

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS • DECEMBER 2014

Liahona



**Bringing Others
Back to Faith in
Christ, p. 12**

**Four Lessons from
the Sacred Grove, p. 24**
**Recognizing the Reality
of Christmas, p. 36**

**For Youth Curriculum:
How You Can Help
New Converts, p. 50**



"Gratitude transcends whatever is happening around us. It surpasses disappointment, discouragement, and despair. It blooms just as beautifully in the icy landscape of winter as it does in the pleasant warmth of summer."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf,
Second Counselor in the
First Presidency, "Grateful in
Any Circumstances," *Ensign* or
Liahona, May 2014, 75.



12

MESSAGES

- 4 First Presidency Message:
Fill the World with Christ's Love**
By President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
- 7 Visiting Teaching Message:
The Divine Mission of Jesus
Christ: Prince of Peace**

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 12 Helping Others Find Faith
in Christ**
By Elder L. Tom Perry
*You can strengthen your faith now
and help others return to a solid
foundation of faith in the Savior.*
- 18 Pioneers in Every Land: The
Church in Sweden—Growth,
Emigration, and Strength**
By Inger Höglund
*Despite the obstacles, the Lord is
hastening His work in this beauti-
ful country.*
- 24 Lessons from the Sacred Grove**
By Elder Marlin K. Jensen
*By observing growth patterns of
trees, we can learn how to keep
ourselves firmly rooted in eternal
truths.*
- 30 The Lost 500 Years: From
Malachi to John the Baptist**
By S. Kent Brown and
Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
*What happened in the years
between the Old and New
Testaments?*

36 The Reality of Christmas

By Bishop Gary E. Stevenson
*Let us recognize that the babe born
in Bethlehem is the real Redeemer.*

DEPARTMENTS

- 8 What We Believe: Tithing Helps
Build Up the Kingdom of God**
- 10 Reflections: A Christmas Miracle**
By Lindsay Alder
- 11 Old Testament Prophets:
Malachi**
- 40 Latter-day Saint Voices**
- 80 Until We Meet Again: I Know
That He Lives**
By Elder Melvin J. Ballard
*Jesus is our resurrected Lord, and
He invites us all to come unto Him.*

ON THE COVER

Front: Photo illustration by Matthew Reier.
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44

44 The Answer to All the Hard Questions

By R. Val Johnson

If doubts start to seep into your heart, remember these five principles.



See if you can find the Liahona hidden in this issue. Hint: How can animals teach us about obedience?



48 The Savior and the Sacrament
By David L. Beck
"This do in remembrance of me," said the Savior as He instituted the sacrament.

50 What's It Like to Be a Brand-New Convert?
By Joshua J. Perkey
Learn how you can help new converts adjust to membership in the Church.

54 Questions and Answers
What should I do when I am mocked at school for following Church standards?

56 From the Mission Field: No Angels Needed
By Jeniann Jensen Nielsen

57 Poster: Make Room

58 Where Am I? How to Discover and Develop Your Spiritual Gifts and Talents
By Elder Mervyn B. Arnold
What could my uncle possibly do with an old piece of metal?

62 How to Prepare for the Second Coming
By Elder Dallin H. Oaks
What would you do if you knew you would meet the Lord tomorrow?

63 My Christmas Gift
By Dustin Ward
Even though I was baptized when I was eight, I never went to church—until something changed my life forever.

64 Ready to Move Forward
By Richard M. Romney
Seven 12-year-olds tell what it's like to advance from Primary into Young Men or Young Women.



74

67 Special Witness: Did Jesus Really Die and Rise Again?
By Elder D. Todd Christofferson

68 Bringing Primary Home: We Remember and Worship Our Savior, Jesus Christ
By Erin Sanderson and Jean Bingham

70 Yancy
By Elder Brent H. Nielson
If only our horse had been obedient, she could have lived a happy life.

71 Our Page

72 Friends around the World: I'm Minna from Sweden
By Amie Jane Leavitt

74 The First Christmas
By Jenn Wilks
Remember Jesus's birth as you act out this play.

76 Look Inside!
By Sophia C.

77 Old Testament Scripture Figures: David and Goliath

78 For Young Children: A Bit of Christmas Every Day
By Kate Strongin

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Family Home Evening Ideas

This issue contains articles and activities that could be used for family home evening. The following are two ideas.



"What's It Like to Be a Brand-New Convert?" page 50: Consider having a discussion with your family about the conversion stories shared by members in this article. You could also read the list of 10 challenges that converts face (included in the article). As a family, identify the new members in your ward or branch or members who are starting to return to Church activity. Then work together to create a plan to befriend those members and support them as they try to find the strength to adapt socially and culturally and to grow spiritually.

"We Remember and Worship Our Savior, Jesus Christ," page 68, and **"The First Christmas,"** page 74: Celebrate the Savior's birth with one of the many Christmas-themed activity ideas in this issue. For example, you could cut out the boxes on page 69 and decide as a family how you'll show your love for the Savior during this Christmas season and throughout the whole year. You might also consider using the script on pages 74–75 as a guide to help your family act out the scene of Jesus's birth. Both of these activities might help your children learn how to focus their thoughts on the Savior at Christmastime.

IN YOUR LANGUAGE

The *Liahona* and other Church materials are available in many languages at languages.lds.org.

TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE

Numbers represent the first page of the article.

Adversity, 24, 54
Apostasy, 30
Christmas, 4, 10, 36, 40, 42, 43, 57, 63, 74, 76, 78
Conversion, 42, 50, 63
Death, 40
Doubts, 44
Faith, 12, 24, 44, 80
Family, 10, 40, 42
Friendship, 50
Gratitude, 10

Jesus Christ, 4, 7, 12, 36, 48, 57, 67, 68, 74, 80
Love, 4, 40, 50
Missionary work, 12, 18, 50, 56, 76
Obedience, 30, 54, 70
Old Testament, 11, 30
Peace, 7
Pioneers, 18
Restoration, 24
Resurrection, 67

Sacrament, 48
Scriptures, 30
Second Coming, 62
Service, 4, 10, 12, 41, 43, 56, 78
Spiritual gifts, 58
Sweden, 18, 72
Testimony, 44
Tithing, 8



**By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf**

Second Counselor in
the First Presidency

FILL THE WORLD WITH CHRIST'S LOVE

When we think of Christmas, we often think of giving and of receiving gifts. Gifts can be part of a cherished tradition, but they can also detract from the simple dignity of the season and distract us from celebrating the birth of our Savior in a meaningful way.

I know from personal experience that the most memorable Christmases can be those that are the most humble. The presents of my childhood were certainly modest by today's standards. Sometimes I received a mended shirt or a pair of gloves or socks. I remember one special Christmas when my brother gave me a wooden knife he had carved.

It doesn't take expensive gifts to make Christmas meaningful. I am reminded of a story told by Elder Glen L. Rudd, who served as a member of the Seventy from 1987 to 1992. One day before Christmas a number of years ago, while he was managing a bishops' storehouse, he learned from an ecclesiastical leader about a needy family that had recently moved to the city. When he went to visit their small apartment, he discovered a young single mother with four children under age 10.

The family's needs were so great that the mother could not buy treats or presents for her children that Christmas—she couldn't even afford a tree. Brother Rudd talked with the family and learned that the three little girls would love a doll or a stuffed animal. When he asked the six-year-old son what he wanted, the hungry little boy replied, "I would like a bowl of oatmeal."

Brother Rudd promised the little boy oatmeal and maybe something else. Then he went to the bishops' storehouse and gathered food and other supplies to meet the immediate needs of the family.

That very morning a generous Latter-day Saint had given him 50 dollars "for someone in need." Using that donation, Brother Rudd bundled up three of his own children and went Christmas shopping—his children selecting toys for the needy children.

After loading up the car with food, clothing, gifts, a Christmas tree, and some ornaments, the Rudds drove to the family's apartment. There they helped the mother and her children set up the tree. Then they placed presents under it and presented the little boy with a large package of oatmeal.

The mother wept, the children rejoiced, and they all sang a Christmas song. That night as the Rudd family gathered for dinner, they gave thanks that they could bring some Christmas cheer to another family and help a little boy receive a bowl of oatmeal.¹

Christ and the Spirit of Giving

Think of the simple yet dignified way our Heavenly Father chose to honor the birth of His Son. On that holy night, angels appeared not to the rich but to shepherds. The Christ child was born not in a mansion but in a manger. He was wrapped not in silk but in swaddling clothes.



To those whose souls are burdened with sin, He offers hope, forgiveness, and redemption.

If the Savior were among us today, we would find Him where He always was—ministering to the meek, the downcast, the humble, the distressed, and the poor in spirit. During this Christmas season and always, may we give to Him by loving as He loves. May we remember the humble dignity of His birth, gifts, and life. And may we, through simple acts of kindness, charity, and compassion, fill the world with the light of His love and healing power. ■

NOTE

1. See Glen L. Rudd, *Pure Religion: The Story of Church Welfare since 1930* (1995), 352–53; see also Glen L. Rudd, “A Bowl of Oatmeal,” *Church News*, Dec. 2, 2006, 16.

The simplicity of that first Christmas foreshadowed the life of the Savior. Though He had created the earth, walked in realms of majesty and glory, and stood at the right hand of the Father, He came to earth as a helpless child. His life was a model of modest nobility, and He walked among the poor, the sick, the downcast, and the heavy laden.

Though He was a king, He cared neither for the honors nor the riches of men. His life, His words, and His daily activities were monuments of simple yet profound dignity.

Jesus the Christ, who knew perfectly how to give, set for us the pattern for giving. To those whose hearts are heavy with loneliness and

sorrow, He brings compassion and comfort. To those whose bodies and minds are afflicted with illness and suffering, He brings love and healing.

TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

President Uchtdorf teaches that we should follow the Savior’s pattern of giving. Consider asking the people you visit to take turns naming a gift the Savior has given to them, and discuss how they can use that gift to serve others. For example, if a member was blessed with musical training, he or she could go caroling to some of the neighbors. You could offer to kneel in prayer with those you visit, asking for inspiration about which gifts to share, how to share them, and with whom. Follow up on any inspiration you receive.

For ideas on teaching this message to youth and children, see page 6.

YOUTH

Learn from Others' Experience

President Uchtdorf speaks from personal experience when he teaches that “the most memorable Christmases can be those that are the most humble.” We can learn so much from the older generation; many adults have lived through times of war, unemployment, sickness, or other trials. Ask the older

members of your ward or branch to tell you about their most meaningful Christmas. You could write down their stories. Try to learn from their example by focusing this Christmas more on giving sincere service and remembering the Savior.

CHILDREN

Gifts from Jesus Christ

Some people use a Christmas tree to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Sometimes people place gifts for others under the tree. What gifts has the Savior given to you? Read each scripture below and color in the gift. You can give gifts back to Jesus by finding ways to help others.



Prayerfully study this material and seek to know what to share. How will understanding the life and roles of the Savior increase your faith in Him and bless those you watch over through visiting teaching? For more information, go to reliefsociety.lds.org.

The Divine Mission of Jesus Christ: Prince of Peace

This is part of a series of Visiting Teaching Messages featuring aspects of the mission of the Savior.

The Savior is the source of true peace,” said Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “Even with the trials of life, because of the Savior’s Atonement and His grace, righteous living will be rewarded with personal peace.”¹ Understanding that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace can help us find inner peace and increase our faith in Him.

Jesus Christ said: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Bearing testimony of that truth, Linda S. Reeves, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, said: “The Lord has been merciful to me and has helped make



my burdens light. He has helped me to feel great peace.”²

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “The ideal place for . . . peace is within the walls of our own homes, where we have done all we can to make the Lord Jesus Christ the centerpiece.”³

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; 1 Nephi 13:37; Doctrine and Covenants 59:23

Consider This

In what ways does the Savior bring peace to your life?

NOTES

1. Quentin L. Cook, “Personal Peace: The Reward of Righteousness,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 35.
2. Linda S. Reeves, “Claim the Blessings of Your Covenants,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 120.
3. Richard G. Scott, “For Peace at Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 29.

Faith, Family, Relief



From the Scriptures

Isaiah prophesied of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). In the Americas, Samuel the Lamanite told of signs that would accompany Christ’s birth five years later (see Helaman 14:3, 5). As the prophesied day approached, unbelievers threatened to execute all the Christians if these signs did not occur. The prophet Nephi “cried mightily unto the Lord all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying: . . . On the morrow come I into the world” (3 Nephi 1:12–13). The signs appeared, and with the birth of Christ, “the people began again to have peace in the land” (verse 23).

In Bethlehem, Mary “brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7).

TITHING HELPS BUILD UP THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We believe in giving one-tenth of our income to the Lord to help build up His kingdom. The law of tithing requires that we sacrifice some of our material goods in order to enjoy greater spiritual blessings.

The principle of tithing has been practiced since the gospel was first taught on earth. Abraham, for example, paid tithes to the high priest Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:18–20). The Lord commanded Moses to teach the people about tithing (see Leviticus 27:30–34). Later, when the Savior visited the Nephites, He gave them the law of tithing (see 3 Nephi 24). And in our day, He restored this

commandment through the Prophet Joseph Smith (see D&C 119).

To fulfill this commandment, we give one-tenth of our income to the Lord through local priesthood leaders. The funds are transmitted to Church headquarters, where a council comprising the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric determines how the sacred funds will be used (see D&C 120).

Tithing allows the Church to build and maintain temples and meeting-houses, to support seminaries and institutes, to provide materials for Church members, and to sustain missionary, temple, and family history work.

We believe in paying tithing willingly, “for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Paying tithing is a way we can help build up the kingdom of God on earth and show gratitude to Heavenly Father for blessing us with everything we have. Yet paying tithing brings more blessings into our lives. As Malachi taught: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). Spiritual and temporal blessings can come to all who pay an honest tithe, even if the amount is small. ■

For more information, see Genesis 28:20–22; Malachi 3:8–11; and chapter 12 in Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow (2012).

BLESSINGS OF PAYING TITHING



“Tithing develops and tests our faith. By sacrificing to the Lord what we may think we need or want for ourselves, we learn to rely

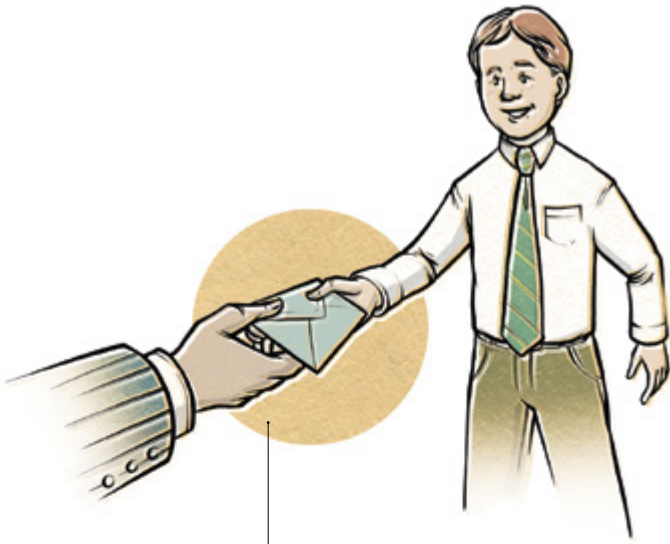
on Him. Our faith in Him makes it possible to keep temple covenants and receive eternal temple blessings. . . .

“Tithing also teaches us to control our desires and passions for the things of this world. Payment of tithing encourages us to be honest in our dealings with our fellowmen. We learn to trust that what we have been given, through the blessings of the Lord and our own diligent efforts, is sufficient for our needs. . . .

“To those who faithfully and honestly live the law of tithing, the Lord

promises an abundance of blessings. Some of these blessings are temporal, just as tithes are temporal. But like the outward physical ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, the commandment to pay tithing requires temporal sacrifice, which ultimately yields great spiritual blessings.”

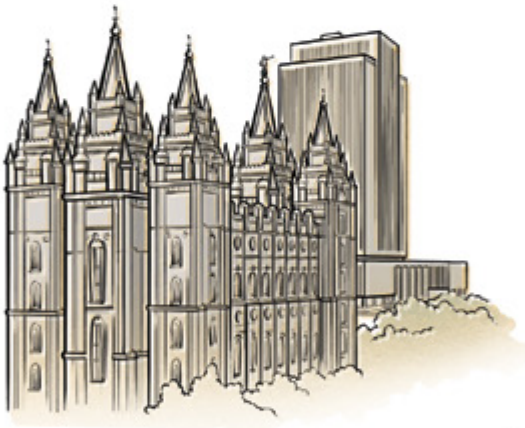
Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Tithing: A Test of Faith with Eternal Blessings,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2002, 27.



Tithing and other donations are given to the Lord through a member of your bishopric or branch presidency.

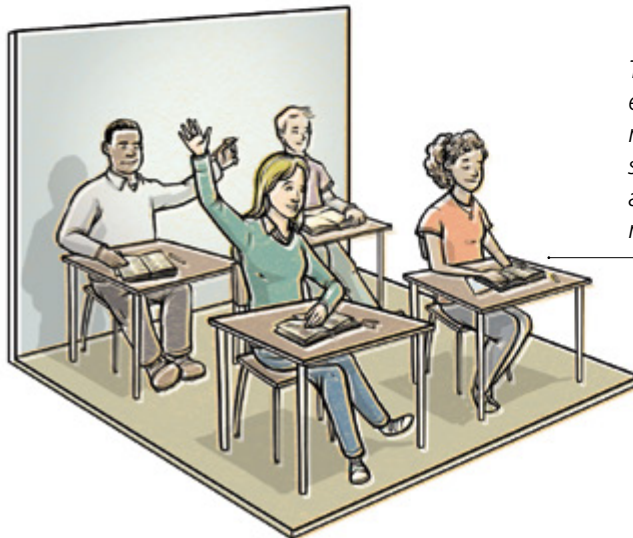


Tithing pays for the cost of building and maintaining temples and meetinghouses.



Tithing pays for the translation and publication of scriptures and lesson materials.

Tithing funds are transmitted from wards and branches to Church headquarters, where a council that includes the First Presidency decides how these sacred funds will be used.



Tithing helps pay for educating young members in Church schools, seminaries, and institutes of religion.

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

By Lindsay Alder

His heart beats still. Not as well as it did before the heart attack. But it beats still.



My heart feels warm tonight. Broken, bruised, torn, certainly. But beautifully warm. I feel intense gratitude—gratitude so deep and encompassing that it seems a new hole has opened in my soul to make room, gratitude so filling and so personal that it won't stop coursing down my cheeks in silent tears. My husband is breathing. I can hear it, deep and soft.

Just a couple of hours ago, I climbed into his hospital bed, ignoring the gentle kicks from our soon-to-arrive baby,

and found a spot among all the wires hooked to his chest where I could rest my head. Listening to his heartbeat in my ear was an experience that will be burned into my memory forever.

His heart beats still. Not as well as it did before the heart attack. But it beats still.

The warm lights from the Christmas strands strung across the room make me feel cozy tonight in more than one way. Their soft glow creates a comforting atmosphere, but the real

coziness comes from knowing that true friends were willing to drop their own Christmas Eve plans to come decorate when Brian moved from the intensive care unit. The three-foot (1 m) Christmas tree stands in the window as a symbol of their love.

How can I thank our friends? Will they ever know how much I needed them and how grateful I am? While my thoughts were turned to nothing but my husband, they were loving my children, scrubbing my house, restocking my fridge, doing my laundry, wrapping our Christmas presents, and bringing love to me through hugs, dinners, gift cards, cash, phone calls, texts, emails, messages, bags of cinnamon-scented pine cones, and a suitcase full of decorations. They cried with me and prayed and fasted. And in doing all of this, they gave me the most precious gift they could have given: their time. How I love them all!

I think I will sleep well tonight, for I am wrapped in a seemingly endless field of gratitude for all of them.

