this activity may be copied or printed from the Internet at www.lds.org. For English, click on **Gospel Library**. For other languages, click on **Languages**.

ILLUSTRATION BY DILLEEN MARSH







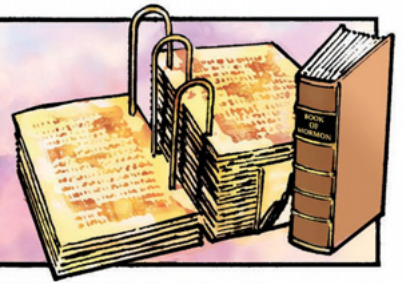
For instructions, see page F8.

ILLUSTRATION BY DILLEEN MARSH

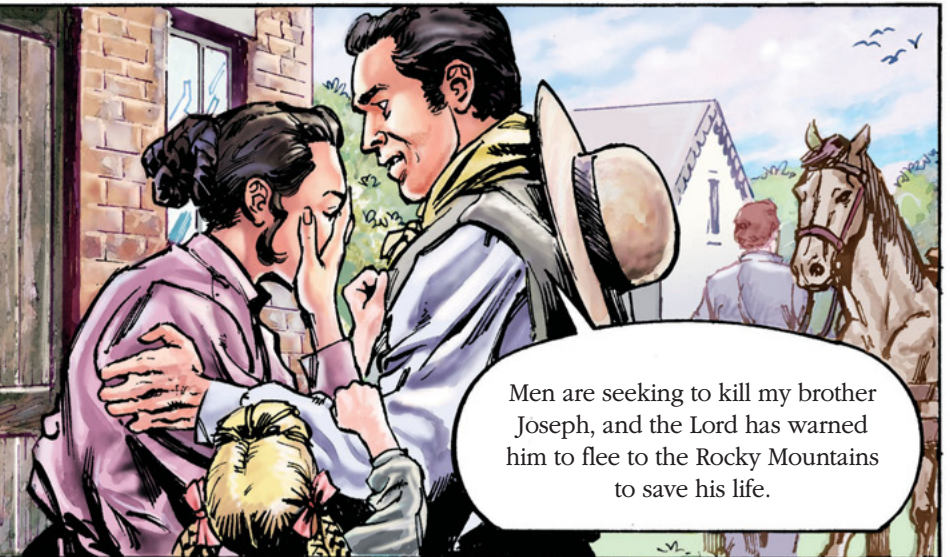


FROM THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH

The Martyrdom of the Prophet



Some wicked people wanted to kill Joseph Smith. He and his brother Hyrum decided to leave their homes in Nauvoo so they would be safe. They sadly said good-bye to their families and started their journey.

