

Liahona

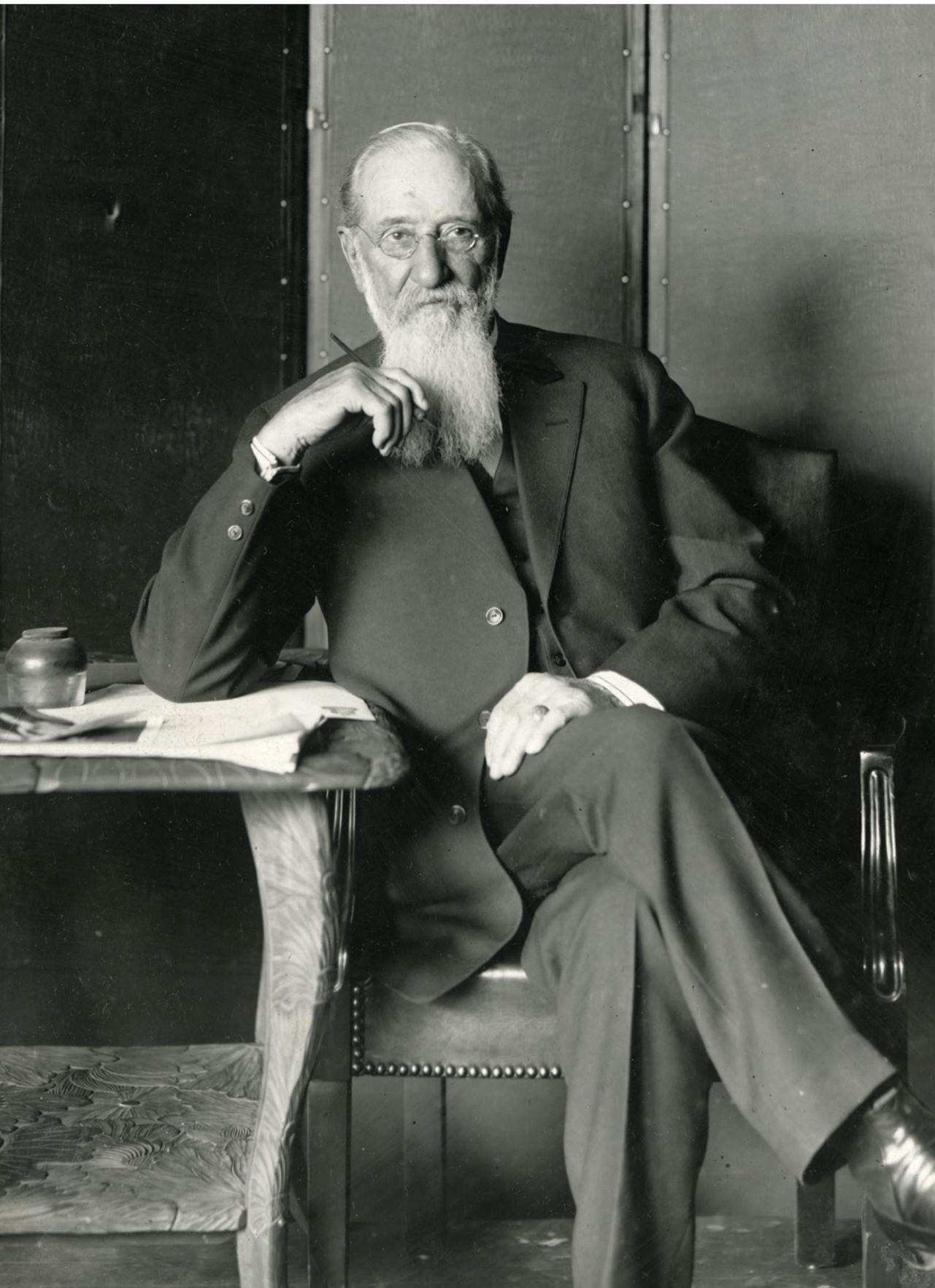


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Joseph F. Smith, who served as President of the Church from 1901 to 1918, is shown here a year before he passed away at age 80. His father, Hyrum Smith, was martyred with Joseph Smith in 1844. At age 27, Joseph F. Smith was ordained an Apostle in 1866 by President Brigham Young, and he served as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church. Having served as a General Authority for 52 years, his numerous teachings were published under the title Gospel Doctrine. He also received the revelation now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 138.

Photograph courtesy of Church History Library



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Invitation to Artists Worldwide

"I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings" (Psalm 77:11-12).



You are invited to create new works of art for the 11th International Art Competition, sponsored by the Church History Museum in Salt Lake City, Utah.