But mostly I feel gratitude to the Lord for my husband's life—his deep breathing, his heart pumping blood, his living body and soul. His life is my Christmas miracle. ■

The author lives in North Carolina, USA.

MALACHI

"[Jesus] commanded them that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi" (3 Nephi 24:1).

My name means "my messenger," and as such I relayed the "burden of the word of the Lord to Israel."¹ In my day, about 450 years before Christ's birth,² many of the Jews became discouraged and had stopped living righteously.³ The Lord rebuked them through my teachings.

Jewish priests from the tribe of Levi were normally dedicated to providing ordinances, but the Levites were corrupt in my time. They were ungrateful, refused to honor God, and offered polluted bread and imperfect animal sacrifices.⁴ They had broken the priesthood covenant God had made with Levi.

The people—not only the priests—were corrupt as well. They were marrying outside of the covenant, divorcing the wives of their youth, and refusing to pay their tithes and offerings.⁵

But even as the Lord spoke against these evil practices, He was willing

to forgive because He loved His people: "Return unto me, and I will return unto you."⁶ One way to return unto the Lord was to bring "all the tithes into the storehouse."⁷

The people complained, "It is vain to serve God: . . . they that work wickedness are set up [prosperous],"⁸ but I taught that the names of those who "feared the Lord . . . and that thought upon his name" were written in a "book of remembrance."⁹

I also prophesied that at the Lord's Second Coming, the wicked "shall be

stubble" but unto those who fear His name "shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."¹⁰

I prophesied that before the Second Coming, the prophet Elijah would come to restore the priesthood keys that would "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."¹¹

Through my teachings, we see that the Lord remembers His people and keeps His promises to His faithful children. He wants us to have faith in these promises and, through repentance, return unto Him.¹² ■

NOTES

1. Malachi 1:1.
2. See Bible Dictionary, "Malachi," 728.
3. See *Old Testament Seminary Student Study Guide* (2002), 193.
4. See Malachi 1:2, 6–14; see also *Old Testament Instructor's Guide, Religion 301–2* (1994), 109–110.
5. See Malachi 2:11, 14–16; 3:8.
6. Malachi 3:7.
7. Malachi 3:10; see also LeGrand Richards, "The Second Coming of Christ," *Ensign*, May 1978, 75.
8. Malachi 3:14–15.
9. Malachi 3:16.
10. Malachi 4:1–2.
11. Malachi 4:6; see also Doctrine and Covenants 110.
12. See *Old Testament Teacher Resource Manual* (2003), 215.





By Elder
L. Tom Perry

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

HELPING OTHERS FIND Faith in Christ

*I challenge you to help God's children return to their
Christian faith and to the strong religious foundation that is
so essential for peace of mind and real happiness.*

Pope Benedict XVI, lamenting the weakening of Christian churches in Europe, Australia, and the United States, said, "There's no longer evidence for a need of God, even less of Christ." He added, "The so-called traditional churches look like they are dying."¹

We have moved away from traditional worship. More people say they are spiritual rather than religious. If a teaching fits their lifestyle, they accept it and it becomes part of their faith. If it does not, they develop their own man-made faith. Faith and spirituality are now viewed as consumer products. Materialism has taken over and replaced God.

As Latter-day Saints, our voices must be heard in opposition to these dangerous trends designed to destroy the faith of mankind. The Book of Mormon warns us over and over about replacing our trust in God with things that do not last. Describing a time when many Nephites were drifting from their faith, Mormon states: "They grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to [the prophets'] words, to walk uprightly before God" (Alma 45:24).

***The best-
recorded fact
in all history is
the account of
the birth and
mission of the
Lord Jesus Christ
on the earth.***





Sacrifices were instituted on the earth as a gospel ordinance, to be practiced and performed by the authority of the priesthood, typifying the coming sacrifice of the Son of Man, who would give His life for the sins of the world.

As you see the weakening of Christian faith in society, your own faith must become more firm and sure. Helaman declares: “Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure

foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

Nephi reminds us:

“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 . . . [and] that life which is in Christ. . . .

“ . . . For the right way is to believe in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26–28).

Do we have a foundation to support such a claim?

The Symbols of Christ's Sacrifice

The best-recorded fact in all history is the account of the birth and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth. His mission was prophesied from the days of our first parents. In the book of Moses we read:

“And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence.

“And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

“And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

“And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

“Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:4–8).

Thus, sacrifices were instituted on the earth as a gospel ordinance, to be practiced and performed by the authority of the priesthood, typifying the coming sacrifice of the Son of Man, who would give His life for the sins of the world.

The form of the ordinance was arranged to make specific the points of the Lord's sacrifice when He would come in the meridian of time. The later offering of the Passover, for instance, stipulated that a male lamb of the first year, without spot or blemish, be chosen as an offering. The blood was spilled and care was taken that no bones would be broken—all symbolic of the manner of the Savior's death.

It is amazing that the offering of sacrifice continued through all ages from Adam until the time of the Savior. Even though the children of Israel went through many periods of apostasy, the hope that the Only Begotten Son would atone for the sins of mankind and that His atoning blood would

make immortality possible remained in many hearts.

The offering of sacrifices generally ended as a practice after the Savior's Atonement. The sacrament was instituted to remind His followers that He had been to earth and had performed His earthly ministry. We read in Luke:

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

“Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19–20).

Once again I am amazed that this reminder, even through dark periods of apostasy, was practiced in many forms and in many ways throughout generations until the time of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, when priesthood power was restored to earth to perform this sacred, saving ordinance.

Through all periods of recorded history we find the constant reminder of the mission of our Savior. He came to earth as one who had a dual citizenship—one of God and one of man. This enabled Him to perform His great ennobling sacrifice for all of us through His Atonement. Could there be any stronger proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, than by studying and living His saving doctrines, which He has revealed throughout the dispensations of the world? He has given us His gospel to guide and direct us during our earthly sojourn.

The Gospel Is the Solution

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) said:

“The responsibility of showing to the world that the gospel of Jesus Christ will solve its problems rests upon the men who make the claim. . . . I believe, too, that every *world problem may be solved by obedience to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

“The solution of the great world problems is here in the Church of Jesus Christ. Ample provision is made not only for the needs of individuals, but also for the nation and groups of nations. . . . I grant that we may seem to

be arrogating to ourselves superior wisdom, but we are not. It is simply the application of God's plan to the world problems. You who hold the priesthood have greater responsibility today, now that you live in this creative moment in the world's history, than ever the Church has had before. I repeat it. If we make the claim to hold the truth, it is obligatory upon every Latter-day Saint so to live, that when the people of the world come, in answer to the call, to test the fruit of the tree, they will find it wholesome and good."²

The great message we carry to the world is that the gospel of our Lord and Savior has been restored to the earth. His Church is again on the earth with the power and glory of the holy priesthood.

To those so ordained is given power to act for Him as His agents to bring the doctrines, ordinances, principles, and powers to bind on earth as will be done in the heavens. This is the Savior's Church. He directs the affairs of His Church through His chosen prophets. His prophets in turn teach the gospel to others and testify of Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer. This day and age is the dispensation of the fulness of times, which has been spoken of by the prophets from the beginning of time. It is the time of fulfillment of all that has been spoken of by the Lord's prophets and recorded in the holy scriptures. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a new church but the restored Church to the world in this day and age.

You are the generation the Lord has saved for this day. You came out of the waters of baptism with a covenant and a promise to the Lord to represent Him in helping people throw off their worldly ways and return to the blessings promised us if we would follow Him and live His gospel. You can help your Heavenly Father's children return to their Christian foundation, develop faith in Him, and return to His ways.

What You Can Do

You may ask, "What can I do?" Some months ago our stake president, speaking in sacrament meeting,

suggested four things we could do to bring others back to their Christian faith:

1. *Pray daily.*

President Thomas S. Monson has said: "To those within the sound of my voice who are struggling with challenges and difficulties large and small, prayer is the provider of spiritual strength. . . . Prayer is the means by which we approach our Father in Heaven, who loves us. Speak to Him in prayer and then listen for the answer. Miracles are wrought through prayer. . . . Remember to pray fervently."³

Hold your daily prayers and help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to get on their knees and pray to God.

2. *Study the scriptures daily.*

Could there be any stronger witness of Jesus Christ than the testimonies we find in the Book of Mormon? Of its 239 chapters, 233 mention the Savior.⁴ Isn't that amazing?

Be certain you have daily scripture study. Then help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to also study the scriptures daily.

3. *Remain worthy to attend the temple.*

Some of you have been to the temple; others have not. It is well to understand what is required to obtain a temple recommend. We understand clearly the process by which we go to a judge in Israel and confirm to him our worthiness to hold a temple recommend and then live by the standards required to keep that recommend.

Live in such a way that your righteous example will demonstrate how to be worthy of temple blessings.

4. *Give daily acts of service.*

Remember the words of King Benjamin: "And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). The Lord literally answers our prayers through the service we give to others.



Be an example of Christlike service, and help others return to their Christian faith by encouraging them to serve others.

Rise to a New Sense of Commitment

I know that God lives. I know that we are all His children and that He loves us. I know that He sent His Son to the world to be the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. I know that those who embrace His gospel and follow Him will enjoy eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God. I know that the Savior directed the Restoration of the gospel on earth through the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I know that the only lasting joy and happiness we will ever find during our mortal experience will come by following Jesus Christ, obeying His law, and keeping His commandments.

I challenge you to rise to a new sense of commitment. I challenge you to help God's children return to their Christian faith and to the strong religious foundation that is so essential for peace of mind and real happiness in this period of mortal probation.

May God bless you with the courage, boldness, enthusiasm, and desire to restore faith in the gospel of our Lord and Savior. ■
From a Church Educational System fireside address, "We Were the Greatest Generation," delivered at Brigham Young University on March 6, 2011. For the full address, go to cesdevotionals.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Pope Benedict XVI, in Noelle Knox, "Religion Takes a Back Seat in Western Europe," *USA Today*, Aug. 10, 2005; usatoday.com/news/world/2005-08-10-europe-religion-cover_x.htm.
2. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 5; emphasis in original.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "Be Your Best Self," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 68, 69.
4. See Robert J. Matthews, in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman and others (1988), 33.

Could there be any stronger witness of Jesus Christ than the testimonies we find in the Book of Mormon? Of its 239 chapters, 233 mention the Savior.



THE CHURCH IN Sweden

GROWTH, EMIGRATION, AND STRENGTH

The Church in Sweden has weathered emigration of faithful members, unfavorable media reports, and an increasingly secular environment, but the Lord is hastening His work in this choice land.

By Inger Höglund

In 1849, President Brigham Young called a small number of men to travel to various parts of the world to preach the gospel. A former Swedish sailor, John Forsgren, who had joined the Church in Massachusetts, USA, and traveled to the Salt Lake Valley, asked President Young to be sent to Sweden as a missionary. He was called to serve and arrived in Sweden in June 1850.

Elder Forsgren first visited his younger siblings in Gävle. His brother Peter was ill, and doctors said he was beyond help. Elder Forsgren explained the purpose of his mission to his siblings, then anointed and blessed Peter, who was restored to full health. On July 19, 1850, Elder Forsgren baptized his brother, who became the first convert in Sweden.

Elder Forsgren's sister, Erika, had an interesting experience that prepared her and Peter to receive the gospel. A few months before her brother's arrival, she was attending church, as was her custom. During the singing of a hymn, she saw a person stand before her and say, "On the fifth

day of July a man will come to you with three books and all those that believe in the things written in those books shall be saved." When her brother arrived with the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants, she believed his testimony without question.¹

Unfortunately, Elder Forsgren had to leave the country after just three months. Within a few years other missionaries were sent to Sweden. They found the people in Skönabäck, in the province of Skåne, receptive to the gospel. So many were converted that the first branch was organized there in 1853 with 36 members. One of the first leaders in Skåne was Carl Capson, called as the branch president in Lund. Around 100 members attended the first Church conference in Carl's barn, which was held at night to avoid persecution.²

Women of Faith

Women who received the gospel became pillars of strength in Sweden. One example is Britta Olsdotter



Members in Västerås met in this home in the 1950s.

would say to herself, “God should not have to wait.” She would sing a song, say a prayer, give a little talk, and then finish with another song and prayer.

When she had occasion to travel to Stockholm by train, Sister Munter would pass out tracts about the Church. Her legacy of faith continues: several of her descendants have returned to Sweden as missionaries.³

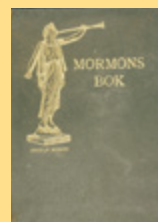
Missionaries also visited Smedjebacken, in the province of Dalarna. Among others, a Jansson family became members of the Church in 1886. A descendant of that family was Reid Johnson, a missionary who arrived in Sweden after the Second World War. He returned several times after his

1850: First missionary, John Forsgren, arrives in Sweden; first converts, Peter and Erika Forsgren, baptized



1853: First branch, Skönabäck Branch, established with 36 members

1854: Stockholm Branch established



◀ *1878: Book of Mormon translated and printed in Swedish*

► *1904: Known by its address, Svartensgatan 3, the first Church building purchased in Sweden (shown here in 1946)*

Persson, the first person to embrace the gospel in Vingåker. In 1877, to help support her family, she traveled to Stockholm to sell her weaving. There she met the missionaries and realized that they were teaching the truth and was baptized, at age 50.

Her conversion and valiant labor to promote the Lord's work eventually led to more baptisms, and a branch was established in Vingåker. Her descendants are still active in the Church. Sister Persson's great-great-granddaughter Laila Krylborn remarked, “It is wonderful to see what has happened in our children's and grandchildren's generations. Now our families have several priesthood holders and missionaries.”

Another pioneer woman was Lovisa Munter of Uppsala. She became a member in 1886 and was faithful until her death at 91 years of age. On many Sundays she went to the meeting hall, turned on the light, and waited for other members to come. Often no one came. At 11:00 a.m. she

mission—as mission president, regional representative, and temple president. The Jansson family also produced the wife of a prophet, Sister Frances Monson.

Overcoming Persecution

For decades, persecution of Church members was severe. Many missionaries landed in prison, including Mikael Jonsson, a native Swede. He was arrested in 1852 and was brought in chains 480 miles (770 km) to Malmö, where he was thrown in the castle prison, exhausted from hunger and privation. He was visited by a priest, who found that Elder Jonsson was an intelligent man with some education. The priest declared that he was willing to help him and even promised him further education—on the condition that he join the Lutheran faith and deny “Mormonism.” Elder Jonsson would not deny his faith, so he was deported.⁴

Another faithful missionary was Carl A. Carlquist, born near Vänersborg in 1857. At age 17, he felt a strong desire

to preach the gospel and was called to distribute Church tracts around Jönköping. He was poor, so members of his branch, seven widows and their children, obtained a suit coat and boots for him. Carl didn't own an overcoat when the winter season came, but he was allowed to borrow one a few hours every day from some of the members when they didn't need theirs.⁵

Carl later emigrated to Utah and married Hulda Östergren, a Swedish immigrant. He returned to Sweden two more times on missions, including as mission president of the Scandinavian Mission. Much of his last mission was spent correcting false reports published about the Church

leaders encouraged this emigration to strengthen the Church there. The results of that emigration can be seen today: about half of Utah's inhabitants have Scandinavian roots.

However, in 1910, President Joseph F. Smith visited Stockholm and encouraged members to stay and build up the Church in Sweden.

The Church after World War II

When the Second World War erupted, all American missionaries had to return home. Local Swedish men were then asked to serve as missionaries. C. Fritz Johansson, who had joined the Church in 1931, was called as the new



► 1905:
Sweden
Mission
organized



1914: Swedish
parliament mem-
bers vote against
a proposal to expel
"Mormon agents"
from the country

1926: Church
receives legal
permission to
perform burials
of its members

1952: New law guar-
antees freedom for all
non-state churches;
the Church receives
legal permission to
perform marriages
for its members

by Reverend P. E. Åslev, a pastor who had lived in Salt Lake City and was hired to promote anti-Mormon sentiment in Sweden. For instance, in 1912, Åslev wrote an article in the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* in which he claimed that Brother Carlquist was a polygamist.⁶ Carl's efforts included meeting with King Gustaf V and refuting Åslev's claims in public meetings.⁷

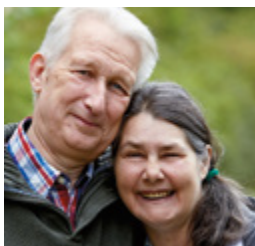
To help combat Åslev's claims, a local member, Einar Johansson, offered to speak for the Church. He initiated legal proceedings since Åslev had also said that the Church mission office "was a white-slavery business," a libelous claim.⁸ Brother Johansson came to mean much as a leader for the Church in Sweden, including as a branch president in Stockholm.⁹

Despite persecution in this era, many became converted to the gospel. The most successful year to date was 1862, when 640 persons were baptized and confirmed. Most of the converts, however, soon traveled to Utah. At the time,

mission president. One year before the war, he sold his grocery store business and became a missionary with his wife and three children. When the war was over, President Johansson and seven missionaries from Sweden were called to reopen missionary work in Finland, which had stopped because of the war.

When American missionaries returned to Sweden in 1946, they held English classes as a part of their missionary work, and many of their students became members of the Church. The growth didn't last long, however, because many Swedish members emigrated to Utah. Fear of their former enemies, encouragement by the mission president, and the chance to receive their temple ordinances motivated 250 active members to leave Sweden between 1948 and 1950.

Such a family was Oskar and Albertina Andersson, who became members of the Church in 1915. After World War II, Oskar, Albertina, and seven of their children who had



THE CHURCH IN SWEDEN

Missions: 1
Stakes: 4
Districts: 1
Wards: 24
Branches: 16
Members: 9,463

married members made the heart-rending decision to sell all they owned and “travel to Zion.” From 1949 to 1950, 29 members of the Andersson family left Sweden. Oskar and Albertina left their home, three children, and four grandchildren, whom they would never see again. They arrived in a desert and a city where the people spoke a language they did not understand. But for these faithful members, being close to the temple was more important than anything else.

Members of the Andersson family have

1953: First member couple, Bengt-Arne Månhammar and Kerstin Skog, are married by the mission president Clarence F. Johnson



◀ 1955:
First group of Swedish members travel to the temple in Bern, Switzerland

1965: First meeting-house built by the Church dedicated in Gubbängen, Stockholm



since served as missionaries and Church leaders in all parts of the world, including as an Area President in Africa and a temple president in Sweden.

Yet other members of the Church decided to stay in Sweden and became leaders. Such a one is Bo Wennerlund, a young father who was baptized in 1949. He became an important Church leader in Sweden, serving as a mission president, regional representative, and temple president.



Temple Blessings in Sweden

Emigration largely ceased when a temple was dedicated in Switzerland in 1955. For 30 years the Swedish members made the several-day journey there by train, by bus, by car, and even by air—sometimes several times a year.



The members felt boundless joy when a temple was built in Stockholm and dedicated in 1985. Berit Vennerholm, a member of the Västerhaninge Ward, describes the dedication as “a much-longed for and glorious experience. What I remember most was when we all waved with our white handkerchiefs and exclaimed, ‘Hosanna!’”

The choice of a temple lot shows the hand of the Lord in the process. After many discussions with several municipalities in the Stockholm area, two suitable lots were found.



The Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed in the Stockholm Concert Hall in 1982.

A committee of local Church leaders suggested one of them, but the President of the Church decided that the other would be better. This decision has proven to be inspired, since the other lot later proved to be unsuitable for a temple.

Although the Church has struggled to receive positive attention in Swedish media, one time it did was in 1984, when the young brothers in the Herrey family won the largest singing contest in Europe. Their appearance on television and in newspapers gave the Church good publicity, and many young people joined the Church at this time.

In the late 1980s, another member who received good press coverage was the 35-year-old U.S. ambassador to

dispersing them from their native lands. There is a veritable hastening of work in our day in this choice land.”