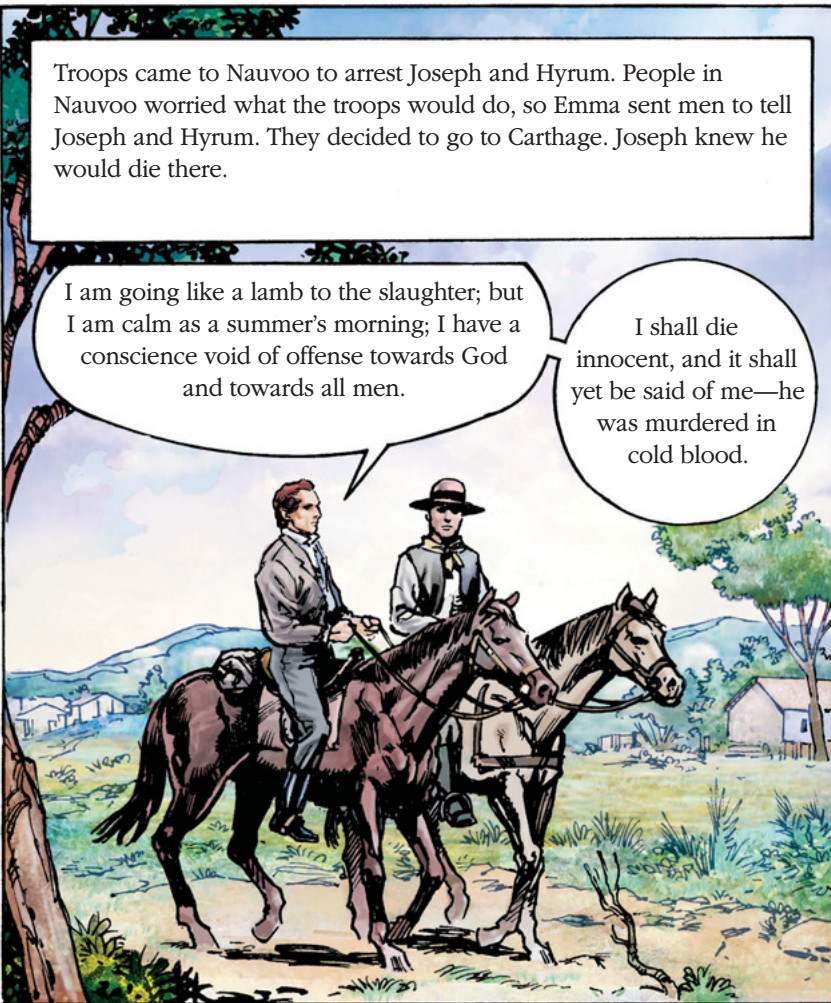


Men are seeking to kill my brother Joseph, and the Lord has warned him to flee to the Rocky Mountains to save his life.

Troops came to Nauvoo to arrest Joseph and Hyrum. People in Nauvoo worried what the troops would do, so Emma sent men to tell Joseph and Hyrum. They decided to go to Carthage. Joseph knew he would die there.

I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer's morning; I have a conscience void of offense towards God and towards all men.

I shall die innocent, and it shall yet be said of me—he was murdered in cold blood.



A constable arrested Joseph and Hyrum and sent them to Carthage Jail. Many people visited the Prophet there.



On June 27, 1844, Hyrum, Elder John Taylor, and Elder Willard Richards stayed with him in the upstairs bedroom of the jail.

The room got very hot that afternoon. The men opened the windows to try to cool off. Hyrum read a book while Joseph talked to a guard. John Taylor sang "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief" (*Hymns*, no. 29).

A poor, wayfaring Man of grief
hath often crossed me on my way . . .

Please sing that
song again, John.

Brother Hyrum,
I do not feel like singing.

You
will get the spirit
of it.

A mob of angry men gathered around the jail.
Then they rushed up the stairs, shooting their
guns. Hyrum was killed.

Oh!
My poor, dear
brother Hyrum.

Joseph fired six shots to try to stop the
mob. Then he ran to the window. Men
in the mob shot him, and he fell out of
the window.

Oh Lord,
my God!

When the Latter-day Saints
in Nauvoo heard about the
Prophet's death, they were
heartbroken. Over 10,000
people walked through
Joseph's house to see the
bodies of the beloved
Prophet and his brother.

"Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. . . . He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and . . . sealed his mission and his works with his own blood" (D&C 135:3).



I LOVE MY SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, AND HIS RESTORED GOSPEL

“And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

The Secret Giver

BY CHARLOTTE GOODMAN MCEWAN

Based on a true story

"God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9: 7).

I love everything about Christmas: the lights, carols, time with family—everything we do to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Oh, and I especially *love* getting presents. I start making my Christmas wish list in September.

One year my list was about as long as my arm. And I kept thinking of things to add to it. I was excited to show it to my dad.

"Well, David, I see what you want to *get* for Christmas," he said as he looked it over. "But what are you going to *give*?"

"I'm making gifts for you and Mom at school. On Friday Mom is taking me shopping for Shannon's and Jon's gifts. So I've got it all planned out."

"Hmmm," was all Dad said. For some reason he didn't like my answer. I didn't like the sound of "hmmm."