- Theme: "Meditations on Belief," inspired by Psalm 77:11–12. All artistic media, styles, and cultural approaches are welcome.
- Submission dates: February 1 to June 1, 2018.
- Ages: Participants must be age 18 or older.
- Awards: Chosen by a jury, awards will be announced in October 2018. Selected entries will be displayed at the Church History Museum and online.

Visit lds.org/artcompetition for detailed rules, eligibility requirements, and online registration.

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**By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf**
Second Counselor in
the First Presidency

SEEKING CHRIST AT CHRISTMAS

To all who wish to understand who we are as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I would like to offer a starting point defined by these three words: We seek Christ.

We seek to learn of Him. To follow Him. To become more like Him.

Every day throughout the year, we seek Him. But especially at this time of the year—Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of our beloved Savior—our hearts are ever more inclined to Him.

As part of our preparations for celebrating Christmas, let us consider how those who lived two millennia ago were ready to welcome the arrival of the Savior.

The Shepherds

We don't know much about the shepherds, only that they were "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."¹ The shepherds were more than likely quite ordinary people, like many commendable souls who go about their days earning a living.

They could represent people who, at one time, may not have been actively seeking the Christ, but their hearts changed when the heavens opened and Christ was proclaimed to them.

These are they who, after hearing the voice of heavenly messengers, immediately went to Bethlehem wanting to see.²

The Wise Men

The Wise Men were academics who had been studying the advent of the Messiah, the Son of God. Through their learning, they identified the signs that pointed to His birth. When they identified them, they left their homes and traveled to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"³

Their knowledge of the Christ did not remain solely academic. Once they saw the signs of His birth, they acted. They set out to find the Christ.

The Wise Men could represent those who seek the Christ through learning and academic study. Their devotion to truth eventually leads them to find the Christ and worship Him as the King of kings, the Savior of mankind.⁴

Simeon and Anna

Simeon and Anna could represent those who seek Christ through the Spirit. These marvelous souls were devoutly religious and, through fasting and prayer and by leading lives of devotion and obedience, waited eagerly to see the day of the coming of the Son of God.

Through fidelity, humility, and faith, they patiently watched for the coming of the Savior.

Eventually, their faithfulness was rewarded as Mary and Joseph presented to them the baby who would one day take upon Himself the sins of mankind.⁵

Believers among the Nephites and Lamanites

The touching story of how believers in the New World watched for the signs of the birth of the Savior is found in the Book of Mormon.

You remember that those who had faith in Christ were ridiculed and persecuted. The sophisticates of that day accused believers of hanging onto foolish superstitions. In fact, the non-believers were so vocal in their ridicule that they made “a great uproar” in the land (3 Nephi 1:7). They scoffed at those who believed that the Savior would be born.

Their anger and rage grew so great that they became obsessed with silencing once and for all those who believed in the Savior. The Book of Mormon records the dramatic resolution.⁶

The believers who lived at this time could represent those who seek the Christ even when others laugh, mock, and taunt. They seek Christ even when



TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

How can we better seek Christ, as President Uchtdorf suggests? You might encourage those you teach to ask themselves, “How am I seeking Christ?” Consider inviting them to start sharing how they are each seeking Christ during their daily family scripture study time. You could also watch the Mormon.org Christmas video with those you teach and invite them to participate in this yearly opportunity to seek Christ by following His teachings.

others attempt to caricature them as unrefined, unsophisticated, or gullible.

But the contempt of others does not discourage true believers from seeking Christ.

We Seek Christ

Throughout the year, and perhaps especially at this Christmas season, it would benefit us to once again ask the question “How am I seeking Christ?”

During a difficult period of his life, the great King David wrote, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee.”⁷

Perhaps this attitude of seeking God was one of the reasons David was described as a man after God’s own heart.⁸



During this Christmas season and throughout the entire year, may we seek with our hearts and souls our beloved Savior, the Prince of Peace, the Holy One of Israel. For this desire, in large part, defines not only who we are as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but even more who we really are as Christ’s disciples. ■

NOTES

1. Luke 2:8.
2. See Luke 2:15.
3. See Matthew 2:1–2.
4. See Matthew 2:11.
5. See Luke 2:22–38.
6. See 3 Nephi 1.
7. Psalm 63:1.
8. See Acts 13:22.

CHILDREN

Watching for Jesus

Many people watched and waited for Jesus to be born. Now we watch and wait for Him to come again! We can be ready by learning about Jesus and following Him. How do you follow Jesus? Write your ideas on the stars.