The Church also grows among the members. Multi-stake conferences attract many young people from neighboring countries and contribute to the building of new families. The government’s generous child allowances and paid leave for new parents make it possible for couples to have fairly large families.

Today, most of the active young members serve missions all over the world. One returned missionary, David Halldén, the first missionary in Yekaterinburg, Russia, today has a wonderful family with six children. He relates

1975: First stake organized, in Stockholm, by then-Elder Thomas S. Monson



◀ 1985: Stockholm Temple dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley

1991: First members from Russia come to the Stockholm Temple; Russia and the Baltic states included in the temple district



◀ 1995: King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia hosted by President Thomas S. Monson on Stockholm Temple grounds

Sweden, Gregory Newell, who was often seen in various public events. He and his wife returned to Sweden in 2011 to preside over the Sweden Stockholm Mission until July 2014.

President Newell presided over a growing number of missionaries, from 84 to 205. Because apartments are scarce and expensive in Sweden, he describes it as “a miracle that the mission was able to find an additional 56 apartments for our newly arriving missionaries.”

Real Growth

In the post-war era, Sweden has become an increasingly secular country. There are, however, many immigrants who are seeking God. Every sixth Swede today was born out of the country. A majority of those who join the Church in Sweden are immigrants. President Newell described some recent converts: “Brothers and sisters from 28 different countries have been converted to the Church in Sweden. I have expressed my view that the Lord is gathering Israel by

how the gospel helps his family: “There are so many voices that can lead children astray. The gospel helps us to strengthen them and get their confidence.”

Despite the secular environment and some bad publicity, many faithful members and strong Church leaders live in Sweden. The members appreciate the help that Church teachings and activities give to families and individuals, and it is their great wish that many more would receive the joyful message of Jesus Christ and His Atonement. ■

The author lives in Sweden.

NOTES

1. See *Box Elder Lore of the Nineteenth Century* (1951), 58.
2. See Andrew Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (1979), 81.
3. See Inger Höglund and Caj-Aage Johansson, *Steg i tro* (2000), 122.
4. See Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 53.
5. See Myrtle McDonald, *No Regrets: The Life of Carl A. Carlquist* (1985), 19–21.
6. See McDonald, *No Regrets*, 219.
7. See Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 331.
8. In McDonald, *No Regrets*, 239.
9. See McDonald, *No Regrets*, 219.



**Elder
Marlin K. Jensen**

Served as a member
of the Seventy from
1989 to 2012

LESSONS FROM THE Sacred Grove

In 1993, four years after my call to the Seventy, my family and I were asked to serve in the New York Rochester Mission. That mission includes the town of Palmyra (where Joseph Smith and his family lived during much of the 1820s) and Fayette (where the Church was organized in April 1830).

It is picturesque country, characterized by rolling, wooded hills; clear lakes and streams; and warm, colorful people. It is also a place made sacred by what happened there.

In a grove of towering beeches, oaks, maples, and other trees located about a quarter mile west of the Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith family home near Palmyra, 14-year-old Joseph Smith saw in vision God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. This divine manifestation, in response to Joseph's prayer to know the truth concerning religion, began the Restoration of the gospel in this final dispensation. It also made that grove of trees a revered place in the history of the Church—a place we honor with the name Sacred Grove.

My family and I came to love that grove of trees and to feel of its sacredness. We went there often. Each month as new missionaries arrived and as those finishing their missions departed, we took them there.

As I have reverently walked through the Sacred Grove or sat in thought on the benches provided there, I have often reflected on the abundance of scriptural imagery involving trees, branches, roots, seeds, fruits, and forests. A careful observer can learn some significant lessons from the ecosystem that exists there. I wish to briefly share four of those lessons.¹

*I encourage
you to stand
always in your
minds and
hearts in the
Sacred Grove
and live true to
the truths that
God began to
reveal there.*



1. Trees always grow toward the light.

In the Sacred Grove, the trees growing on the edge of the original forest and lining many of the interior pathways have grown outward to escape the overshadowing foliage above them and then upward to absorb the greatest possible sunlight. Their crooked trunks and branches stand in stark contrast to neighboring trees that grow almost perfectly straight. Trees, like almost all living organisms, need light to survive and thrive. They will do all in their power to soak in as much sunlight as possible to promote photosynthesis—the process of converting light energy into chemical energy.

Light is an even more important catalyst in the spiritual realm than it is in nature. This is so because light is essential to our spiritual growth and the realization of our full potential as God's sons and daughters.

Darkness is the opposite of light and represents the forces in the world that seek to separate us from God and to frustrate His divine plan for our lives. It is usually after dark or in dark places that the forces of evil exert their greatest influence. Breaches of the law of chastity, acts of stealing, violations of the Word of Wisdom, and other behaviors forbidden by our Heavenly Father usually occur under cover of darkness. Even when we choose to do wrong during broad daylight, we can't help but have feelings of darkness.

Fortunately, the Spirit of Christ “giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.

“And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father” (D&C 84:46–47).

This passage beautifully describes the upward reach of God's children, the natural God-given spiritual instinct we all have—if we don't stifle it—to go toward the light and, in so doing, to go toward God and His Son and to become more like Them. Of Himself, Christ said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

I urge you to avoid the darkness of sin in all its vile forms and to fill your lives with Spirit, truth, and the light of our Savior, Jesus Christ. You can do this by seeking noble friends, inspiring music and art, knowledge out of the best books (especially the scriptures), moments of sincere prayer, quiet times in nature, wholesome activities and conversations, and a life centered on Christ and His teachings of love and service.



2. Trees require opposition to fulfill the measure of their creation.

Various schools of thought about forest management have been followed through the years in caring for the Sacred Grove. At one time a test plot was selected for a practice known as *release thinning*. Foresters identified what they felt were potentially the largest and healthiest young trees in the test plot, and then they cut and pruned out the less-promising trees and the competing undergrowth. The supposition was that by removing much of the competition for water, sunlight, and soil nutrients, the chosen trees would be *released* to grow and develop in extraordinary ways.

After some years it became obvious that just the opposite was occurring. Once freed from competition, the



Some trees in the Sacred Grove demonstrate that opposition can work to our benefit and that in our extremity there is often much to be gained.



chosen trees became complacent. Instead of stretching upward toward the light, they slowed their vertical growth, put out many lower limbs that eventually became useless when the canopy closed, and became fatter. None of the trees in the test plot compared in size or vitality to the trees that had to compete and overcome opposition in order to survive and thrive.

One of the key doctrines of the Book of Mormon is that there must be “an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). A world with opposites provides choices between good and evil so that agency can operate. Equally important, however, is the principle that opposition must exist for spiritual growth to occur. Understanding and embracing this principle is a key to accepting and being generally happy with life. It is also critical to experiencing needed personal growth and development.

Sooner or later, all of us will encounter opposition and adversity. Some of it will come simply as a result of being here in mortality in a fallen world. It may involve forces of nature, illness and disease, temptations, loneliness, or physical or mental imperfections. Sometimes opposition and hardship come because of our misguided choices. How grateful we should be to our Savior, whose Atonement provides a way for the mending of everything that is broken.

I take great solace from the Lord’s words to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail at a time when Joseph’s burdens were nearly unbearable: “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

Some trees in the Sacred Grove demonstrate that opposition can work to our benefit

and that in our extremity there is often much to be gained. These trees have had to recover from various forms of opposition or adversity—a lightning strike, a powerful gust of wind, a heavy accumulation of snow or ice, the encroachment and abuse of careless humans, and sometimes the aggression of a neighboring tree. Out of these adverse circumstances have come some of the sturdiest and most visually interesting trees in the grove.

3. Trees grow best in forests, not in isolation.

In nature it’s unusual to see a tree standing alone. Trees almost always grow in groves, and over time groves may become forests. The Sacred Grove, however, is much more than just a group of trees. It is a complicated ecosystem that includes numerous species of flora and fauna.

There is an observable interconnectedness among all the different varieties of wildflowers, bushes, shrubs, trees, fungi, mosses, birds, rodents, rabbits, deer, and other creations found there. These species interact and rely on one another for food, shelter, and a synergistic and social environment where they can experience their cycle of life.

God’s plan for our lives contemplates a similar interconnectedness for us. We are to work out our salvation together, not in isolation. The Church builds meetinghouses, not hermitages.





From the beginning of the Restoration, the command has been for us to gather in communities, where we can learn to live in harmony and mutually support one another by honoring our baptismal covenants (see Mosiah 18:8–10). As God’s children, we can no more prosper in isolation than can a solitary tree. Healthy trees need an ecosystem; healthy people need each other.

Thankfully, there is in all of us a longing for sociality, companionship, and loyal friends. As members of God’s eternal family, we all yearn for the satisfaction and security that close and lasting relationships can provide. Although social networking sites undoubtedly provide a form of sociality, they are no substitute for the honest, open, face-to-face communication that must occur for authentic and lasting relationships to be established.

Certainly the earliest and best laboratory for learning to get along with others is the home. At home we learn the lessons of service, unselfishness, forgiveness, and patience that are essential to the formation of lasting relationships with others.

Happily, the inspired organization of the Church also provides settings where we can develop socially. In Church callings, meetings, classes, quorums, councils, activities, and a variety of other opportunities for association, we develop the attributes and social skills that help prepare us for the social order that will exist in heaven.

In speaking of this higher order, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy” (D&C 130:2).

4. Trees draw strength from the nutrients created by previous generations of trees.

There was a time when those in charge of caring for the Sacred Grove decided that the grove should be well groomed. Service projects were then organized to clear the grove of fallen trees and limbs, undergrowth, stumps, and dead leaves. Under this practice, it wasn’t long before the vitality of the grove began to diminish. Tree growth slowed, fewer new trees sprouted, some species of wildflowers and plants began to disappear, and the numbers of birds and other wildlife decreased.

Later, upon recommendation that the grove be left in as natural a state as possible, fallen trees and limbs were left to decompose and enrich the soil. Leaves were left lying where they fell. Visitors were asked to stay on marked pathways so that the grove would be less disturbed and the soil within the grove less compacted. Within just a few years, the grove began to regenerate and renew itself in a remarkable way. Today it flourishes in a nearly pristine state, with lush vegetation and abundant wildlife.

The lesson to be learned from this experience is dear to my heart. For seven years it was my privilege to serve as Church historian and recorder. Why do record keeping and the collection, preservation, and sharing of

*A careful observer
can learn some
significant lessons
from the ecosystem
that exists in the
Sacred Grove.*

history enjoy such importance in the Church of Jesus Christ? Why is it critical for us to be mindful of and draw strength from past generations? (See D&C 21:1; 69:3, 8.)

I suggest that it is impossible to live fully in the present—much less to plan for our future destiny—without the foundation of the past. Understanding the relationship of the past to the present and to the future helps us more fully appreciate the Lord’s



definition of truth as revealed to Joseph Smith: “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

The knowledge we have of our past because of the records that have been kept and of our future because of the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets provides us with the context that allows wise use of our agency.

It is important that we become familiar with our Church’s history, especially with its founding stories. These stories—Joseph Smith’s First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, angelic visitations by John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Elijah, Elias, and others—contain the foundational truths upon which the Restoration is based.

Regrettably, in this technological age, where information abounds—some of it critical of events and people in the Church’s history—some Latter-day Saints become shaken in their faith and begin to question long-held beliefs. To such questioning individuals I extend love, understanding, and the assurance that if they will abide by gospel principles and prayerfully pursue their study of Church history—studying sufficiently to gain a more comprehensive rather than a fragmentary or incomplete knowledge—the Holy Ghost will confirm their faith in the essential events in Church history by speaking peace to their minds. In this way they can become settled in their convictions concerning the history of the restored Church.

Conclusion

When we were serving our mission near Palmyra, sometimes I would go into the Sacred Grove alone and stand in reverence next to my favorite “witness tree”—one of three living trees that were growing in the grove at the time of the First Vision. I used to imagine that if that tree could talk, it would tell me what it witnessed that spring day in 1820. But I really didn’t need that tree to tell me—I already knew.

By virtue of spiritual experiences and feelings beginning in my youth and continuing to this very hour, I have come to know that God, our Father, lives. I know too that His Son, Jesus Christ, is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. I know that these two glorified Beings appeared to Joseph Smith.

These glorious truths have their beginning in the Sacred Grove. I encourage you to stand always in your minds and hearts in that sacred place and live true to the truths that God began to reveal there. ■

From a CES devotional address, “Stand in the Sacred Grove,” given in California, USA, on May 6, 2012. For the full address, visit cesdevotionals.lds.org.

NOTE

1. I am indebted to Robert Parrott, a forester and naturalist employed by the Church who lives in Palmyra, for bringing to my attention some of the insights about the Sacred Grove that I share.

THE LOST 500 YEARS: FROM MALACHI TO JOHN THE BAPTIST

The 500 years between the Old and New Testaments can teach us about the conditions in ancient Palestine before the coming of Jesus Christ and help us renew our commitment to follow the Savior.



By S. Kent Brown

Professor Emeritus of Ancient Scripture

and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

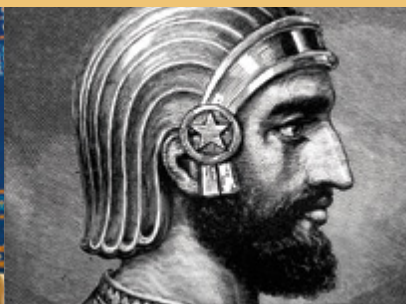
Professor of Church History and Doctrine at
Brigham Young University

When the prophet Malachi stepped off the earthly stage around 450 B.C., no genuine prophetic voice was heard again for about 500 years. We know this period as the intertestamental period—the gap between

dispensations in the Old and New Testaments. Without a prophet, people in the land began to divide into parties and groups, each claiming the right to interpret the scriptures and lead the people. The true understanding of Jehovah diminished among these groups. A long night of confusion followed, which ended when God sent a new prophet, John the Baptist, to begin a new dispensation. But even with John the Baptist and the Savior teaching the people, many were unable to



539 B.C.



THE GREEKS 332 B.C.

overcome the traditions and beliefs that had developed and intensified during the intertestamental period. As we understand these 500 years and the confusion that accompanied them, we can understand more about the Savior's ministry and renew our commitment to follow Him.

Exile and Bondage: The Price of Disobedience

Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah warned Jerusalem's citizens that if they continued breaking their covenants with the Lord, the city and their temple would be destroyed. This prophecy proved true when Babylon initially invaded Judah around 600 B.C., destroying its villages, towns, cities, and religious life.

Jerusalem finally fell in 587 B.C., and the exiled Jews were forced out of their destroyed homeland (see Psalm 137:1). A few people remained in and around Jerusalem—including the Samaritans, who eventually intermarried with non-Israelites (see Jeremiah 40:7, 11–12).

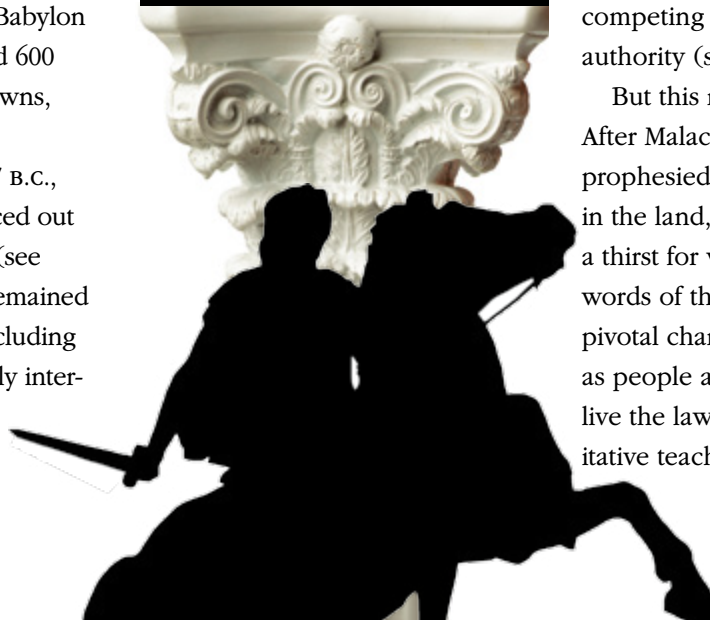
THE PROPHETS ISAIAH AND JEREMIAH WARNED THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH THAT THEY WOULD BE RULED BY FOREIGN NATIONS. THEIR PROPHECIES PROVED TRUE WHEN THE REGION WAS CONQUERED BY A SERIES OF KINGS FROM VARIOUS NATIONS: KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR OF BABYLON, CYRUS THE GREAT OF PERSIA, KING DARIUS OF PERSIA, AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT OF GREECE. WHEN ALEXANDER DIED, HIS TERRITORY WAS DIVIDED AMONG HIS GENERALS; PTOLEMY I TOOK CONTROL OF PALESTINE.

Later the exiles began to return to Palestine and to rebuild their homes and religious life (see Ezra 3). The temple in Jerusalem, finally rebuilt by 515 B.C., once again became the center of Jewish worship.

Because the Jews rejected the Samaritans' offer to help reconstruct the temple, the Samaritans built an alternate temple in the late fourth century on Mount Gerizim, some 40 miles (64 km) north of Jerusalem. Thus, the worship of and belief in Jehovah fragmented between the new temple at Mount Gerizim and the Jerusalem temple because they offered competing claims of priesthood authority (see John 4:20).

But this revival did not last long. After Malachi, as the prophet Amos had prophesied, the Lord sent a "famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). This pivotal change had major consequences as people attempted to understand and live the law without a prophet's authoritative teachings and interpretations.

LEFT: THE PROPHET ISAIAH FORETELLS CHRIST'S BIRTH. BY HARRY ANDERSON. RIGHT: JEWS IN EXILE—NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PALACE. BABYLON © BALAGE BALOUGH/ARTRESOURCE.COM; IMAGE OF FLAMES BY WAVEBREAKMEDIA LTD./THINKSTOCK; IMAGE OF CYRUS THE GREAT BY DORLING KINDERSLEY/THINKSTOCK; DARIUS I, BAS-RELIEF ON APADANA, PERSEPOLIS, BY GIANNI DAGLI ORTIZ/ART ARCHIVE AT ART RESOURCE, NY; IMAGE OF GREEK COLUMN BY OLMARMA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; IMAGE OF COIN WITH PORTRAIT OF SOTER PTOLEMAIOS I COURTESY OF BP&K, BERLIN/UEZKABINETT, STAATLICHE MUSEEN, BERLIN/REINHARD SACZEWSKI/ART RESOURCE, NY



THE SELEUCIDS 198 B.C.

REVOLT 164 B.C.

INDEPENDENT JEWISH NATION 142 B.C.

The Conditions of Apostasy

As an effect of this apostasy, the people divided into groups with varied political, religious, and social agendas. They also differed in their beliefs and traditions about the Messiah. The religious groups tried to live the law of Moses as they understood it, but each group interpreted the scriptures from such varied perspectives that Jewish society became more and more divided. As a result, the true understanding of who the Savior would be became confused.

Once the voices of prophets fell silent, the priests and their fellow temple workers, the Levites, became the most important officials among the Jews and claimed for themselves the right to interpret scripture. However, the office of high priest became corrupted as it was bought and sold during this time.

Many Jews felt that the priests and Levites did not fulfill their responsibility to teach the law correctly (see Deuteronomy 33:10), so a new group evolved who sought to teach the law. Known as scribes, they modeled themselves on Ezra, who had helped his people feel an urgency to learn and to obey the law (see Ezra 7:25; Nehemiah 8:1–8).

PALESTINE CAME UNDER THE RULE OF THE SELEUCID EMPERORS, ONE OF WHOM WAS ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES. ANTIOCHUS FORCIBLY HELLENIZED JEWISH SOCIETY, SOMETIMES EXECUTING LARGE NUMBERS OF JEWS, FORBIDDING JEWISH RELIGIOUS RITES, AND DESECRATING THE TEMPLE. JUDAS MACCABEUS, LEADER OF THE ANTI-GREEK JEWS, LED A REVOLT AND REDEDICATED THE TEMPLE. THE PEOPLE CELEBRATED THE FIRST HANUKKAH.