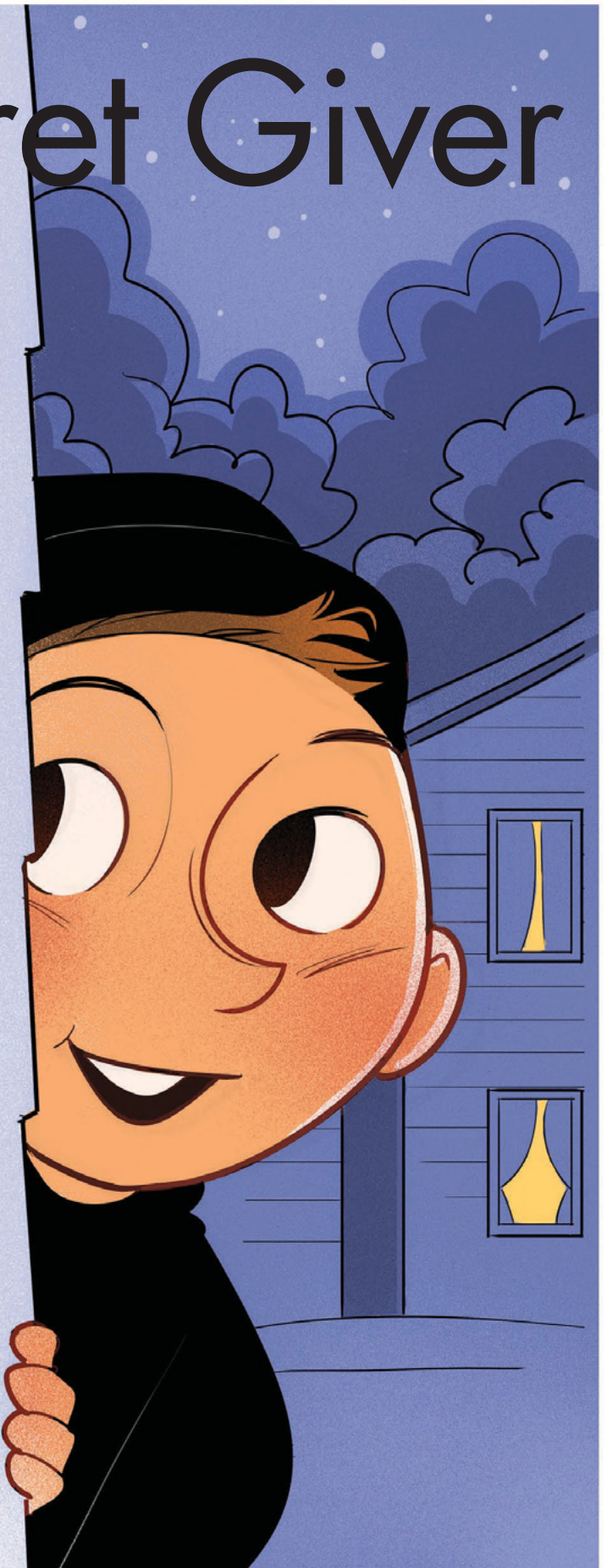
The next family home evening, my parents discussed the idea of giving and getting and the true meaning of Christmas. I could see my wish list getting shorter by the minute. They asked us if we had any ideas to help us remember to be more giving. Shannon waved her hand excitedly. My older brother, Jon, and I groaned. With Shannon, ideas usually involved doing things for other people, like weeding our neighbors' gardens.

"Let's choose some people who are lonely or in need and anonymously leave presents on their doorsteps," Shannon said with excitement.

"Not a bad idea," Jon said. "It would be top secret."

"This might actually be fun," I thought.

We all agreed that it would be a great plan. We chose two families. One was the Swenson family in our ward. Since Brother Swenson had gone back to school, they never seemed to have enough money. They had lots of kids too, who would love getting Christmas surprises. The other family was Mr. and Mrs. Perez, an older



couple who lived down the street. They always seemed a little lonely.

We all went shopping for the gifts. We agreed to buy them using some of the money we would have used for our own presents. That was fine with me. I was having way too much fun choosing toys for the younger Swenson boys. Somehow my stuff wasn't that important anymore.

We decided to give one gift a night to each family starting 12 days before Christmas. When the first night came, I dressed in black from head to toe, and Jon drove me over to the Swensons' house. I quietly put the first gift on the porch, rang the doorbell, and ran away as fast as I could. I jumped behind a fence just as one of the kids opened the door. I could hear their surprised voices as they discovered

the present. I felt like I would explode with excitement and joy. My life as a Secret Giver had begun.

Things only got better—and harder. We had to go at different times every night and sometimes even in the morning because the Swenson kids started looking out the window to try to catch us. And every time I crept up to the Perez's doorstep, I imagined Mrs. Perez waiting there, ready to fling the door open, give me a hug, and tell me how wonderful I was. I definitely had to avoid that. Keeping a secret was half the fun.

Well, that year was only the beginning. The Christmas after that, we chose a family



"As we seek Christ, as we find Him, as we follow Him, we shall have the Christmas spirit. . . . We shall learn to forget ourselves.

We shall turn our thoughts to the greater benefit of others."

President Thomas S. Monson, "In Search of the Christmas Spirit," *Ensign*, Dec. 1987, 5.



whose daughter had been in the hospital 11 times that year and another family whose mom had cancer. Wow—I didn't realize that some people had it so tough.

Now that Christmas is here again, we've decided to help three families. The hardest part is choosing them. There seem to be so many people who could use a little Christmas cheer.

As for my own list? Each year it has gotten a little shorter. I'm so busy making my Secret Giver plans that I don't have much time to think about myself. There are gifts to choose and strategies to plan.

One thing is certain—it's great doing things for others. Nothing beats the feeling I get when I see the surprise and excitement on the faces of the people we help. Giving has become one of my favorite things about Christmas. ●



Showing Our Love for Jesus

BY JANE MCBRIDE CHOATE

Based on a true story

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).