Willing to Bear One Another's Burdens

Prayerfully study this material and seek for inspiration to know what to share. How will understanding the purpose of Relief Society prepare daughters of God for the blessings of eternal life?

“We are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encouragement, our support, our comfort, our kindness,” said President Thomas S. Monson.

“We are the Lord’s hands here upon the earth, with the mandate to serve and to lift His children. He is dependent upon each of us.”¹

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, said: “A great change began in your heart when you came into the Church. You made a covenant, and you received a promise that began changing your very nature. . . .

“ . . . You promised that you would help the Lord make [others’] burdens light and be comforted. You were given the power to help lighten those loads when you received the gift of the Holy Ghost.”²

“We want to use the light of the gospel to see others as the



Faith
Family
Relief

Savior does—with compassion, hope, and charity,” said Jean B. Bingham, Relief Society General President. “The day will come when we will have a complete understanding of others’ hearts and will be grateful to have mercy extended to us—just as we extend charitable thoughts and words to others. . . .

“Our obligation and privilege is to embrace improvement in *everyone* as we strive to become more like our Savior.”³

As we bear one another’s burdens and keep our covenants, we are more aware of Jesus Christ’s healing power. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Considering the incomprehensible cost of the Crucifixion and

Atonement, I promise you He is not going to turn His back on us now. When He says to the poor in spirit, ‘Come unto me,’ He means He knows the way out and He knows the way up. He knows it because He has walked it. He knows the way because He *is* the way.”⁴

Additional Scriptures

Matthew 25:40; Galatians 6:2; Mosiah 2:17; 18:8–9
reliefsociety.lds.org

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Serve the Lord with Love,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Feb. 2014, 4.
2. Henry B. Eyring, “The Comforter,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 18.
3. Jean B. Bingham, “I Will Bring the Light of the Gospel into My Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 6, 8.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Broken Things to Mend,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2006, 71.



Consider This

How does helping bear the burdens of others and keeping our covenants open the way for Jesus Christ to heal those in need?

How could we help our children become more active gospel learners?

By Doug Hart

Some time ago, my wife and I became concerned about a pattern of behavior developing in some of our teenage children during family scripture study, family home evenings, and even our impromptu, one-on-one gospel-centered conversations. They were meeting a minimum learning standard—a physical presence, occasional eye-contact, and one-word answers—but they were not engaging in active learning.

We knew that in order for them to gain strong testimonies and to experience deep, personal conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost, they needed to do more. The Savior wants

Elevating

His disciples to not just hear His words—He wants them to act on His teachings with faith (see *Teaching in the Savior's Way* [2016], 30).

One night we talked with them about our feelings. Our intent was to counsel with them in a Spirit-guided discussion. Our discussion, however, quickly deteriorated into a one-way lecture. Our boys heard our message, but their minds and hearts remained unaffected.

That experience troubled us, so my wife and I began to ponder how we could help our children become more proactive in their gospel learning, inspiring them to act instead of being acted upon by our speeches and lectures. Our questions led us to develop a plan based on what we learned from searching the scriptures,

Our Family

the words of latter-day prophets, and other Church resources related to teaching and learning. Our plan reads:

Leading Our Children to Seek the Holy Ghost in Family Discussions

Cultivate love and respect. Love softens hearts. Expressions of love will help prepare our children for the influence of the Holy Ghost. It will also nurture their desire and willingness to engage in active, spiritual learning. Respecting our children by listening to and validating their perspective and feelings will help them feel safer and more willing to share what they are feeling.

Teach by the Spirit. Carefully observing and listening to our children will prepare us to discern by the Spirit what to say next, what question to ask, or what invitation to extend that will

Discussions

lead them to seek the Holy Ghost's influence in their learning.

Anchor every discussion in the word of God. While sharing our own thoughts and opinions about the gospel together can be helpful, the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets will often provide a deeper, more powerful connection to the Spirit (see D&C 84:45).

Make the Savior the basis of all gospel-centered discussions. Substance and power will come to our discussions as our children see how what we are discussing relates to the Savior and His Atonement, “the very root of Christian doctrine” (Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 56).

Ask inspiring questions. Effective questions will lead our children to draw truth and understanding directly

from the scriptures and words of the prophets with the Spirit's help. What they learn in that way will mean more to them than our clearest explanations of the very same material.

Encourage family members to do the talking. When our children use their own words to express what they are seeing, thinking, or feeling, they invite the Holy Ghost to help them know what to say and how to say it. That process will help them see and understand more clearly what the Lord wants them to learn and feel.