Alexander the Great conquered the region in 332 B.C. When he died, his kingdom was divided among his generals. In time, Palestine came under the influence of the Greek-speaking Seleucid emperors. In 167 B.C., the Seleucid rulers outlawed the Jewish faith, forbidding circumcision and desecrating the temple by offering swine on the altar. Many Jews resisted, led by a family known as the Maccabees or Hasmoneans. The revolt—called the Maccabean War—eventually brought freedom to the Jews and created a Jewish nation for the first time since the fall of Jerusalem. At the same time, another religious group formed known as the Hasideans, “the pious.” They showed their devotion to God by trying to live every aspect of the law of Moses as they understood it.

Other religious groups also emerged during the intertestamental period, each claiming the exclusive right to interpret the scriptures. The Pharisees were an independent religious group that came into being soon after the Maccabean War. They became very influential in Jewish society by introducing a narrow focus on food laws and on ritual purity, aspects that were rooted primarily in their



THE ROMANS 63 B.C.

oral traditions, not scripture. In their homes, they tried to behave as if they were living in the temple.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, whose origins remain unknown, rejected any appeal to oral tradition and held strictly to the five books of Moses, turning their backs on the writings of other prophets. This group consisted mostly of the elite in Jerusalem society. By the time Jesus was born, they had expanded their power by asserting control over the Jerusalem temple.

Each of these religious groups preserved traditions and doctrines that they believed were essential to lives of devotion. But because they lacked the guidance of a true prophet, they were left to their own interpretations.

Awaiting a New Dispensation

Regardless of their religious persuasion, righteous men and women still looked forward to the coming of the Messiah during the intertestamental period. Poets sang psalms, and the common people prayed, talked, and dreamed of His arrival—a Davidic King who was destined to save His people.

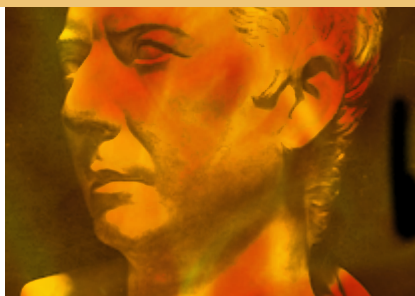
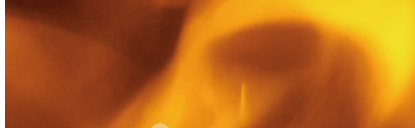
One group waiting for the Messiah was the Essenes, which formed during the Maccabean conflict. The

AFTER A SHORT PERIOD OF INDEPENDENCE, JERUSALEM FELL UNDER ROMAN RULE WHEN POMPEY THE GREAT INVADED THE CITY. THE ROMANS INSTALLED HEROD THE GREAT, A DESCENDANT OF ESAU, AS A CLIENT KING OVER JUDEA. HE REBUILT JERUSALEM AND EXPANDED THE TEMPLE AREA. CAESAR AUGUSTUS ENDED REPUBLICAN RULE IN ROME AND BECAME THE SECOND ROMAN EMPEROR AFTER JULIUS CAESAR.

Essenes believed that the temple priests in Jerusalem were corrupt and the temple was in need of serious reform. In their view, the coming of the Messiah was near. They believed He would join with them to throw off the oppressive yoke of Rome, whose rulers had conquered Palestine some 60 years before the birth of Jesus.

Like the Reformation that preceded the Restoration, the intertestamental period also witnessed events that prepared the world for the coming of Jesus Christ. This time had a remarkable production of religious literature, including the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and the beginning of the creation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Apocrypha. During this time the ideas about angels, resurrection, and the concepts of heaven and hell became developed and refined.

However, without a prophet to guide them, the Jews debated the meaning of the scriptures and about who the Messiah would be. While most people waited for a Davidic Messiah (one descended from King David), others championed a Messiah who was the son of Aaron—a priestly Messiah. Still others did not expect the Messiah to come.



HEROD THE GREAT
CAESAR AUGUSTUS

PONTIUS PILATE



DURING THE RULE OF CAESAR AUGUSTUS AND HEROD THE GREAT, THE SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM. HE WAS BORN KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (SEE ISAIAH 44:6).

So many expectations had built up among the different groups during the intertestamental period that the groups did not know how to recognize the true Messiah when He came to them. None of the groups—scribes, Pharisees, Essenes, or Sadducees—accepted John the Baptist as a prophet or Jesus as the Messiah. Some members of these groups became the primary adversaries of John and Jesus during their ministries (see Matthew 21:23–46).

The debates and arguments among the differing groups about the Messiah continued. The first prophet of the new dispensation, John the Baptist, announced the coming of the true Messiah and clarified the type of salvation He would provide. Indicating Jesus Christ, John said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Many Jews accepted John as he prepared the people for the coming of Christ.

When Jesus Christ began His ministry, He taught the people “as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29). He had many discussions with the religious leaders, clarifying the doctrines of marriage, resurrection, the Godhead, and His

role as the Savior. Since many of the religious leaders rejected Him (see Matthew 26:4), Jesus told them: “Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” He added, “If God were your father, ye would love me” (John 8:19, 42).

Because they expected a Messiah so different from Jesus, they rejected Him. Thankfully, we live in an age when the truths of the gospel are built on the foundational teachings of prophets and apostles (see Ephesians 2:20). We do not have to choose among the spiritual crosswinds that arise without the guidance of prophets and apostles. As we follow our latter-day prophets and apostles, we will come to understand the true doctrine of the Savior Jesus Christ, as was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“For [I] saw him, even on the right hand of God; and [I] 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 76:23–24). ■



THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

WINDOW TO THE MODERN BIBLE

By Donald W. Parry

Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brigham Young University

In early 1947, three shepherds belonging to the Ta'amireh Bedouin were searching for a stray animal. One of them threw a rock into a cave and heard an earthen jar break. When they entered the cave, they saw it contained several large clay jars, some of which held scrolls.* In the ensuing years, Bedouin and archaeologists found several hundred scrolls in 11 caves on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

Many scholars believe that the Dead Sea Scrolls are the greatest archaeological discovery of the 20th century. The scrolls provide an ancient library of more than 900 texts, most of them written in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. About 225 of the scrolls contain the oldest copy of the Old Testament (except for the book of Esther), which is more than 1,000 years older than the copies used during the Middle Ages. Most of the scrolls date between 150 B.C. and A.D. 68, although some texts date as far back as the third century B.C.

In addition to traditional biblical texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls also include the Temple Scroll (describing a temple to be built in Jerusalem and the ideal covenant society), the War Scroll (describing the end-of-days conflict), and texts parallel to the Bible (such as the books of Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek,

and the testaments of Jacob, Judah, and Levi). Little is known about Enoch in the Bible, but in the scrolls, Enoch is a major character—a mighty prophet with special gifts.

Most of the scrolls are severely fragmented because of age and exposure to the elements, but scholars have been able to glean a wealth of information about the scribal practices. The scribes' careful and meticulous work indicates a high level of professionalism and competence as they copied and transmitted sacred texts from one generation to the next. Those of us who love and appreciate the holy scriptures owe a great debt to these scribes for their careful work.

When we consider the ancient methods of transmitting texts by hand, we realize that the Bible went through a remarkable process to make it into this century. The Dead Sea Scrolls stand as a witness that the Old Testament has been passed down through the centuries with a respectable degree of accuracy. For this, we must be grateful to prophets, scribes, copyists, and everyone who was responsible for the Bible's transmission from generation to generation. ■

**Accounts of how the scrolls were discovered vary because the shepherds relied on their memories to recount the story years later.*





**By Bishop
Gary E.
Stevenson**
Presiding Bishop

*Without
the Savior's
birth and
Atonement,
we would
have no
Intercessor,
no Advocate
with the
Father, and
no Mediator
who makes
it possible
for us to
return to the
presence of
our loving
Heavenly
Father and
live together
as eternal
families.*

THE Reality OF CHRISTMAS

When my father was a boy, he lived in a small town in central Utah near Utah Lake.

In the days before the pioneers, Native Americans hunted and fished in the area. Certain locations around the lake became popular for those looking for arrowheads.

At a fathers-and-sons activity when my father was five years old, his ward went to Utah Lake to look for arrowheads. After the group had spent the day searching, my grandfather asked my father whether he had found any arrowheads.

"No, I didn't find any," my father replied. Then he reached into his pocket and said, "But I did find this nice rock that is shaped just like a Christmas tree."

My father had found an arrowhead after all, but he didn't know it. He held the real thing in his hand, but he didn't recognize it.

Recognizing the Redeemer

For many people today, their vision of what is real and most important—Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world—is blurred by things that are not real.

Recently I saw a television program on Jesus Christ that questioned whether He really was born of the Virgin Mary. Even great professors from esteemed institutions of learning speculated about whether this could be.

Responding to such doubters, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said: "The so-called scholars seek to convince us that the divine birth of Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament was not divine at all and that Mary was not a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception. They would have us believe that Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, was His physical father, and that therefore Jesus was human in all attributes and characteristics. They appear generous in their praise of Him when they say that He was a great moral philosopher, perhaps even the greatest. But the import of their effort is to repudiate the divine sonship of Jesus, for on that doctrine rests all other claims of Christianity."¹

I have skied on artificial snow, and I have decorated fake Christmas trees with fake icicles. Sometimes it can be difficult to grasp what is real, especially in a day



FINDING THE SAVIOR



“Sometimes the most precious and sacred things are right in front of us, in plain sight, but we cannot or

will not see them. . . .

“I promise that if we unclutter our lives a little bit and in sincerity and humility seek the pure and gentle Christ with our hearts, we will see Him, we will find Him—on Christmas and throughout the year.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “How to See the Christ in Christmas,” *New Era*, Dec. 2013, 48.

“And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness . . .

“And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld” (Helaman 14:3, 5).

The Jewish people anxiously anticipated this great event. They knew the Messiah would come, and they expected Him to come in glory, liberate

of virtual reality. So how do we know what is real? How do we obtain a testimony of the reality of Jesus Christ?

We gain a testimony of what is real as we read the word of God in the scriptures—both ancient and modern. We learn the reality of the Savior as we listen to and read the testimonies of living prophets and apostles. We find the truth as we pray “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4). We discover “the right way” as we “believe in Christ, and deny him not” and as we “bow down before him, and worship him with all [our] might, mind, and strength, and [our] whole soul” (2 Nephi 25:29).

Prophecies of Christ’s Birth

Scriptures abound that prophesy of the birth of Christ—the first Christmas. We may forget when we read these scriptural prophecies that they were indeed *prophecies*. They offer great detail about what was going to happen but had not yet happened.

Eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah said, “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).

Six hundred years before the Savior was born, Nephi described a vision he

had of the mother of the Son of God:

“I looked and beheld the . . . city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. . . .

“And [the angel] said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God . . .

“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” (1 Nephi 11:13, 18, 20–21).

One hundred twenty-four years before the birth of the Savior, King Benjamin said:

“Behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent . . . shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles . . .

“And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:5, 8).

Eighty-three years before the birth of Christ, Alma said, “And behold, [the Son of God] shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel” (Alma 7:10).

And only six years before the first Christmas, Samuel the Lamanite declared:



them temporally, establish an earthly kingdom, and rule as their King.

Who would know first of the Messiah's birth? Would it not be the Sanhedrin or others in positions of power and influence?

The Bible tells us that it was lowly shepherds sleeping on the ground to whom an angel declared the "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10) and that it was Wise Men from afar who saw "his star in the east, and [came] to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). The powerful and the influential, whose vision was blurred by the philosophies of this world, were not with the Savior at His birth or during His ministry. They had before them the real thing but did not know it or accept it.

Becoming More Christlike

President Benson said that one of the greatest things about Christmastime

is that it increases our sensitivity to things of God:

"It causes us to contemplate our relationship with our Father and the degree of devotion we have for God.

"It prompts us to be more tolerant and giving, more conscious of others, more generous and genuine, more filled with hope and charity and love—all Christlike attributes. No wonder the spirit of Christmas touches the hearts of people the world over. . . . For at least a time, increased attention and devotion are turned toward our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."²

This Christmas, as the spirit of the season permeates our hearts, let us do something that expresses our feelings in an outward way, showing that we understand that the babe born in Bethlehem is the real Redeemer. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) gave some practical advice that helps us do that:

"This Christmas, mend a quarrel. Seek out a forgotten friend. Dismiss suspicion and replace it with trust. Write a letter. Give a soft answer. Encourage youth. Manifest your loyalty in word and deed. Keep a promise. Forgo a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Apologize. Try to understand. Examine your demands on others. Think first of someone else. Be kind. Be gentle. Laugh a little more. Express your gratitude. Welcome a stranger. Gladden the heart of a child. Take pleasure in the beauty and wonder of the earth. Speak your love and then speak it again."³

Without Christ, there would be no Christmas. Without Christ, there can be no fulness of joy. Without His birth and His Atonement, we would have no Intercessor, no Advocate with the Father, and no Mediator who makes it possible for us to return to the presence of our loving Heavenly Father and live together as eternal families.

I celebrate with you the beautiful and miraculous reality of the birth and mission of the Son of God, and I bear my testimony that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer—the promised Messiah. ■

NOTES

1. *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (1988), 128.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, in Larry C. Porter, "Remembering Christmas Past: Presidents of the Church Celebrate the Birth of the Son of Man and Remember His Servant Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies*, vol. 40, no 3. (2001), 108.
3. Howard W. Hunter, "The Gifts of Christmas," *Ensign*, Dec. 2002, 18–19.

MOM'S CHRISTMAS QUILT

One of the most challenging experiences of my life happened shortly after the passing of our 10-year-old daughter from brain cancer. The saying “You can’t take it with you” came with clarity as we looked around her room one Saturday afternoon.

Clarissa was gone, but her room still held the identifiable remnants of her earthly stay. We now had the daunting task of deciding what to do with her personal belongings. I knew that parting with a single item would not

be easy, especially for my wife.

Dealing with the whirlwind of details associated with hospitals, chemotherapy, and radiation had left us little time to clean and organize.

Memories came as we packed up items she’d arranged on her headboard or bookshelf. They all held heartfelt meaning—from her favorite blanket, book, or necklace to her stuffed animals, schoolbooks, and football. My wife sobbed as we asked what to do with each item.

We gathered many of Clarissa’s books and took them to her elementary school for other children to enjoy. We gave her dresser to a neighbor. Some of her clothes went to cousins. Focusing on others helped make the difficult situation of parting with her things a little easier.

Several weeks later, as Christmas approached, my two teenage daughters asked their mother if they could use some of Clarissa’s clothes to make a special Christmas gift. They selected each article of clothing for its

I will always remember my wife’s expression when she opened her gift and saw what her daughters had made for her.



HE NEEDS MY SERVICE NOW

intrinsic family memory and carefully cut squares to represent precious moments in her life.

A few days before Christmas, they and their Young Women leader, who had helped them come up with the idea, showed me a quilt they were making. I looked in astonishment at each square of fabric, which represented an event in Clarissa's life: a square from her football uniform, a square from the shirt we bought her on a family trip, a square from the pajama pants she wore at the hospital. Each piece, so precious and beautiful, reminded me of our time with her. I told my daughters it was perfect. I knew their mother would love it.

That Christmas morning I saw a gift given from the heart. I will always remember my wife's expression when she opened her gift and saw what her daughters had made for her. Each night since then she has wrapped her Christmas quilt around her, recalling memories and dreaming of the day our family will be united again—thanks to the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. ■
Jed Packer, Utah, USA

I sit at the sewing machine and feed thread onto seams of flannel. Child-print patterns in soft colors decorate the tops, with coordinating colors forming the backs of the baby receiving blankets I'm sewing.

Our ward Relief Society assembles newborn kits for poverty and disaster areas. I'm an amateur seamstress, but I'm committed to participate. I enjoy choosing fabric for the project and cutting out blanket-sized squares.

I put right sides of the fabric together, sew around the edges, and leave an area open to turn the blanket right side out. Then I stitch along the edges, clip the corners, turn the blanket so that the colorful sides are on the outside, and stitch up the open area.

I sew along the top of the edges to reinforce the seams. I ease the fabric into place and take off at a brisk pace. As I rush to finish so I can resume household duties, a thought strikes me: "What if I were sewing this blanket for baby Jesus?"

With that thought, I slow down and take great care to straighten the seams. But even with care, the stitching doesn't run straight.

Next I sew a 10-inch (25 cm) square in the center to secure the front to the back. I make a heavy paper template, center it on the blanket, and lightly mark around it. I put the fabric in place, ease down the needle, and carefully sew.

When I'm done, I clip the threads and pull out the finished blanket. It

isn't square—it's a cross between a trapezoid and a parallelogram.

I set the blanket aside, pull out fresh flannel, and start again—taking greater pains for this gift worthy of Deity. But even with the extra effort, the results are only slightly better. Each blanket I sew is imperfect.

I feel that I can't take any of the blankets to the collection site, at least not this year. I'll keep practicing, and perhaps someday I can make a contribution.

Then another thought floats through my mind: "If you wait until your sewing is perfect, the Christ child will be in Egypt."

I understand. The opportunity for service would be gone. The Savior accepts our offerings when we use our best efforts, imperfect though they may be. I know that a newborn, wrapped in a soft, clean blanket, would not refuse to sleep because the corners aren't square.

As I contemplate whether my efforts will make a dent in worldwide needs, Christ's counsel comes to mind: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

So I continue sewing blankets, working to make them as attractive as I can. I know there is a need now, not some vague time in the future when I can sew them perfectly. ■

Jean Hedengren Moultrie,
Washington, USA



OUR BEST CHRISTMAS PRESENT EVER

It was Christmas Eve, and our family had gathered as we do every year to celebrate. The clock was about to strike midnight when Dad called us together, saying that he had something to show us.

With all the preparation and excitement that accompany Christmas Eve, my sisters, mother, and I had not noticed what Dad had prepared for the occasion. As soon as we were all comfortably gathered together, he began to show us some slides.

In his slide show, which featured a painting of the Savior, Christmas scenes, and carefully crafted words, Dad expressed his love for us. His presentation also reminded us of the

true meaning of Christmas and the happiness and gratitude we should feel for the Savior's birth. One slide of a colorful Christmas tree also featured the words, "This Christmas the love of Jesus Christ will bring me a new life."

The most special part of Dad's presentation followed when he used a slide of a painting of the Savior to give us some news. It wasn't just any news; it was the best news ever. Above the Savior appeared the words "I have decided to get baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Our father had finally decided to join the Church! Such a decision may be easy for some people, but it wasn't for our father. He had been studying

the gospel and learning about the Church for 25 years. Despite our best efforts and many missionary discussions, he still had not been baptized. We never understood why, but we knew he wasn't ready.

I admit there were times when I felt that my father would never be baptized. Deep inside, however, I never lost hope, and we all continued to pray for him. On Christmas Eve, the Lord answered our prayers.

When Dad made his announcement, at first all we could do was weep for joy. We felt a mixture of feelings—excitement, surprise, and above all else, an enormous happiness that is difficult to describe.

Dad's announcement didn't just change Christmas Eve—it changed life for our entire family. We still have progress to make as individuals and as a family, but I know moving ahead will be better now that we're together in the Church.

I am so grateful to the Lord for this blessing. In a few months we will be sealed as a family in the temple. Dad's announcement was definitely the best Christmas present ever. ■

Adriana Nava Navarro, Bolivia

The most special part of Dad's presentation occurred when he used a slide of a painting of the Savior to give us the best news ever.



CHRISTMAS UNDER CORRUGATED METAL

While I was stationed in Manila, Philippines, during World War II, I would often meet with a small group of other LDS servicemen to hold sacrament meeting. During one meeting I noticed a Filipino woman at the back of our bombed-out building peering through an opening that had once been a door. I wondered if our singing had attracted her. While our eyes were closed for the benediction, she quietly slipped away.