Jenay watched as Mommy set the freshly baked white cake on the kitchen table. Tonight was Christmas Eve, when her family would celebrate Jesus's birth.



Jenay liked going caroling with her family, baking gingerbread men, and decorating the tree. But remembering Jesus's birthday was her favorite thing to do at Christmas.



Can I help you put the icing on the cake?

We need to let it cool first.

Jenay helped Mommy clean off the counters and wash the dishes.



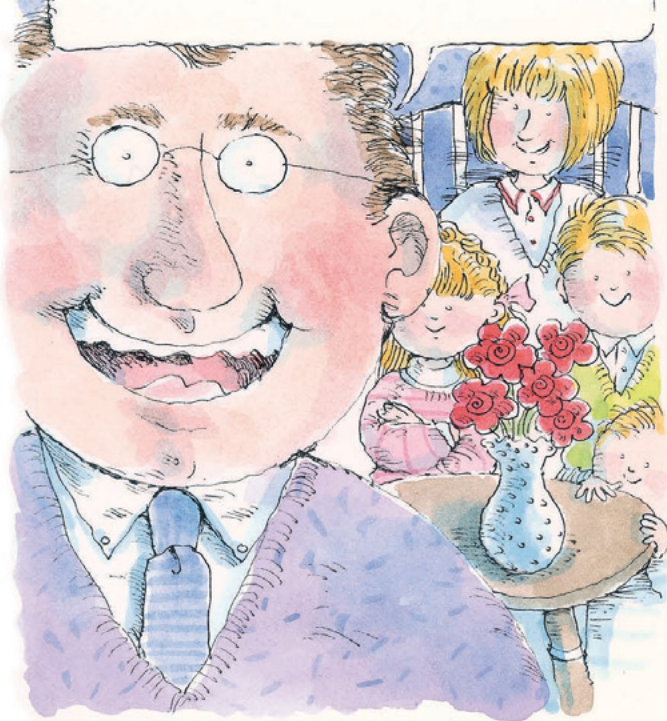
Do you think the cake is cool now?

I think it's just about right.

Mommy and Jenay spread fluffy white icing on the cake.

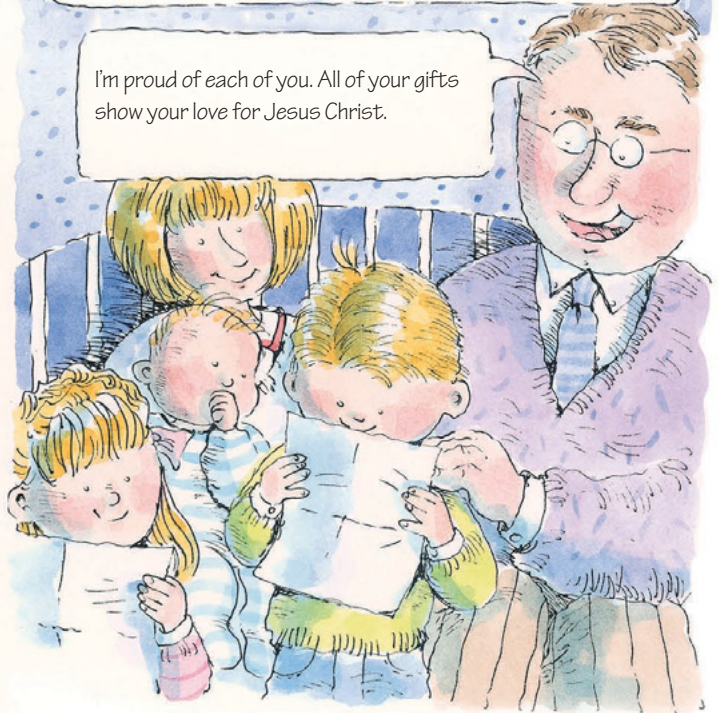
After dinner Daddy asked the family to gather in the living room.

Even though we know that Jesus was born in the spring, we like to celebrate His birthday at this time of year.



One by one, the family members opened their presents to Jesus and read what they had written on a slip of paper. With Mommy's help, Jenay had written, "Be more reverent at church."

I'm proud of each of you. All of your gifts show your love for Jesus Christ.



Mommy read the story of Jesus's birth from the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Then Daddy bore his testimony of Jesus's Atonement and Resurrection.



Mommy cut the cake and served it on fancy dishes. Jenay took a bite of cake and smiled.

I love Jesus, and I know He loves me.

A sweet feeling of peace settled over her like a cozy warm quilt.