Be patient! The Holy Ghost will work with our children as they search their minds and hearts for truth and understanding. We need to resist the temptation to cut their search short by prematurely jumping in with personal opinions and self-conceived solutions.

Lead by example. Striving to learn and live the gospel in the same way we ask of our children will help us qualify for the support and guidance of the Spirit in our discussions.

As we've tried to implement our plan, we are learning that inviting the influence of the Holy Ghost into our family discussions will take practice and time. But we refuse to get discouraged or give up. Just the other night, our 10-year-old daughter, prompted by a verse from the Book of Mormon we were reading as a family, asked in sweet sincerity, “How do you learn by the Holy Ghost?” I smiled. I knew we were getting somewhere! ■

The author is currently serving as the mission president of the Brazil Curitiba Mission.

The new teaching guidebook, *Teaching in the Savior's Way*, includes suggestions for teaching teens and younger children. See teaching.lds.org.





By Elder Ronald A. Rasband

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Glory to God in the Highest

*Whenever we act in concert with the Lord—doing His bidding,
lifting those around us—we are bearing witness
that He lives and that He loves us.*

Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem of Judea, the prophet Isaiah declared, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

King Benjamin, 125 years before the Savior’s birth, prophesied, “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 3:8).

The day before the birth of the baby Jesus, Nephi, the son of Nephi, heard a voice saying, “On the morrow come I into the world” (3 Nephi 1:13).

The next day, oceans away, the Christ child was born. There’s no question that His mother, Mary, looked on in wonder at her newborn son, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh.

On the hills of Judea surrounding Bethlehem, Luke tells us, shepherds were abiding in their fields (see Luke 2:8). These shepherds were “just and holy men” (see Alma 13:26) who would bear witness of the Christ child.

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

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

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. . . .



“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:9–11, 13–14).

Imagine that scene in Judea—the sky filled with the brilliance of a magnificent star and choruses from heaven marking this singular event. The shepherds then went “with haste” (Luke 2:16) to see the babe lying in a manger. Later “they made known abroad” (Luke 2:17) what they had heard and seen.

Each year at Christmas we add our witness to that of the shepherds—that Jesus Christ, the literal Son of the living God, came to a corner of the earth in what we call the Holy Land.

The shepherds reverently went to the stable to worship the King of kings. How will we worship Him this season? Endlessly shopping? Hustling about our homes decorating and wrapping? Will that be our tribute to our Savior? Or will we also bring peace to troubled hearts, goodwill to those in need of higher purpose, glory to God in our willingness to do His bidding?

Jesus put it simply: “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, has resonated with believers across the world. I have witnessed for myself the fervor of those from the isles of the sea to the enormity of Russia who have embraced the Savior’s sacred word.

The Message of Christmas

Among the early Saints who gathered to Zion was Hannah Last Cornaby, who settled in Spanish Fork, Utah, USA. In the difficult early days of the restored Church, Christmas was sometimes marked with a precious orange or a carved toy or perhaps only a rag doll—but not always. Hannah wrote of December 25, 1856:

“Christmas Eve came, and my darlings, with childish faith, hung up their stockings, wondering if [they] would [be filled]. With aching heart, which I concealed from them, I assured them they would not be forgotten; and they fell asleep with joyful anticipations for the morrow.

“Not having a particle of sweetening, I knew not what to do. They must not, however, be disappointed. I then thought of some squashes in the house, which I boiled, then strained off the liquid, that, when simmered a few hours, made a sweet syrup. With this, and a little spice, I made gingerbread dough which, when cut into every conceivable variety of design, and baked in a skillet, (I had no stove,) filled their stockings and pleased them as much as would the most fancy confectionaries.”¹

Between the lines of this story is an account of a mother working through the night without even an oven to ease her efforts. Yet she was committed to bring joy to her children, to reinforce their faith, to affirm in their home, “Happy day! All is well!”² Isn’t that the message of Christmas?