During one of her subsequent visits, we invited her to join us. Her name was Aniceta Fajardo, and she enthusiastically accepted our friendship. As she continued attending our meetings, she learned about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

With Christmas approaching, we decided to bless Aniceta and her family with some Christmas presents. We gathered canned milk, meat, and vegetables; a couple of blankets; and a medical kit, including penicillin to treat Aniceta's sick grandson.

On Christmas Eve we loaded up the gifts and went to Aniceta's home. She lived with her daughter and grandson under sheets of corrugated metal that leaned against a brick wall—a remnant of a building that had been blown apart. We wondered how they could survive with such little protection during the tropical rains so prevalent that time of year.

One of our men pulled a branch from a mango tree and stuck it in the

ground. We found bits of litter to decorate the branch.

Aniceta and her family looked on with delight and amazement. When they saw the gifts we had brought, their delight turned into tears of happiness and appreciation. They hadn't seen or eaten such food in a long time, and they wept so much that for a time they couldn't speak.

Because it was Christmas Eve, our thoughts turned to home and loved ones. I thought of the cablegram I had received just two days before, informing me that I had become a father. We shared our feelings, ending with our testimonies of the Savior and the restored gospel.

We assured this wonderful family of the Savior's love for them. They found

comfort in our words, and a feeling of peace warmed the night air. Then we bid our dear friends good-bye and wished them a merry Christmas.

Soon afterward I was transferred to a new area, and I never saw Aniceta or her family again. But years later I opened the *Church Almanac* to a section on the Philippines and read that Aniceta Pabilona Fajardo was the first Filipino to join the Church in those islands.¹ What a wonderful blessing to think of the seeds that were planted during that Christmastime in 1945. ■

Erwin E. Wirkus, Idaho, USA

NOTE

1. See "Philippines," *Deseret News* 1991–1992 *Church Almanac*, 157; recent issues of the *Church Almanac* spell Sister Fajardo's first name Aneleta.

We pulled a branch from a mango tree and stuck it in the ground. Aniceta and her family looked on with delight and amazement.



The Answer TO ALL THE Hard Questions



When faced with hard questions, only one ultimately matters.

By R. Val Johnson
Church Magazines

The questions life sends our way are not always easy to answer. Some of the personal challenges we have—a child's death, for example, the betrayal of a friend, or an unfortunate financial reversal—are often not easy to reconcile, and we need the compassionate support of those around us. Sometimes the most difficult struggle in these situations is to recognize that our Heavenly Father loves us and is not punishing us, though the reason for the trial, if there even is a reason, escapes us for now.

Some of the hardest questions come when what we believe is challenged by changing cultural fashions or by new information, sometimes misinformation, that critics of the Church confront us with. At such times, it may seem that our doctrinal or historical

foundations are not as solid as we thought. We may be tempted to question the truths we've taken for granted and the spiritual experiences that have formed our faith.

What do we do when doubt seeps into our hearts? Are there really answers to those hard questions?

Yes, there are. In fact, all the answers—all the right answers—depend on the answer to just one question: do I trust God above everyone else?

Simple but Not Easy

Is that approach too simple? too easy?

Perhaps. Truth isn't always obvious, particularly when it has to compete with alternatives presented in attractive packages. Often we understand the truth only in part, while the whole remains yet to be learned. And in the learning, we face the uncomfortable prospect of abandoning imperfect but heretofore comforting understandings. But trusting that God has all the answers, that He loves us, and that He will answer all our questions—in His way, on His timetable—can simplify our searching. It may not always be easy, but simply trusting in God's counsel can safely steer us through clouds of confusion.

During the October 2013 general conference of the Church, President

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, made this insightful observation:

"It's natural to have questions—the acorn of honest inquiry has often sprouted and matured into a great oak of understanding. There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith—even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty. Faith is to hope for things which are not seen but which are true.

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters—my dear friends—please, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith. We must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."¹

Some Helpful Principles

So how do we go about honestly doubting our doubts? How do we anchor our faith on the solid rock of revelation and not on the sandy soil of shifting human understanding? It may help to keep in mind the following principles.

PRINCIPLE 1: God Knows Infinitely More Than We Do. When faced with questions—whether



THE COURAGE TO STAND FOR PRINCIPLE

"It is impossible to stand upright when one plants his roots in the shifting sands of popular opinion and approval. . . . We will all face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us—all of us—have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Be Strong and of a Good Courage," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2014, 68–69.

FIND ANSWERS

To expand your study of difficult questions, go to lds.org/topics and history.lds.org, among other supportive online resources.

personal, social, or doctrinal—we can rely on the fact that the Creator of the universe knows far more than we do. If He has addressed a topic (and sometimes He hasn't), we can trust that His views are clearer than ours.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8–9).

PRINCIPLE 2: God Shares Some of His Knowledge. A corollary of principle 1 is that God shares with us as much of what He knows as we are ready to receive and He is ready to deliver. We just need to prepare ourselves to receive it, then seek it. The scriptures answer many questions. One of the great pleasures of this life is being taught by the Holy Ghost as He uses the scriptures to reveal "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" (2 Nephi 28:30) in response to our diligent study.

Some questions, particularly of a historical nature, have reasonable explanations, and the more information honest scholarship reveals, the clearer our views become.

We are also blessed to have living prophets and apostles to teach us under the inspiration of heaven. We



need not be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." We can trust that their collective guidance will help us "all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." (See Ephesians 4:11–15.)

PRINCIPLE 3: We Can Trust in God's Love. God loves us far more than we can imagine. We are His children, and He wants us to return to His presence as mature, glorified beings capable of becoming like Him (see Moses 1:39). All the counsel He gives us is given with the deepest of love to bless us eternally. We can trust in that love completely.

"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings" (Psalm 36:7).

PRINCIPLE 4: We Need to Seek Spiritual Affirmations. If so much of the world's wisdom seems contrary to God's, we should not be surprised. After all, by divine design, we live in a fallen world where we are cut off from the presence and mind of God. Such a condition can make understanding the things of God difficult, "for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. . . .

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:11, 14).

If we are to understand the things of God, we can't depend on human wisdom alone to do the job. We need access to the Spirit of God "that we might know the things that are

freely given to us of God. . . . which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:12–13).

When we are baptized and confirmed members of Christ's Church, we are given the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that gift, we can learn from the Spirit and receive His comforting confirmations of truth. Receiving such spiritual affirmations dispels doubt more surely than the most convincing logic, and it is available to all who seek truth through sincere prayer, diligent study, and obedience to the Lord's commandments.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

PRINCIPLE 5: We May Need to Wait upon the Lord. Sometimes we come up blank as we struggle to understand the trials and questions we

have. Despite our best efforts, understanding escapes us. The heavens seem closed. That's when our trust in God enables us to have the patience to wait upon Him. Not all questions will be answered immediately or even in this life. Not all trials will ease before body and spirit separate. But if we love God above all else, if we trust in His love for us, we will be able to endure in faith until that day dawns when the veil lifts and all becomes clear.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

"And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:5–7). ■

NOTE

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 23.





By David L. Beck
Young Men
General President

THE SAVIOR AND THE SACRAMENT

MY SACRAMENT EXPERIENCE

As long as I can remember, I was told to think about Jesus Christ during the sacrament. When I first passed the sacrament last December, a feeling of peace and holiness came over me. I felt the Spirit telling me I was helping others to come unto Christ. I am grateful Heavenly Father trusts me enough to allow me to serve Him and help others.

Jacob R., age 12, Idaho, USA

*As you partake
of the sacrament,
you renew your
covenant to
always remember
the Savior.*

What do you think about when you eat the bread and drink the water of the sacrament or when you prepare, bless, or pass the sacrament? Many of us ponder our covenants and how we are living. We think about our sins and pray for forgiveness and determine to do better.

These are important aspects of the ordinance of the sacrament. In addition, there is something else to ponder—something so profound and so specific that it is part of the sacramental prayer itself. It is remembering Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Those who eat the bread promise to “eat in remembrance of the body of [the] Son” and to “always remember him” (D&C 20:77). Similarly, those who drink the water promise to drink “in remembrance of the blood of [the] Son” and “that they do always remember him” (D&C 20:79).

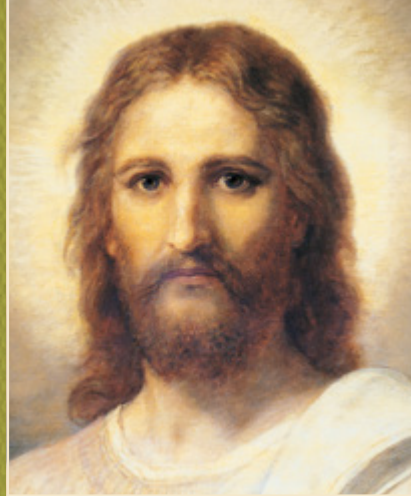
The choice to remember the Savior and His Atonement and sacrifice is fundamental to the ordinance. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “In the simple and beautiful language of the sacramental prayers . . . the principal word we hear seems to be *remember*. . . . What is stressed in both prayers is that all of this is done in remembrance of Christ. In so participating we witness that we will always remember him, that we may always have his Spirit to be with us.”¹

The Savior stressed these same points when He instituted the sacrament with His Apostles during the Passover in Jerusalem on the last night of His mortal ministry—the night He suffered for us in the Garden of Gethsemane before suffering again on the cross. For example, after giving them bread to eat, He said, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; see also Matthew 26:26–28).

During the Savior’s first day among the Nephites in the Americas, He also taught them the ordinance of the sacrament. Again, He instructed them to partake in remembrance of His body and blood and told them that as they did, “it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me” (3 Nephi 18:7). He then promised them, “If ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:7, 11).

What a marvelous blessing! In a world filled with challenges and turmoil and temptations constantly trying to lead us astray, what more important gift could we have? By having the



REMEMBERING THE SAVIOR

To help you and your family remember the Savior, consider studying the *Come, Follow Me* lesson outline “How can I help others have a meaningful experience with the sacrament?” at lds.org/go/491214. The video on that page, “Always Remember Him,” can be used as a powerful family home evening resource.

Spirit with us, we can “know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). That will give us the power and wisdom to live the way the Lord would have us live, to make correct choices, to serve faithfully, and to become like Him.

As you participate in the sacrament each week, what can you do to remember him? What can you do to *always* remember Him—throughout the week and throughout your life?

May I invite you to ponder those questions and to make a commitment to always remember the Savior. You’ll be amazed at how it will change your life. ■

NOTE

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, “This Do in Remembrance of Me,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 68.



By Joshua J. Perkey
Church Magazines



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A BRAND NEW CONVERT?

You can help new members by understanding what they are going through.

If you grow up in the Church, churchy things become pretty normal. You get used to the regularity of the meetings, the building you attend, the kind of clothes people wear at church. Things like giving talks in sacrament meeting, paying tithing and fast offerings, and fasting once a month are just a part of life. Living the Word of Wisdom, accepting callings to serve, and living the law of chastity are all part of what you learn to do.

But for converts, it can be a big adjustment trying to take it all in. Certainly, gaining a testimony of gospel truths is the first step to membership in Christ's Church. But having a testimony doesn't mean the transition to living life as a member of the Church is easy.

The Church Can Seem Very Different

Take me for example. I had LDS friends since I was 13, and I eventually joined the Church when I was 19. But despite learning a lot about Church culture over those years, I had a hard transition. To me, the Church culture and practices were so different that they seemed kind of weird.

I grew up in a church that in many ways is quite unlike the one you know or are coming to know. At church the ministers and choir wore robes similar to high school graduation robes. During worship service—their equivalent of sacrament meeting—the ministers gave sermons and did all the talking. Every Sunday we all repeated the Lord's Prayer in unison and always sang the hymn "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow." Babies were baptized by having water sprinkled on their heads, but confirmation happened at around 14 years old.



We used grape juice instead of water for the sacrament, and high school kids attended Sunday School with the adults in a class that talked about current issues in society.

Even our building was different from the LDS buildings I had visited. We had a large chapel modeled after Christian churches in Europe, with a high peaked roof and tall, stained-glass windows. There was a cross in the choir loft. A beautiful, tall bell tower stood out front. I loved ringing that bell after church services. It was heavy enough that it could lift a small child off the ground as the rope went up and down.

Our customs and social beliefs were different too. We were taught that it was OK to drink alcohol or smoke. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend as a teenager was OK. In fact, we were taught that you could even have sexual relations before marriage as long as you believed you were in love. We never talked about having a testimony. The first time I saw a fast and testimony meeting—wow! I couldn't believe how odd that seemed. No one ever stood to share their beliefs like that in my church.

Coming to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints wasn't just about learning new doctrines, such as the

**THE FIRST SIX MONTHS AFTER
MY BAPTISM WERE REALLY HARD.**

**I ALMOST DIDN'T MAKE IT.
EVERYTHING WAS
SO DIFFERENT ...**

premortal life and baptism for the dead; it was a change in culture and lifestyle and expectations. Resolving those differences was a hard road to walk.

The first six months after my baptism were really hard. I almost didn't make it. Everything was so different, especially because I was attending church without my family. I still struggled with certain doctrinal points, as well as feelings of being estranged from my past.

Fortunately, my friends in the Church were patient, kind, and constant. They took me to activities, invited me to their homes for dinner and family home evening, and prayed with me. That made a huge difference not just in my joining the Church but also in my staying active and finding strength when my testimony wavered. I owe a lot to them for helping me figure things out.

In the following stories, two young members share their own experiences of joining the Church and how they found the strength to make it. As you read their experiences, think about what you could do to help a new convert or someone returning to activity find the strength to adapt socially and culturally and to grow spiritually.

Waiting Years to Be Baptized

When I was in high school, I decided to join the Church after meeting the missionaries at English classes and studying with them. My parents reacted pretty badly when I told them I wanted to be baptized. They didn't know a whole lot about the Church, and they were afraid I would be caught up in something dangerous. They thought that the Church would get in the way of my education and that



I HAD TO **BUILD MY FAITH
AND MY TESTIMONY**
WITH PRAYER, SCRIPTURE READING,
AND THE WORDS OF
MODERN PROPHETS—
BY MYSELF.

WHAT CONVERTS FACE

Here are some of the challenges new converts face. How might your friendship help them face their challenges?

1. Struggling to understand new doctrine.
2. Choosing different media, music, movies, and books.
3. Understanding scripture language.
4. Coping with lack of acceptance from non-LDS family and friends.
5. Wearing different clothing.
6. Dedicating the time to attend church and seminary.
7. Learning new practices and customs in the worship services.
8. Having to change habits, language, and ways of thinking.
9. Adapting to LDS social culture.
10. Learning the LDS-specific meanings of terms, like *gospel*, *apostasy*, and *restoration*.

because of all the rules, I wouldn't be able to enjoy life. They wouldn't let me get baptized for two and a half years.

I was tested right from the start. In the years before I could be baptized, I prayed over and over again for strength and the necessary faith to keep believing. I couldn't attend church or associate with members or missionaries. I had to build my faith and my testimony with prayer, scripture reading, and the words of modern prophets—by myself. I missed out on a lot of interesting programs and fun activities.

When I moved to Rome for college, my bishop became a true friend who stood by me when my parents were really angry. He taught me that it was essential to love my parents regardless.

When I finally got baptized, many ward members came and supported me. I joined the choir and made a lot of friends there. Their friendship and kindness made me feel at home.

When we are true to the teachings of Jesus Christ and follow His example in loving and caring for others, recent converts and investigators will see that we don't just talk the talk, we walk the walk.

Ottavio Caruso is from Italy and is currently serving a full-time mission.

Not Fitting In

I joined the Church when I was 13 years old. I had a testimony of the gospel, yet I had a nagging feeling that I didn't quite fit in at church. Everyone else knew the songs and the scripture stories; I didn't. Everyone else had memories of Primary activities or family home evening lessons; I'd never done either of those things.

But beyond that, everyone seemed to have the same interests and

**YOU'RE NICE PEOPLE
AND I AM A NICE
PERSON. BUT WE ARE
JUST TOO
DIFFERENT.
I DON'T BELONG HERE.**

opinions—sometimes very strong opinions that were the opposite of mine—about everything from movies and politics to the interpretation of certain scriptures. I would look around at all of the nodding heads and think, “You're nice people and I am a nice person. But we are just too different. I don't belong here.”

I struggled with those feelings for several years. Then I recalled and reread the story from Luke 19 about Zacchaeus. Because he was a publican, he was unpopular and considered a sinner. But when Jesus passed through his city, Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see over the crowd. He didn't care what others thought of him. It was this act of climbing the tree—separating himself from the

crowd—that enabled him to have a very beautiful and personal experience with the Savior. As I read, I recognized that my feelings of being an outsider were not coming from Christ. Jesus was inclusive and forgiving. He actively sought those who were judged and cast aside—those who seemed different.

I can't say I've never felt out of place again. I have. But I've learned that the things that make me different—the way I look, the way others look at me, the things I'm passionate about, the way I think about the world—these are not reasons to fall away. These are the reasons the Church needs all of us, with all our different talents, strengths, and perspectives. ■

Elaine Vickers lives in Utah, USA.



Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see over the crowd as Christ passed through his city.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Things to Ponder

- What kinds of changes make it hard for some people to join the Church?
- How might your friendship help someone come back to or stay strong in the Church?

Things You Might Do

- Write down a list of challenges converts often have to overcome and set goals for how you can help them.
- Invite a recent convert or a less-active friend to help you run an activity for your class or quorum.
- Share your experiences at church, at home, or online.

“What should I do when I am mocked at school for following Church standards?”

If you are mocked for following Church standards, you can take it as an opportunity to represent Jesus Christ. Be respectful and charitable. If prompted, you might explain why you live the way you do. Consider using *For the Strength of Youth* to help you discuss your standards. Invite the Spirit into your life so He can touch the hearts of your peers. The Spirit can help you know what to say.

You can also get advice from your parents, Church leaders, or the full-time missionaries. Ask them how they have responded in similar situations.

At times you may feel tempted to argue with others about your beliefs. But remember that “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of [Christ]” (3 Nephi 11:29).

At other times, you may feel pressure to give in and stop following Church standards. Be strong. Standing firm will not only bless your life with peace, but it can bless the lives of your peers. Your example can encourage them to make righteous decisions.

Look to the example of the Savior for strength. The Savior was ridiculed for standing up for truth (see Isaiah 53). He knows exactly how you feel. He performed the Atonement for *you* and experienced the same trials you face. He is with you. Study more about His life so you can be like Him in these situations.



Hold to the Rod

When people make fun of me at my school, I think of the vision that Lehi had about

the great and spacious building: “It was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:27). I will be like Lehi. I will never let go of this iron rod that leads to eternal life.

Pierre S., age 18, Haiti



Share the Gospel

As a friend and I were completing the virtue value project for Personal Progress, we

read the Book of Mormon at school during breaks. Our teacher and our classmates began to make fun of us. At times I wanted to stop reading, but I simply could not leave my scriptures at home. We continued to read at school, and over time we weren’t made fun of anymore. One of our friends became interested in the gospel and in Personal Progress. We gave her the booklet and a triple combination, and since then we have been telling her about the gospel. Her brother also became interested in the gospel. They are both reading the Book of Mormon.

Kimberly A., age 16, Brazil



Be an Example

At my school, not a lot of the students are familiar with the gospel. I think the best thing you can do is show people how living the gospel affects you positively. By being kind and respectful no matter what they say to you, you set a wonderful example, and they will have a greater respect for you and your beliefs. Remembering your example, those same people may be open to learning more about the gospel later on!

Kelsey P., age 14, Florida, USA

Share Your Testimony

Once you know the blessings that follow from living the standards, you don't need to feel ashamed when mocked. You can teach the standards and share a testimony of living them. Your peers may learn and be filled with the Spirit since you're sharing a testimony of the gospel.