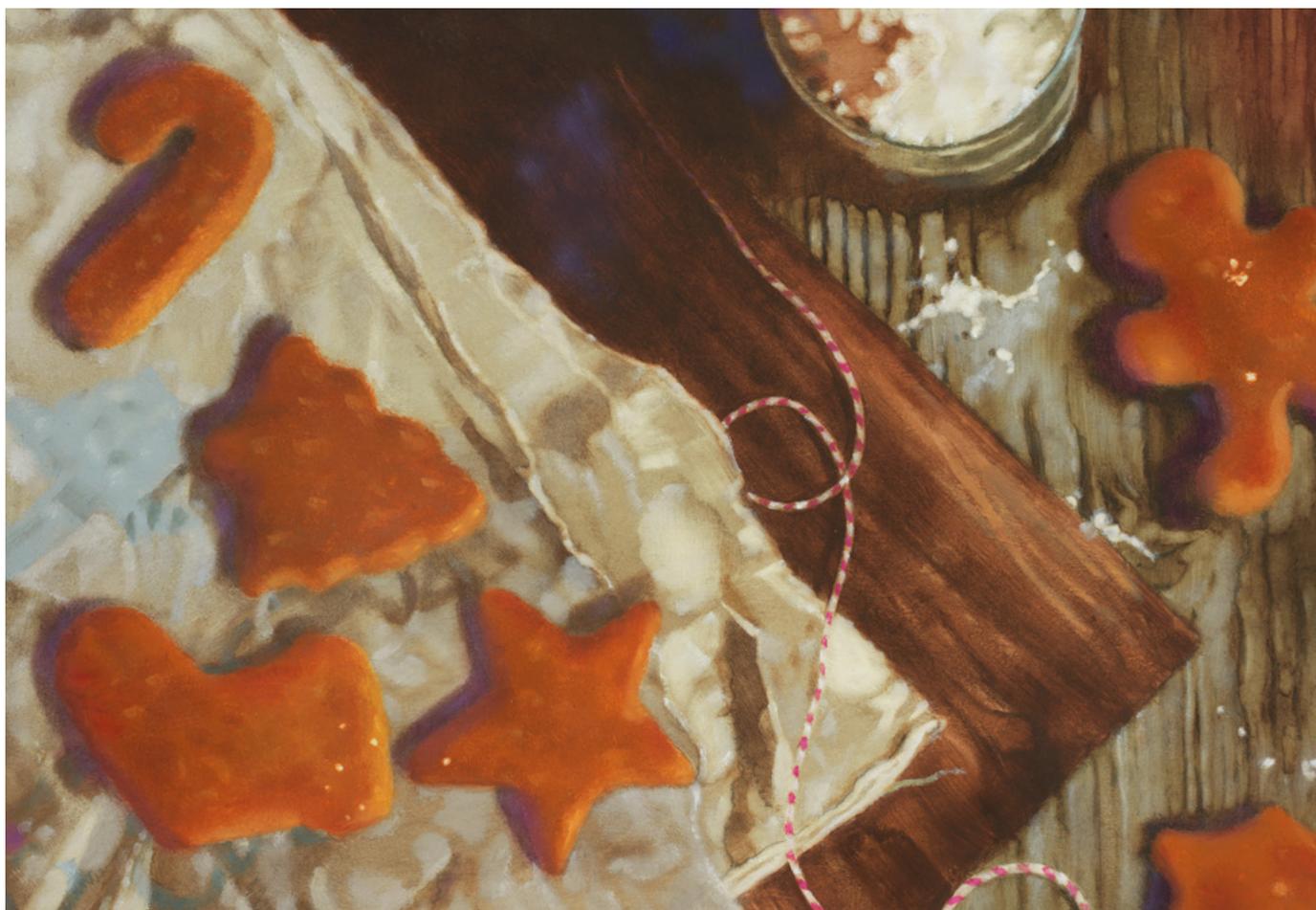
President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “Our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given.”³

Whenever we act in concert with the Lord—doing His bidding, lifting those around us—we are bearing witness that He lives and that He loves us, no matter our temporal challenges.

After Scottish convert John Menzies Macfarlane joined the Church with his widowed mother and brother, the three of them journeyed to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1852. He was 18 years old. Over the years, he became a surveyor, a builder, even a district judge, but it was his music that distinguished him.

He organized his first choir in Cedar City, Utah, and took his ensemble around southern Utah. After a performance in St. George, Elder Erastus Snow (1818–88), an Apostle and leader of the colony, encouraged John to move to St. George and bring his family and music with him.

Times had been hard in 1869, and Elder Snow asked Brother Macfarlane to stage a Christmas program that would lift the people’s spirits. Brother Macfarlane wanted a new and engaging musical piece for the event. But no matter how hard he tried to compose, nothing came. He prayed for inspiration and prayed again.



Then one night he woke his wife and exclaimed, "I have the words for a song, and I think I have the music too!" He hurried to the keyboard of their small parlor organ and played the tune, writing it down while his wife held before him the flickering light of a bit of burning flannel floating in a bowl of grease. The words and music flowed forth:

*Far, far away on Judea's plains,
Shepherds of old heard the joyous strains:
Glory to God,
Glory to God,
Glory to God in the highest;
Peace on earth, goodwill to men;
Peace on earth, goodwill to men!*⁴

Brother Macfarlane had never been to Judea to see that the plains were more like rocky hillsides, but the inspired message of his music poured from his soul as a witness

of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem, a beginning that would change the world forever.⁵

John Menzies Macfarlane testified of Jesus Christ through his music, and Hannah Last Cornaby testified of Christ through her service to her children. We likewise can serve the Lord and bear witness of Him through simple acts of selflessness. We too can make a difference within our families, our wards, our workplaces, and our other spheres of responsibility.