Emmanuel A., age 16, Ghana



Remember Who You Are

For school events, my classmates or even my friends tell me to wear clothes that are not appealing in God's eyes. They say, "You must look cute. You must look different." Sometimes they say that I must forget my beliefs in order to fit in with this world. But my answer is always no. I know that

being the real me is being true and different from the world. It's OK if they don't like me for being me. It is not about what others say; it's about following Heavenly Father's ways.

Jazzy C., age 19, Philippines



Be a Missionary

I have had many experiences regarding living the standards of the gospel at school. I have learned that this is an excellent moment for us to strengthen our testimonies and participate in missionary work. Whenever I have found myself in a situation like this and kept my standards high, I have felt happy with myself for acting as God would like me to act. Never leave any doubt as to who you are and what you believe.

Hiram D., age 18, Brazil



NOURISH YOUR TESTIMONY

"Have the courage to stand firm for truth and righteousness.

Because the trend in society today is away from the values and principles the Lord has given us, you will almost certainly be called upon to defend that which you believe. Unless the roots of your testimony are firmly planted, it will be difficult for you to withstand the ridicule of those who challenge your faith. . . . Your testimony, when constantly nourished, will keep you safe."

President Thomas S. Monson, "May You Have Courage," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2009, 126.

UPCOMING QUESTION

"I feel inadequate to be a Mia Maid class president. How can I be a better leader?"

Submit your answer and, if desired, a high-resolution photograph by January 15, 2015, at liahona.lds.org (click "Submit Your Work"), by email to liahona@ldschurch.org, or by mail (see address on page 3).

The following information and permission must be included in your email or letter: (1) full name, (2) birth date, (3) ward or branch, (4) stake or district, (5) your written permission, and, if you are under age 18, your parent's written permission (email is acceptable) to publish your response and photograph.

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.

NO ANGELS NEEDED

On that Christmas morning in a hospital in Guatemala, we couldn't call on angels to sing. But we could call on ourselves.

By Jeniann Jensen Nielsen

Fireworks and firecrackers, brightly colored nativity scenes, and feasts featuring stuffed tamales—that's Christmas in Guatemala. As a full-time missionary I found the traditions very different from my own traditions in the United States. I was homesick and thought my Christmas would be miserable.

My companion, Sister Anaya, said we would find joy on Christmas by serving others. She suggested that we spend the morning singing at the hospital, and we invited other missionaries to join us.

As we approached the entrance, I watched the people waiting in line to see their loved ones. Their faces were sad, their sandal-clad feet dusty, their clothes faded. We waited with them. When we were finally allowed to enter the building, we walked down narrow halls with flaking green paint and cement floors. The smells of medicines and sickness overwhelmed me.

In the dim light I could see sick patients on beds in a large room with little ventilation or privacy. They lay there, some with bandages, some with IVs, some hooked up to machines to help them breathe. Some moaned quietly. Others slept. I wondered why we had come. Most in our small group of missionaries stood in the doorway, not knowing what to do.

But not Sister Anaya. She went to each bed, greeting those who were sick, asking them how they felt, and wishing them a merry Christmas. Her boldness reminded the rest of us why we had come, and we started to sing Christmas carols, softly at first but more confidently as we continued. Some of the patients smiled, some just lay there and didn't seem to notice, and some hummed along.

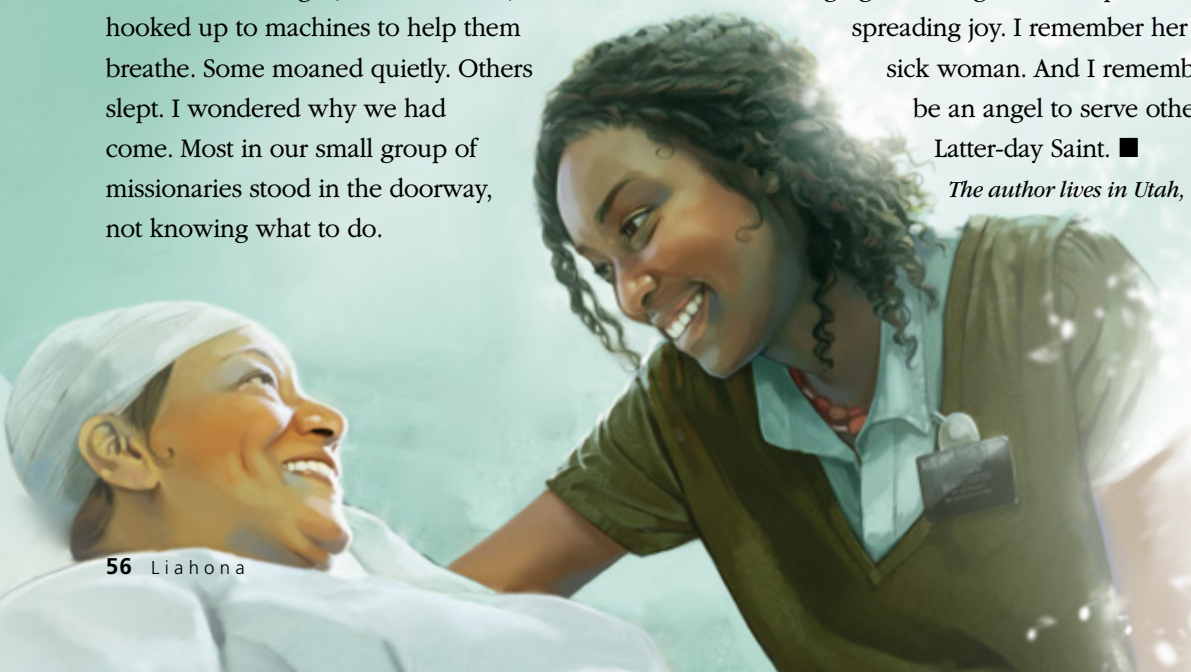
Sister Anaya, singing with a hymnbook in her hand, approached a woman who was wrapped in bandages. The woman began to cry quietly, and my companion lovingly stroked her hair. Through her tears the woman spoke, "You are angels. You are angels."

I will never forget Sister Anaya's response. "No, you are not hearing angels," she replied. "You are hearing Latter-day Saints."

When Jesus Christ was born, an angel announced His birth and a multitude of the heavenly host praised God (see Luke 2:8–14). I think of those angels every Christmas.

But I also think of Sister Anaya. I remember her encouraging us to sing at the hospital and how we found joy by spreading joy. I remember her stroking the hair of that sick woman. And I remember that I don't need to be an angel to serve others. I can serve them as a Latter-day Saint. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.





MAKE ROOM

“Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus!”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,
“Settle This in Your Hearts,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 66.



By Elder
Mervyn B. Arnold
Of the Seventy

Where Am I?

How to Discover and Develop Your Spiritual Gifts and Talents

Heavenly Father has given you spiritual gifts and talents to help you become who He would have you become.

In the scriptures we find many questions that cause us to reflect on our lives. One of the first questions asked in the Bible was directed to Adam after he partook of the forbidden fruit. I invite you to ponder how this question may apply to your life:

“Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

“And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, *Where art thou?*” (Genesis 3:8–9; emphasis added).

The Lord is all-knowing, so we can be certain that He knew where Adam and Eve were hiding. If He knew where they were, what was the Lord really asking?

This question most likely prompted Adam and Eve to think about what

was happening in their lives. We could ask ourselves similar questions. For example: Where are we on our journey along the covenant path to eternal life? What gifts and talents did our Heavenly Father give us in the pre-mortal life to help us along this path? What other gifts and talents are we to gain as we strive to become who the Lord would have us become?

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) stated, “Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal [physical] body.”¹ The *Gospel Principles* manual teaches us that “Father in Heaven knows who we are and what we did before we came here. He has chosen the time and place for each of us to be born so we can learn the lessons we personally need and *do the most good with our individual talents and personalities.*”²

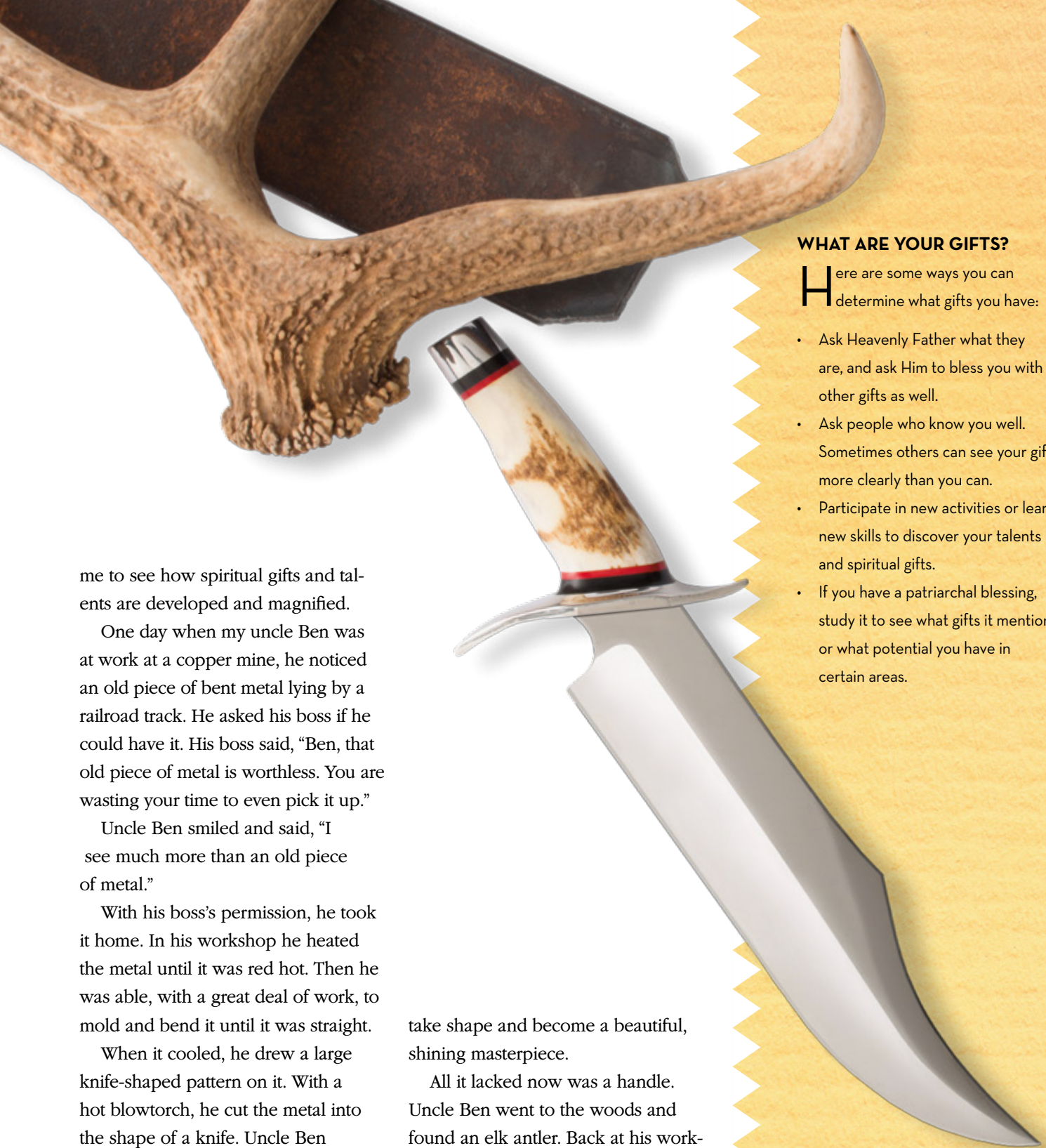
Heavenly Father placed you in the best place to use your spiritual gifts and build your talents. No matter

where you live or what life circumstances you find yourself in, you can make the choice to succeed, regardless of your challenges. Don’t ever give up. Keep going. Don’t quit. Remember, it’s what you do with what you have that makes you who you are.

Adam and Eve’s example can give us a lot of hope. After they transgressed the commandment not to partake of the forbidden fruit, they were cast out of a beautiful garden, the ground was cursed, thorns and thistles appeared, and they had to work and till the earth to provide for themselves. They did not give up. They went to work, as the Lord had commanded them (see Moses 5:1). Their son Cain made a very bad choice, but they continued to live righteously and kept teaching their children.

Uncle Ben’s Discovery

I have an uncle who was continually seeking to improve and increase the gifts and talents he had received from Heavenly Father. Let me share one story from his life that has helped



me to see how spiritual gifts and talents are developed and magnified.

One day when my uncle Ben was at work at a copper mine, he noticed an old piece of bent metal lying by a railroad track. He asked his boss if he could have it. His boss said, "Ben, that old piece of metal is worthless. You are wasting your time to even pick it up."

Uncle Ben smiled and said, "I see much more than an old piece of metal."

With his boss's permission, he took it home. In his workshop he heated the metal until it was red hot. Then he was able, with a great deal of work, to mold and bend it until it was straight.

When it cooled, he drew a large knife-shaped pattern on it. With a hot blowtorch, he cut the metal into the shape of a knife. Uncle Ben then began knocking off the rough edges, working hour after hour to cut, grind, polish, and refine that old piece of metal.

Day after day he worked on what his boss had called a worthless piece of metal. Slowly the blade began to

take shape and become a beautiful, shining masterpiece.

All it lacked now was a handle. Uncle Ben went to the woods and found an elk antler. Back at his workshop he cleaned, cut, and polished the antler. When he was done, it was smooth and beautiful. Carefully he attached the handle to the knife. What was once an old, rusty, bent piece of metal became a beautiful knife that won several awards.

WHAT ARE YOUR GIFTS?

Here are some ways you can determine what gifts you have:

- Ask Heavenly Father what they are, and ask Him to bless you with other gifts as well.
- Ask people who know you well. Sometimes others can see your gifts more clearly than you can.
- Participate in new activities or learn new skills to discover your talents and spiritual gifts.
- If you have a patriarchal blessing, study it to see what gifts it mentions or what potential you have in certain areas.



DO YOU HAVE ONE OF THESE GIFTS?

"Let me mention a few gifts that are not always evident or noteworthy but that are very important. Among these may be your gifts—gifts not so

evident but nevertheless real and valuable.

"Let us review some of these less-conspicuous gifts: the gift of asking; the gift of listening; the gift of hearing and using a still, small voice; the gift of being able to weep; the gift of avoiding contention; the gift of being agreeable; the gift of avoiding vain repetition; the gift of seeking that which is righteous; the gift of not passing judgment; the gift of looking to God for guidance; the gift of being a disciple; the gift of caring for others; the gift of being able to ponder; the gift of offering prayer; the gift of bearing a mighty testimony; and the gift of receiving the Holy Ghost."

Elder Marvin J. Ashton (1915-94) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "There Are Many Gifts," *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 20.

You and I are like that old piece of metal. We also need molding, refining, and polishing to reach our full potential. Part of that process is discovering, strengthening, and multiplying our talents and gifts.

Uncle Ben understood that much of our potential is not visible on the surface and must be discovered and developed. The Lord teaches us to "seek ye earnestly the best gifts" (D&C 46:8) and "that every man may improve upon his talent, that every man may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold" (D&C 82:18). And why must we do this? We can use our talents and gifts to serve others, as the next verse explains: "Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all



things with an eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 82:19). Giving service molds us into living a more Christlike life.

Finding Our Talents

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught how trials can shape us: “Just when all seems to be going right, challenges often come in multiple doses applied simultaneously. When those trials are not consequences of your disobedience, they are evidence that the Lord feels you are prepared to grow more (see Proverbs 3:11–12). He therefore gives you experiences that stimulate growth, *understanding*, and *compassion* [two very important gifts] which *polish you for your everlasting benefit*. To get you from where you are to where He wants you to be requires a lot of stretching, and that generally entails discomfort and pain.”³

Improving Our Talents

Increasing our talents requires work. Not long ago, Elder Scott said to my wife, “Devonna, you should paint.”

Sister Arnold had never painted in her life. She had to work at it. She took some lessons, painted day after day, and after a great deal of time and effort learned to paint beautifully. I have one of her gorgeous paintings of a river scene hanging on my office wall.

Yes, obtaining talents requires work, but how great shall be our joy

when we hear the Lord tell us, “Well done. Thy gifts and talents shall be multiplied because of thy diligence” (see Matthew 25:14–30).

Your Spiritual Gifts

My wife discovered a talent for painting. What are your gifts and talents? I know our Heavenly Father has given you some. How do I know? “There are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God” (D&C 46:11). God’s gifts and powers are available to all of us. It is our right and responsibility to accept our spiritual gifts, multiply our talents, and share them.

The scriptures list a few gifts we can seek (see, for example, D&C 46), but there are actually hundreds of gifts and talents. Search the Book of Mormon, particularly 3 Nephi 11–26, and you will discover many gifts and talents that are available to each of us. For example, in 3 Nephi 11 we read about the people hearing Heavenly Father’s voice but not understanding it at first:

“The third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof

“And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man [Jesus Christ] descending out of heaven” (verses 5, 8).

To hear clearly and to see clearly are just two examples of spiritual gifts and talents that you can obtain and

multiply if you are willing to *seek after and work for* them.

I invite each of us to do as Uncle Ben did: see the best in everything as we seek spiritual gifts and talents and use them to bless those around us. I know our Heavenly Father has many gifts and talents that He wishes to bestow upon us, but they “are made conditional on our asking for them. Blessings require some work or effort on our part” (Bible Dictionary, “Prayer”). May we discover, work for, and multiply the God-given gifts and talents we were born with, and may we acquire other gifts is my humble prayer. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 335.
2. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 10; emphasis added.
3. Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 16–17; emphasis added.



**By Elder
Dallin H. Oaks**
Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE SECOND COMING

This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). Are we preparing?

What if the day of His coming were tomorrow? If we knew that we would meet the Lord tomorrow—through our premature death or through His unexpected coming—what would we do today? What confessions would we make? What practices would we discontinue? What accounts would we settle? What forgivenesses would we extend? What testimonies would we bear?

If we would do those things then, why not now? Why not seek peace while peace can be obtained?

Evil that used to be localized and covered like a boil is now legalized

and paraded like a banner. The most fundamental roots and bulwarks (protective walls) of civilization are questioned or attacked. Nations disavow their religious heritage. Marriage and family responsibilities are discarded as impediments to personal indulgence. The movies and magazines and television that shape our attitudes are filled with stories or images that portray the children of God as predatory beasts or, at best, as trivial creations pursuing little more than personal pleasure. And too many of us accept this as entertainment.

The good, the true, and the beautiful are being replaced by the no-good, the “whatever,” and the valueless fodder of personal whim. Not surprisingly, many are caught up in pornography, pagan piercing of body parts, self-serving pleasure pursuits, dishonest behavior, revealing attire, foul language, and degrading sexual indulgence.

All of this is grievous in the sight of our Heavenly Father, who loves all of His children and forbids every practice that keeps any from returning to His presence.

What is the state of our personal preparation for eternal life? The people of God have always been people of covenant, including the sacred promises we made in the waters of baptism, in receiving the holy priesthood, and in the temples of God. Are we promisers who do not fulfill and believers who do not perform?

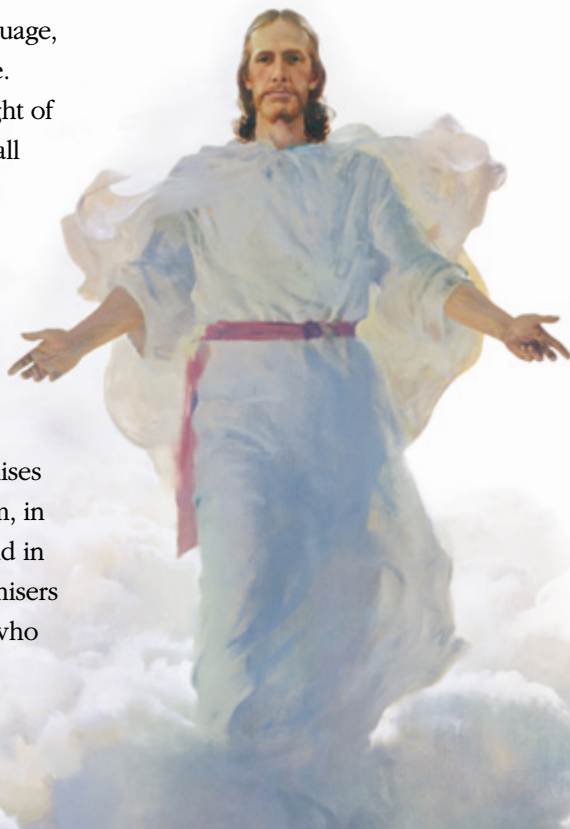
Are we following the Lord’s command, “Stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly”? (D&C 87:8).

We are surrounded by challenges on all sides (see 2 Corinthians 4:8–9). But with faith in God, we trust the blessings He has promised those who keep His commandments. We have faith in the future, and we are preparing for that future.

“Wherefore,” the Savior tells us, “be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom—

“For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly” (D&C 33:17–18). ■

From an April 2004 general conference address.



DETAIL FROM THE SECOND COMING. BY HARRY ANDERSON

MY CHRISTMAS GIFT

What would I give the Savior this year?

By Dustin Ward

My usual spot in ninth-grade seminary was in the back row, where I could talk and joke around with my friend.

I had only signed up for seminary because there was an open space in my schedule. Seminary was offered during the school day where I lived, and a school counselor suggested I take it since I'm a Latter-day Saint. I knew the teacher's name, but that was about all I had learned from class.

Then my friend was gone one day, so I ran into a problem: I had no one to joke with. How would I pass the time? In a panic, I went with the only other option—I listened. It was the first time I paid any attention to the teacher.

As I look back, I don't remember a word he said that day, but I do remember being captivated. My friend was back the next day, but instead of joking around, I listened and was again pulled in.

I eventually moved from the back of the room and sat on the front row, where I could pay better attention. Not a class went by in which I didn't feel a strong interest in the lesson or in the students who were sharing their testimonies.

I enjoyed seminary so much that I signed up for it again the next year. I had been baptized at eight years old but had never really gone to church. But something changed one day in December right before the Christmas break. The teacher invited us to come to the front of the room and say what gift we would give Christ that year.

"No one will do this," I thought. But, to my surprise, one by one the students walked to

the front of the class. Some shed tears, others shared goals they had set, and some told stories. I couldn't believe it.

Time was ticking. I was the only one who hadn't gone. Before I knew it, I was on my feet. I had no idea what I was going to say. Then, with a shaky voice, I said, "This year for Christ's birthday, I'm going to start going to church."

From that day forward, I started going to church as my gift to the Savior. The ironic part was that I was the one who received the gift. Going back to church changed my life, and it all started the day I stopped talking long enough to listen and allow the Spirit to touch my heart.

The Spirit still speaks to me. All I have to do is stop to listen—and then follow. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

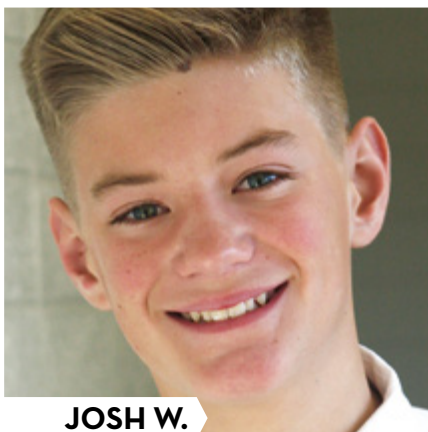


READY TO MOVE

FORWARD



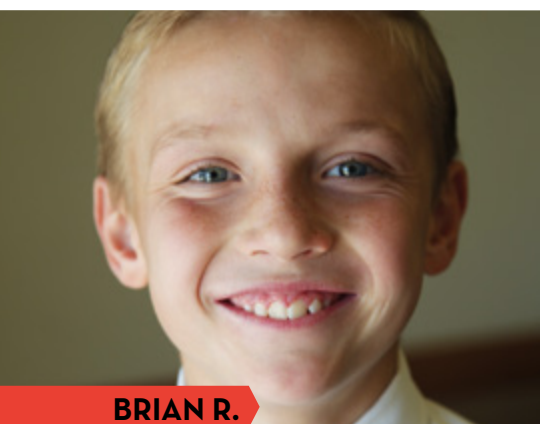
NODOKA T.



JOSH W.



GRACE S.



BRIAN R.



AÏOLAH AND EVALINE V.



JOHN C.

Advancing from Primary into Young Men or Young Women? Check out these thoughts from seven 12-year-olds who are making that transition.

By Richard M. Romney, Church Magazines
and Mickey Shimomiya, Tokyo, Japan

You are almost 12. Life is full of changes. At church, you're advancing from Primary into Young Men or Young Women. That means setting goals, giving service, preparing for the temple, learning more about the gospel. But don't be nervous! Others going through the same thing say it's great.

Two Together

Äiolah V. of France is a 12-year-old Beehive. So is her sister Evaline, who turns 13 in a month. “I’m glad my sister is here to help me move from Primary into Young Women,” Äiolah says.

One of their favorite things is Personal Progress, but when they read about one goal, they laughed. “Learn to play a musical instrument,” it said.

“We’ve been playing for years,” Evaline says. But then they talked with their mother. She helped them to see that they could use music to fulfill another goal: service.

Äiolah and Evaline are now preparing to perform in sacrament meetings and talent nights, give concerts for children and seniors, and accompany missionaries as they sing.

“Personal Progress is nice,” Evaline says. “It lets you do what you love and do new things too.”



Ask Questions

Twelve-year-old Brian R. of Arizona, USA, was preparing to pass the sacrament for the first time. He didn’t want to make a mistake, so he asked the other Aaronic Priesthood holders in his ward to explain things to him.

“They were great,” he says. “They told me where to stand, where to go, and how to pass the trays.”

But even more important, they reminded him to be reverent. “We need to remember the Savior as we pass the sacrament,” Brian says. “If we are reverent, it helps others to remember Him too.”

Brian learned that others are happy to help him to understand his duties and to learn to do them well. “Just ask,” he says. “Moving from Primary into Young Men is easier than you think.”



Make New Friends

“I was nervous when the counselor asked me to go to stake Young Women camp for the first time,” says Nodoka T. of Okinawa, Japan. “I decided to pray. After my prayer I felt comfortable, so I decided to go.”

“From the very first day, I was able to make new friends. The young women were so nice and kind to me; my fear soon disappeared. And I learned to purify water, tie knots, make bandages, perform rescue breathing, and find edible plants!”

Feel Welcome

“My first day in Young Women was my birthday,” says Grace S. of Arizona, USA. “They made a fuss about it, but then they kept being kind. They made me feel welcome.”

Her adviser also welcomed her. “She tells us about things she did when she was in Young Women,” Grace says. “And she goes through the Personal Progress booklet with each of us, to make sure we understand.”

EXPLORE TO LEARN MORE

Find out what's in store for you in *Young Men* or *Young Women*. Go to youth.lds.org.

Learn, Teach, and Share

As a new deacon, Josh W. of Utah, USA, was asked to teach a lesson about being a disciple of Christ. “I found scriptures about when Peter and others were fishing. They tried one side of the boat and didn’t catch anything,” Josh says. “Then the Savior told them to fish on the other side, and they caught lots of fish (see Luke 5:5–11 and John 21:6–11). So in my lesson, we read that. Then we talked about how it’s like that for us. When we go on our own, we can have trouble. But when we listen to the Lord, He helps us.”

Josh says that learning, teaching, and sharing are important in Young Men. “In Primary we learned a lot and had lots of activities,” he says. “Now

we’re learning a lot *and* sharing. That means *doing* a lot with what we learn.” For example, after a priesthood lesson, Josh visited a friend who hadn’t been to church for a long time. “His parents work on Sundays, so they don’t come. But I told him he could come with me.”

Josh is learning the purpose of Young Men and Young Women. “It’s to show us how to become more like the Savior,” he says. He knows that the call to “come unto Christ” means moving along a path that started with baptism and confirmation, continues toward the temple, and leads to eternal life.

“I’m ready to move forward,” he says. ■



WORKING TOGETHER ON DUTY TO GOD

Twelve-year-old John C. and his father often work on projects together. For example, they sewed patches on blankets they will use when they go camping. The patches are from various camps and activities they have attended in British Columbia, Canada, where they live.

“Dad’s a great help,” John says. “I can’t imagine doing Church projects without him.”

When John turned 12, they reviewed the Duty to God booklet together. Soon they came to the “Understand Doctrine” items in the Deacon section. “Dad explained to me about priesthood keys and authority,” John says. And that helped John fulfill one of the requirements.

“When you’re doing Duty to God,” John says, “get your father involved. My dad has already helped me a lot.”



SPECIAL WITNESS

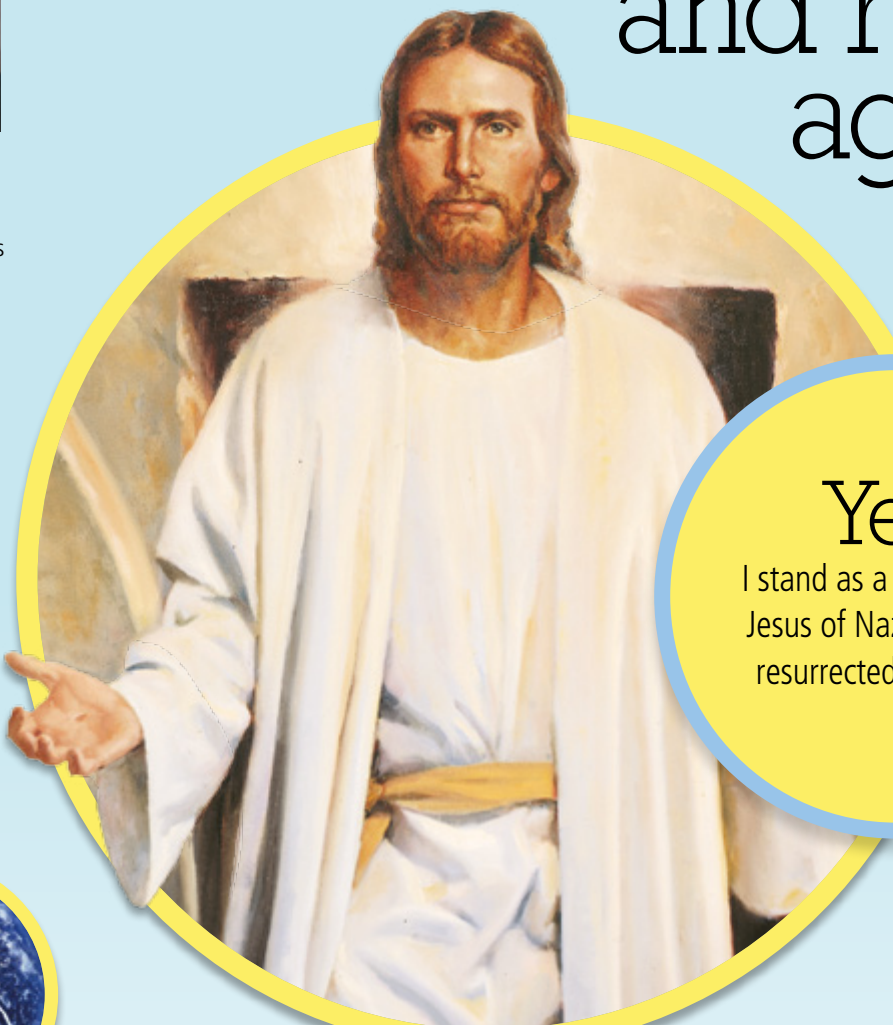


By Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are special witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Did Jesus really die and rise again?

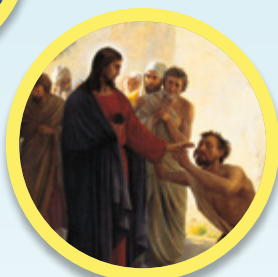


Yes.

I stand as a witness that Jesus of Nazareth is the resurrected Redeemer.



He was the Creator of the earth.



His miracles were real.



He will come again.



His grace is real, allowing all people to repent and become clean.



There is a resurrection for all.

From "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Ensign or Liahona, May 2014, 111–14.

We Remember and Worship Our Savior, Jesus Christ

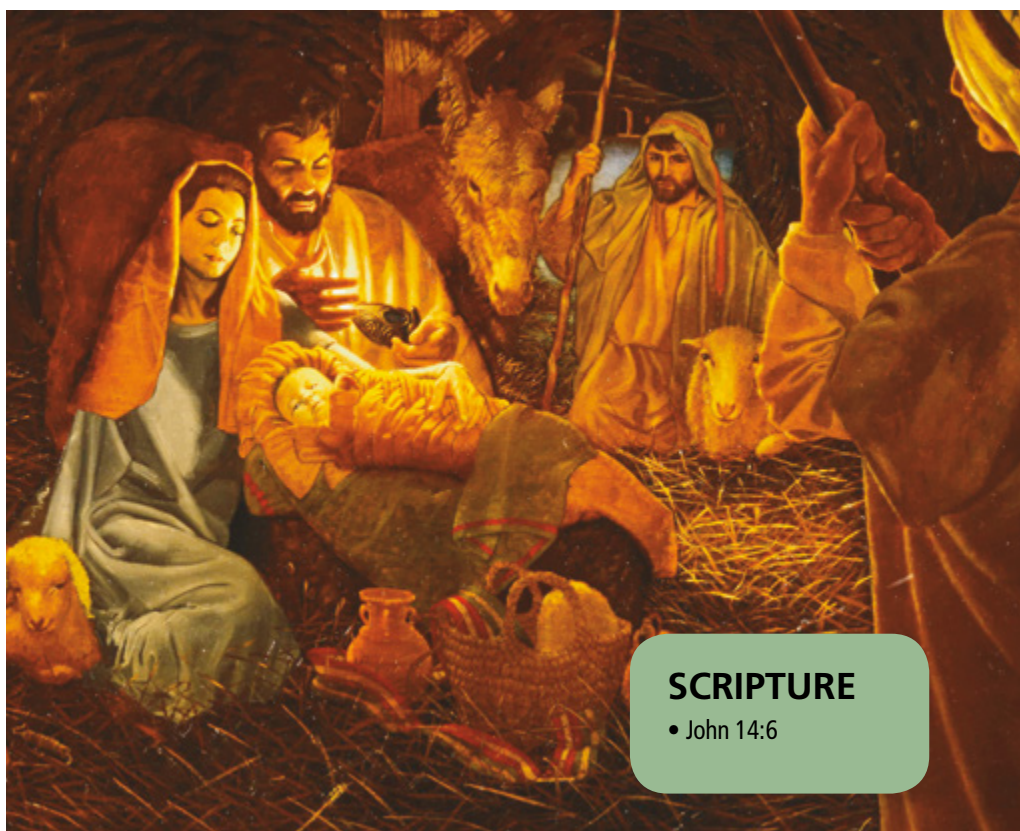
By Erin Sanderson and
Jean Bingham

Long ago Heavenly Father told His prophets about a wonderful gift that He was going to send to the whole world. That gift was His own Son, Jesus Christ, who would come to earth to be our Savior. Jesus would show us the way to live so we could return to Heavenly Father. The prophets looked forward with great joy to the time when Jesus would be born.

When angels told the shepherds near Bethlehem that the special baby who was the Son of God had been born, they felt great joy. They hurried to see and worship Him.

In the Americas, the Nephites knew He was born when the sky stayed light all night even though the sun went down. They too felt great joy and thanked Heavenly Father for the gift of His Son.

In our day we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmastime. We show our joy



SCRIPTURE

• John 14:6

and gratitude for the gift of our Savior by following His example of giving love to others in as many ways as we can. ■

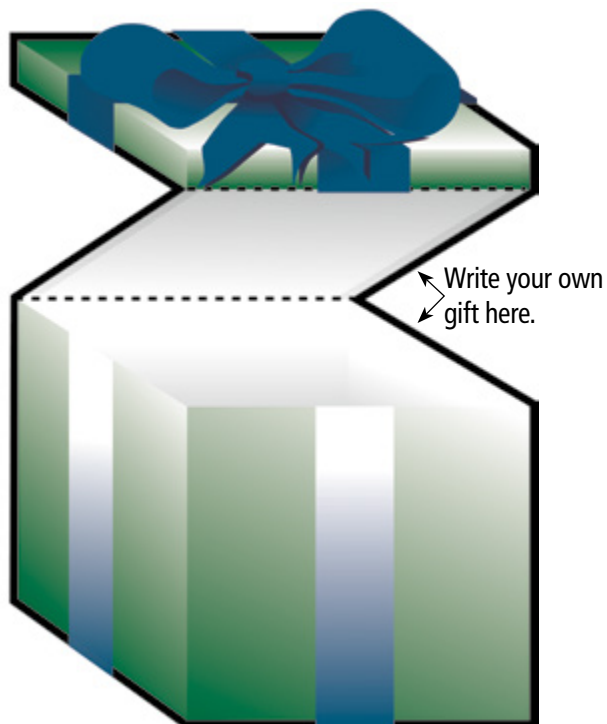
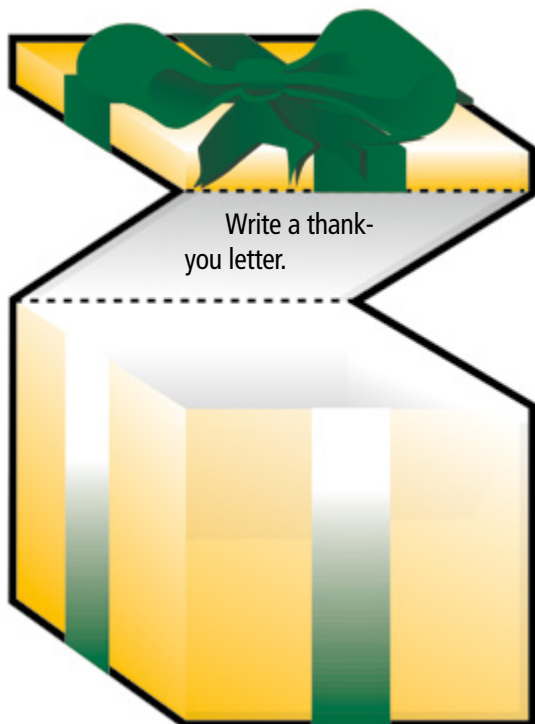
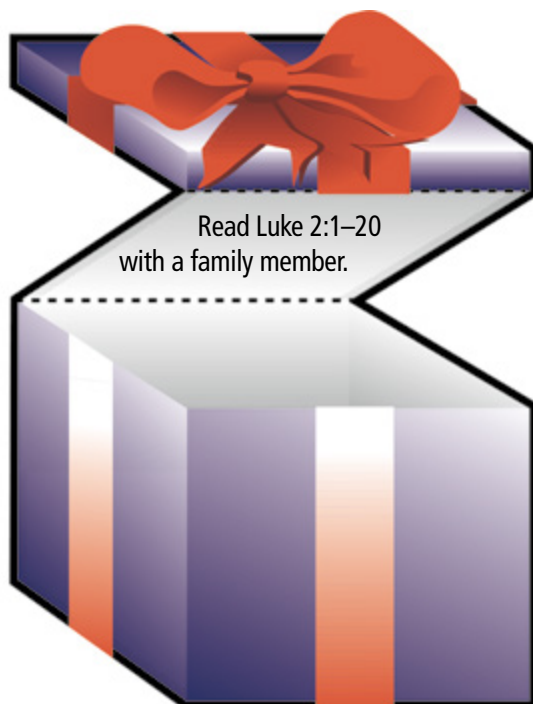
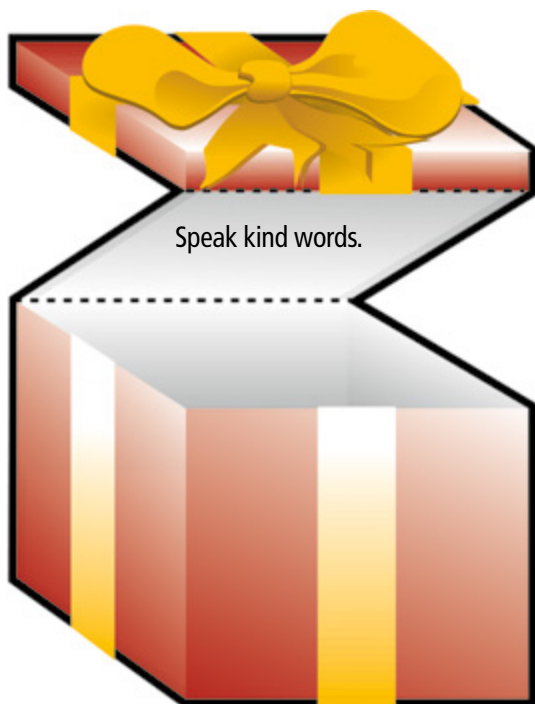
The authors live in Utah, USA.