Make a Difference

One simple way we can make a difference is to become involved in the Church's annual social media Christmas campaign. The campaign is designed to help the Saints—and God's children throughout world—focus on the Savior. This year the Church is launching another global effort to celebrate the birth of



My sister made a beautiful quilt and called it "Name above All Names." The quilt features 26 of the names of Jesus Christ.

Christ and to encourage people to emulate Him by serving others during the Christmas season.

The Church is repeating its successful theme of last year: “Light the World” (see Mormon.org). The theme comes from John 8:12, which reads, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The campaign includes an advent calendar and related scriptural verses that provide ideas for people to serve and share the light of Christmas.

“Each of us came to earth having been given the Light of Christ,” President Monson has said. “As we follow the example of the Savior and live as He lived and as He taught, that light will burn within us and will light the way for others.”⁶

We come to know the Savior by doing what He did. As we serve others, we bring them—and ourselves—closer to Him.

“Name above All Names”

During Christmastime, I especially miss our little grandson Paxton. Born with a rare genetic disorder, Paxton suffered from countless health problems. Heavenly Father taught our family many special and tender lessons during the three short years Paxton blessed our lives.

My sister, Nancy Schindler, made a beautiful quilt in honor of Paxton. She called it “Name above All Names.” The quilt features 26 of the names of Jesus Christ—names beginning with the letters A through Z. The quilt reminds me of the glorious future family reunion with Paxton made possible through the Savior’s suffering, sacrifice, and Resurrection.

The quilt inspired me to begin a study of the names of Jesus Christ as revealed in the scriptures. Researching His names has become part of my personal scripture study. So far, I have identified hundreds of names for the Savior.

One of my responsibilities as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and as stated in the Doctrine and Covenants, is to bear testimony of Jesus Christ. The Doctrine and Covenants states, “The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or *special witnesses of the name of Christ* in

all the world” (D&C 107:23; emphasis added).

Recently I was asked to speak during a sacrament meeting at Primary Children’s Hospital in Salt Lake City. I felt prompted to speak about Jesus Christ and His hopeful names. I bore testimony of the Savior as “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16), a “high priest of good things to come” (Hebrews 9:11), “a God of miracles” who rose “with healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 27:23; 25:13), “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6), and “the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25).

At Christmastime, I like to recite the Savior’s different names as I walk to and from my office through the Christmas lights on Temple Square. I start with A, “Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:8); B, “the babe” of Bethlehem (Luke 2:12, 16); C, “Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6; see 2 Nephi 19:6); D, “the Deliverer” (Romans 11:26); E, the “exalted one” (Psalm 89:19); F, “the founder of peace” (Mosiah 15:18); and so on.

Throughout this Christmas season, I look forward to memorizing more of His names and to looking for opportunities to honor His name. As you strive to make a difference this Christmas season, I hope you will make the Savior the center of your efforts and that you will bring glory to Him as you serve others in His name.

I bear my witness that our Eternal Father lives. His plan of happiness profoundly blesses the lives of each of His children in all generations. I know that His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the babe born in Bethlehem, is the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

These words of praise speak truth to my ears: “Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, goodwill to men.”⁷ ■

From an address delivered to the BYU Management Society—Salt Lake Chapter in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, on December 13, 2016.

NOTES

1. Hannah Cornaby, *Autobiography and Poems* (1881), 45–46.
2. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “May We So Live,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2008, 7; *Liahona*, Aug. 2008, 5.
4. “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains,” *Hymns*, no. 212.
5. See Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (1988), 223–24.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “Be an Example and a Light,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 86.
7. *Hymns*, no. 212.

14 Events OF THE Nativity

By Jessica Griffith

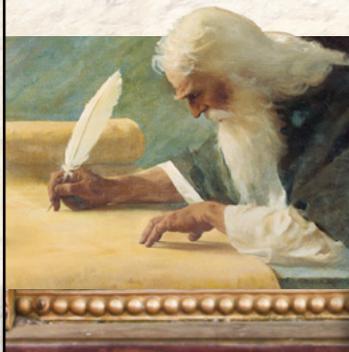
The birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated every year—we sing hymns, we enjoy family traditions, and we remember our Lord by honoring His Nativity. But what details about the Nativity do we find in the scriptures?

LOCATION

EVENT

Christ's Birth Is Propesied

Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7; Micah 5:2; Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10; Helaman 14:2-5



The Angel Gabriel Visits John the Baptist's Parents

Matthew 17:12-13; Luke 1:5-25 (especially verse 17); Doctrine and Covenants 27:7; Guide to the Scriptures, "Elias"

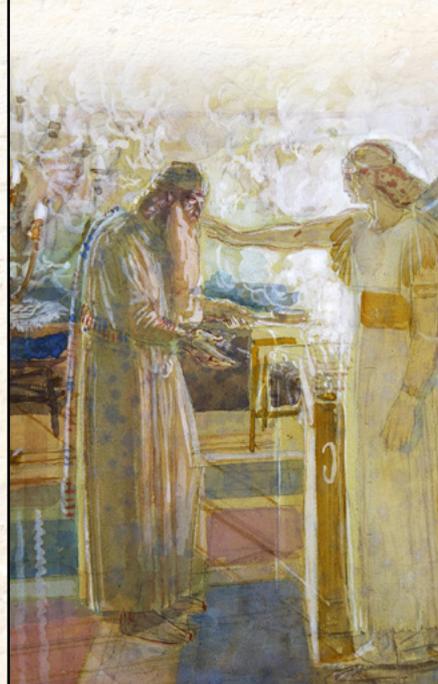


ANCIENT JERUSALEM AND ANCIENT AMERICA

JUDEA

Years before the Savior's birth, prophets had received revelation about Jesus Christ. Old Testament prophets spoke of a king descended from King David who would be born in Bethlehem—a Messiah. According to Jewish interpretation, this Messiah would become a king who would deliver His people, the Jews, from political oppression and rule the earth with justness. What the ancient Jews didn't expect, however, was a King who would deliver His people from spiritual oppression. Rather than a temporal salvation and an earthly kingdom, Jesus Christ offered an eternal salvation and His Father's kingdom.

John the Baptist was an Elias, or forerunner, to Christ. The angel Gabriel told Zacharias, John's father, that his wife, Elisabeth, was to have a child and that this child should be named John. Zacharias responded with doubt, which resulted in his being stricken deaf and dumb.



THE TRUE ESSENCE OF CHRISTMAS

"Our joy at this season is because He came into the world. The peace that comes

from Him, His infinite love which each of us may feel, and an overwhelming sense of gratitude for that which He freely gave us at so great a cost to Himself—these are of the true essence of Christmas."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas," *Ensign*, Dec. 2000, 5; *Liahona*, Dec. 2000, 6.

The Angel Gabriel Appears to Mary

Matthew 1:18;
Luke 1:26-38



NAZARETH AND GALILEE

Mary Visits Elisabeth

Luke 1:39-56



JUDEA

John the Baptist Is Born

Luke 1:57-80

The Angel Gabriel Appears to Joseph

Matthew 1:18-23



JUDEA

NAZARETH



Gabriel's next visit was six months later to Elisabeth's cousin Mary. He told Mary that although she was a virgin, she would have a child by the power of the Holy Ghost and that the child would be Jesus Christ. Mary humbly accepted her call as the mother of the Son of God. The angel also told her that her cousin Elisabeth had conceived.

After Mary's angelic visitation, she left Nazareth to visit her cousin Elisabeth in Judea for three months. While Mary was there, Elisabeth received a testimony through the Holy Ghost that Mary's baby was the Son of God. Mary also bore her own testimony of God.



When John the Baptist was born, people assumed he would be named Zacharias, after his father. Elisabeth rejected that name, telling her friends and neighbors that his name was John. When these friends and neighbors questioned Zacharias about it, he agreed with Elisabeth. Because he followed Gabriel's instructions for naming his son, Zacharias's tongue was loosed, and he used his regained hearing and speech to glorify God.



Upon seeing Mary's pregnant condition when she returned to Nazareth, Joseph, the man to whom Mary was betrothed, intended to "put her away privily," or quietly annul their betrothal. Before he could do so, however, the angel Gabriel appeared to him in a dream, testifying that Mary's baby was conceived of the Holy Ghost and that the baby would be the one who would save His people from their sins. Instead of separating from Mary, Joseph decided to marry her.