IDEAS FOR FAMILY TALK

Talk about the many ways Jesus Christ showed love. As a family choose some ways to show love to others during December as a way to remember and follow Jesus Christ's example.

GIFTS OF LOVE

Cut out the gift boxes along the solid lines. Write your own gift activity on the blank one. Fold on the broken lines; then tape the lids down. Punch a hole at the top of each gift and attach string. Hang the gifts where you can see them. Every few days, open a "gift" and do the activity inside. Remember, you can give these gifts throughout the year!

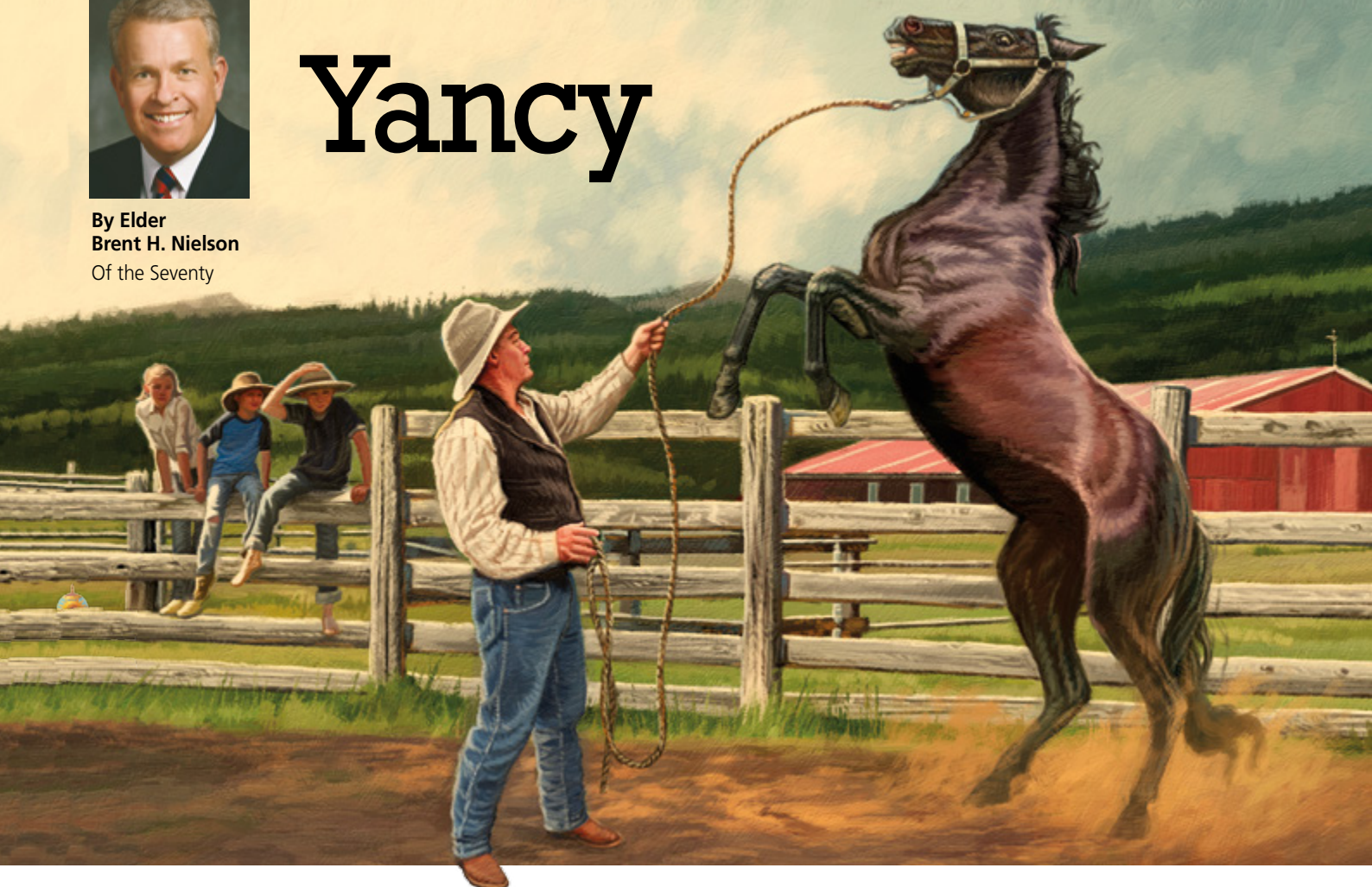


You can print more copies of this activity at liahona.lds.org.



By Elder
Brent H. Nielson
Of the Seventy

Yancy



“And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle” (Alma 7:23).

My siblings and I always wanted a horse. When I was about 9 or 10 years old, my dad bought a beautiful black mare. We named her Yancy. We were so excited to have this horse, but she hadn't been trained to be ridden. We were too young to do all the hard work it takes to train a horse, so my dad asked a friend who knew a lot about horses to help train Yancy.

We often went to the pasture to see Yancy. We couldn't wait for the day we could ride her. But no matter how hard anyone tried, no one could train Yancy. She was too stubborn. We were never able to ride her.

One day my dad's friend tried to ride her in a parade. As Yancy and her rider were going down the road, Yancy bucked the rider off and started to run through the city. Yancy ran so wildly that she cut her leg on a fire hydrant. I chased after Yancy and found her lying in the street in pain.

I was sad. We loved Yancy. If she had been obedient to the trainer, she could have become a happy horse with a wonderful life. But Yancy wouldn't listen to and follow her master. Instead she was now injured and lying in the middle of the street.

Yancy's story taught me of the blessings that come when we follow the Master, our Savior Jesus Christ. When we are kind and gentle and humble, we can be happy as we let the Savior lead us. ■

OUR PAGE

Last year my family and I went with our ward to the temple in Switzerland for four days. On Saturday morning, before we returned to Italy, a rainbow came out.

Saria C., age 10, Italy



We made family trees for a Primary activity.

Las Heras Ward,
Argentina



This is my first Book of Mormon. Now that I can read some words, I can read the scriptures.

Anna L., age 5,
Brazil



Last year we had our first Primary sacrament meeting presentation ever. The power was out the week before during our practice, but we sang and spoke our parts anyway.

Vientiane Branch, Laos



I'm Minna from Sweden

Hallå,
Vänner!*

* "Hello, friends!" in Swedish

From an interview by
Amie Jane Leavitt

How would you like to live in a school-house? Minna and her family live in the countryside of southern Sweden. Their home used to be a schoolhouse many years ago. She says the best part is that the house has a room big enough for lots of people. In December, Minna's family invites neighbors, friends, and family over for a special "sing-in." About 80 people come to sing Christmas carols together. Then they enjoy treats before everyone goes back out into the cold Scandinavian winter weather. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

*This is a big
zucchini squash
that I picked in
our garden.*





I love to jump on the trampoline. I also enjoy playing the piano and the flute.

At my school I am the only member of the Church, so I try to share the gospel with my friends. I often bring some of my friends from school to my Primary activity days. That means I am being a missionary right now, just like my sisters.

I am 10 years old and the youngest of 9 children in my family. Two of my sisters are serving missions—one in France and the other at Temple Square in Utah.



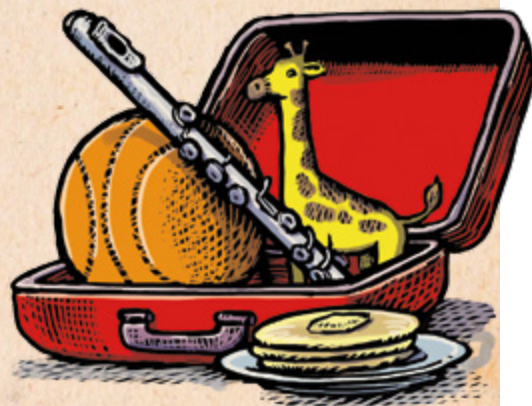
One of my favorite things to do with my family is drive north to Sweden's capital of Stockholm. I love visiting my grandparents and other relatives who live there.

My family loves swimming together. In the summer, we go to a lake near our house. In the winter, we go to an indoor facility that has many pools and waterslides.



I LOVE TO SEE THE TEMPLE

The Stockholm Sweden Temple is near my grandparents' home. This temple has a special place in my heart. One time my dad and I walked around the grounds. We talked about the temple and how I would get to go inside one day.



READY TO GO!

Minna's bag is packed with some of her favorite things. Which of these things would you pack in your bag?

You can put on this play with your family, friends, or Primary class. Read Luke 2:1–16 to help you prepare.

The First Christmas

By Jenn Wilks

CHARACTERS:

Mary
Joseph
Innkeeper
Shepherd 1
Shepherd 2
Angel

COSTUMES:

Make the costumes simple: a robe for Joseph, a scarf for Mary, and staffs for the shepherds.

PROPS:

a blanket draped across two chairs for the stable
small pillows to represent sheep
a doll or bundled-up blanket to represent the baby Jesus



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIE YOUNG

Song: “When Joseph Went to Bethlehem,” first verse
(*Children’s Songbook*, 38).

Mary: I hope we can find a place to stay soon. We have been traveling for so long.

Joseph: There is an inn up ahead. Wait here and rest while I find out if there is room for us.

[Joseph helps Mary sit down and then knocks at the “door.” Innkeeper answers.]

Innkeeper: What do you want?

Joseph: I’m looking for a place to stay. My wife and I have come a long way, and we need a place to sleep.

Innkeeper: I’m sorry, but the inn is full.

Joseph: Please, can’t you do something to help us? My wife is going to have a baby soon.

Innkeeper: I guess you could sleep in the stable. It’s all I have.

Joseph: Thank you. That is very kind.

[Joseph goes to Mary and helps her up.]

Joseph: There isn’t room in the inn, but the innkeeper said we can sleep in the stable.

Mary: Oh, I’m so glad we found a place for the night.

[They walk to the stable. Mary and Joseph sit down, and the scene ends.]

Song: “When Joseph Went to Bethlehem,” second and third verses
(*Children’s Songbook*, 38).

[Shepherds are watching their sheep. The angel comes, and the shepherds fall to their knees.]

Shepherd 1: Who are you?

Shepherd 2: Please don’t hurt us.

Angel: Do not be afraid. I bring joyful news! Tonight the Son of God was born in Bethlehem. You will find the baby lying in a manger.

Shepherd 1: Let us go now and see this child.

Angel: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Song: “Stars Were Gleaming”
(*Children’s Songbook*, 37).

[Shepherds go to the inn and knock at the “door.” Innkeeper answers.]

Shepherd 2: We’ve come to see the Christ child.

Shepherd 1: An angel told us He would be lying in a manger.

Shepherd 2: Do you know where He is?

Innkeeper: A child was born in my stable tonight. I’ll show you the way.

[Shepherds follow the innkeeper to the stable, where Joseph and Mary are seated next to a manger with the baby Jesus inside.]

Shepherd 1: It’s true! There really is a baby lying in a manger, just like the angels said there would be.

Shepherd 2: This really is the Savior, Christ the Lord.

[Shepherds and innkeeper kneel around the manger.]

Song: “Silent Night” (*Hymns*, no. 204). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



IDEA:

Have the audience sing the songs with the characters.



IDEA:

Put a big paper star on a stick and hold it over the stable.

Look Inside!



By Sophia C., age 9, Brazil

Before Christmas my parents bought a box full of copies of the Book of Mormon to give to people. That was when I had the idea to take some to school and give them as presents to three of my teachers.

When I got to the music classroom, I saw my music teacher and thought, “Go ahead, Sophia. Give one to her!” I walked slowly up to my teacher. But I didn’t have the courage to give her the book.

I went to a corner of the room and prayed very quietly. “Heavenly Father, I ask Thee to help me give this book to my teacher.” When I finished my prayer, I felt very strongly that I should give the book to her. Suddenly I had courage.

I went up to her. She looked at me, and I gave her the Book of Mormon and said, “Teacher, I love you from the bottom of my heart, and I want to give you this Book of Mormon!”

She took it and looked at the cover. “Look inside!” I said. She saw that I had written a few words.

She hugged me and said, “Oh, Sophia, thank you for giving this to me!”

After I sat down, she said to the class, “Look what Sophia gave me. I am going to read it during the holidays!”

When I got home, I ran to my mother and said, “Guess what! I gave my teacher a Book of Mormon.”

She smiled and said, “That’s wonderful! You’re a great example to me, Sophia.”

We decided to pray to thank Heavenly Father for giving me the courage to give my teacher the Book of Mormon. ■

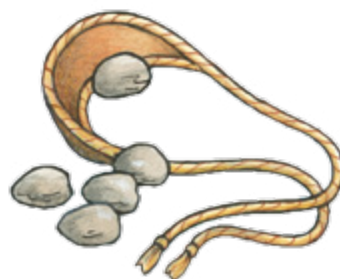
David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17

Glue this page to heavy paper or cardboard. Then cut out the figures and attach them to craft sticks or paper bags. You can use them to help act out your favorite Old Testament stories. ■



Goliath



David



David

A Bit of Christmas

*All of the presents were wrapped and under the tree.
Or were they?*

By Kate Strongin

Based on a true story

*"Have a very merry Christmas!
Scatter gladness ev'rywhere!"
(Children's Songbook, 51).*

Christmas was almost here. Amalie was excited. Soon she could unwrap the presents under the tree!

At family home evening it was Mom's turn to give the lesson.

"Why do we give presents at

Christmas?" Mom asked.

"Because it's Jesus's birthday!" Amalie said.

"Then shouldn't we give a present to Him?" Mom said.

Dad helped Amalie's brother Noah read a scripture. It said that when we serve other people, we are serving God (see Mosiah 2:17).

"Is serving others giving a gift to Jesus?" Mom said.

Noah nodded.

"What else?"

"Keeping the commandments," Amalie said.

"Being nice," Noah said.

"Great ideas!" Mom said.

"Now let's play a game. I'll say a gift someone gave to Jesus. Tell me if you know who it was. Here we go. This person gave out Christmas cards at the care center."

Noah raised his hand.

"Amalie did that!"



Every Day

"This person went home teaching."

"That's Daddy," Amalie said.

Soon they had named lots of gifts they had already given to the Savior.

"We can give gifts every day," Mom said.

The next morning it was time to clean the house. "Oh no," Amalie groaned. But then she remembered. Serving others is a gift! If she helped Mom,

it was the same as helping Jesus. She found a cloth and wiped the counters until they shone.

The next day Amalie earned some money.

"Your tithing is eight cents," Mom said.

Amalie remembered again. Tithing is a commandment, so paying it is a gift. She put eight cents in her tithing jar.

Later that week Amalie helped pick up pillows. Her baby brother had thrown them off the couch. "Another present for Jesus," she said.

On Christmas Eve, Mom and Dad told Amalie they were proud of her. "You've been giving gifts to Jesus all week long," Dad said. "That's like having a little bit of Christmas every day." ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.





By Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939)
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

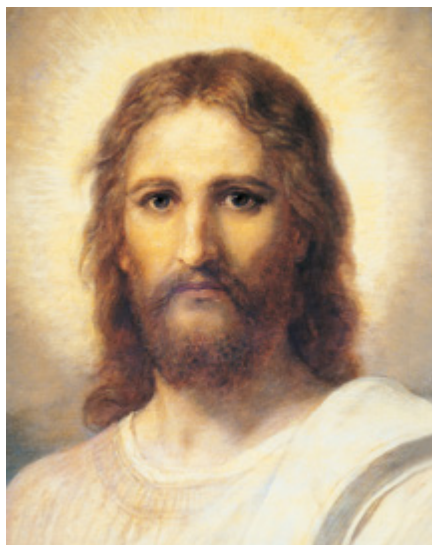
I KNOW THAT HE LIVES

I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt!

I love to contemplate what it cost our Father in Heaven to give us the gift of His Beloved Son, that worthy Son of our Father, who so loved the world that He laid His life down to redeem the world, to save us and to feed us spiritually while we walk in this life, and prepare us to go and dwell with Him in the eternal worlds. . . .

I recall an experience which I had . . . , bearing witness to my soul of the reality of [the Savior's] death, of His Crucifixion, and His Resurrection, that I shall never forget. . . .

. . . I found myself one evening in the dreams of the night in that sacred building, the temple. After a season of prayer and rejoicing I was informed that I should have the privilege of entering into one of those rooms, to meet a glorious personage, and, as I entered the door, I saw, seated on



a raised platform, the most glorious being my eyes have ever beheld or that I ever conceived existed in all the eternal worlds.

As I approached to be introduced, He arose and stepped towards me with extended arms, and He smiled as He softly spoke my name. If I shall live to be a million years old, I shall never forget that smile. He took me into His arms and kissed me, pressed me to His bosom, and blessed me, until the marrow of my bones seemed to melt! When He had finished, I fell at His feet, and, as I bathed them with

my tears and kisses, I saw the prints of the nails in the feet of the Redeemer of the world. The feeling that I had in the presence of Him who hath all things in His hands, to have His love, His affection, and His blessing was such that if I can receive that of which I had but a foretaste, I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt!

. . . I see Jesus not now upon the cross. I do not see His brow pierced with thorns nor His hands torn with the nails, but I see Him smiling, with extended arms, saying to us all: "Come unto me!" ■

Capitalization has been standardized.

From Bryant S. Hinckley, Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard (1949), 147–57, as reprinted in "Classic Discourses from the General Authorities: The Sacramental Covenant," New Era, Jan. 1976, 7–11.

INSIGHTS



In what ways is Jesus Christ the Light of the World?

“[Jesus Christ] is the Light of Bethlehem, born of Mary, His mortal mother, and His Father, Almighty God. . . . He is the Light of the Atonement fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Golgotha, who took upon Himself the sins of the world, that all mankind may obtain eternal salvation. He is the Light of the empty tomb, the resurrected Lord with a glorified body of flesh and bone, who broke the bands of death and gained an everlasting victory over the grave. . . . He is *my* Light, *my* Redeemer, *my* Savior—and yours.”

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Out of Darkness into His Marvelous Light,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 71, 72; *Liahona*, July 2002, 79, 80.

Also in This Issue

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

The Answer TO ALL THE HARD QUESTIONS

President Uchtdorf has counseled us to doubt our doubts before doubting our faith. So how can you doubt your doubts and go forward in faith?



p. 44

FOR YOUTH

THE SAVIOR AND THE SACRAMENT

What should you really be thinking about while preparing, blessing, passing, or partaking of the sacrament?



p. 48

FOR CHILDREN

The First Christmas

Make the Christmas story come to life by acting out this nativity play!



p. 74