THE PROPHET ISAIAH FORETELLS CHRIST'S BIRTH, BY HARRY ANDERSON; ILLUSTRATION OF THE ANGEL GABRIEL BY MICHAEL MALMI; BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN, BY WALTER RANE; DETAIL FROM THE VISITATION, BY REMBRANDT HARMENSZ. (1606-69)/DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ART, USA/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; ARCHANGEL GABRIEL STRIKES ZACHARIAS DUMB, BACKGROUND, BORDER, MAN WITH CAMEL FROM GETTY IMAGES; ZACHARIAS WRITING A NAME FOR THE CHILD, COURTESY OF FCFI; ANNUNCIATION TO JOSEPH, BY JOSEPH BRICKEY

All the World Is Taxed

Luke 2:1-4;
James E. Talmage,
Jesus the Christ
(1916), 91-92



THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Jesus Christ Is Born

Luke 2:6-7



NAZARETH, BETHLEHEM, AND JUDEA

Propesied Signs Come forth in the Americas

Helaman 14:1-5;
3 Nephi 1:15-21



THE AMERICAS

Shepherds Hear of Christ's Birth

Luke 2:8-17



NEAR BETHLEHEM

The taxing functioned as both a tax and a census enrollment, which was implemented by the Romans. Usually, the Romans enrolled people based on their current residency, but the Jewish custom was to enroll people based on their ancestral homes. Because of this, Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Joseph, was crowded, and the inns were full.



Bethlehem means "house of bread" and was the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah.

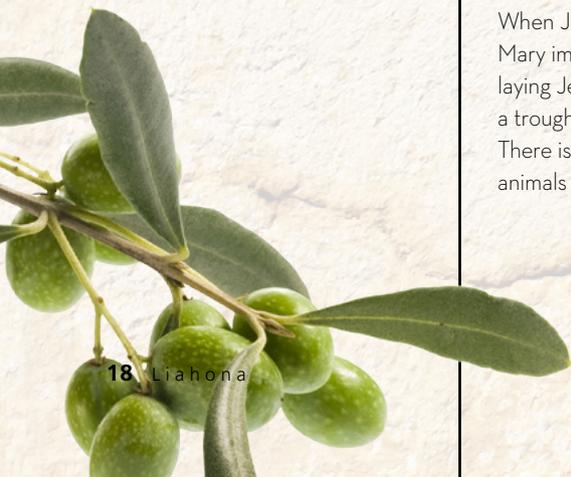
Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to be taxed. When Jesus was born, Mary improvised a crib by laying Jesus in a manger, or a trough to feed livestock. There is no mention of animals being present.



As prophesied, on the day of Christ's birth, there was a day and a night and a day of full brightness on the American continent. A new star appeared in the sky.



At this time of year, shepherds were keeping their flocks outdoors both day and night. This is where they were when an angel appeared to them, telling them of the birth of the Savior. Following the angel's announcement, a host of angels appeared, glorifying God. After hearing this, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see Jesus. Once they had seen Him, they left Joseph and Mary and testified to others of what they had seen.



Jesus Is Circumcised, Named, and Presented at the Temple

Luke 2:21-38;
James E. Talmage,
Jesus the Christ, 95



BETHLEHEM

Wise Men Ask Herod about Christ

Matthew 2:1-10



JERUSALEM

Wise Men Find Christ and Give Gifts

Matthew 2:9-12;
Bible Dictionary,
“Magi”



BETHLEHEM

Joseph Is Warned to Flee to Egypt

Matthew
2:13-16, 19-23



BETHLEHEM, EGYPT,
AND NAZARETH

After eight days, Christ was circumcised and named, as was the Jewish custom. He was named Jesus, or “Yeshua,” which means “Savior” in Hebrew. Jewish custom dictates that a woman must wait 40 days after childbirth to enter the temple. After the 40 days were over, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be presented at the temple. There they met Simeon, who had been promised that he would see Christ before he died. He recognized Christ, held Him in his arms, and glorified God. He also prophesied of Christ’s mission on earth. Anna, a prophetess, also witnessed of Christ at the temple. She too testified of His mission.

An unspecified number of Wise Men “from the east” came to Jerusalem seeking Christ. They had seen a new star in the sky, which indicated that the Christ had been born. They asked King Herod, the Roman-appointed king of Judea, where to find the child. Herod was threatened by the possibility of a new king, the Messiah, who he thought would take over his kingdom. Without telling the Wise Men of his fears, he asked them to bring him word of where they found Christ. He planned to kill Him.

The Wise Men did eventually find Christ. Matthew specifies that they found Jesus in his house as a “young child,” suggesting that they came at least a year after Christ’s birth. They presented Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh—valuable gifts that acknowledged the kingly status of Jesus. In a dream, the Wise Men were told not to tell Herod of their findings.

The Wise Men never reported to Herod as they said they would. Herod reacted by decreeing that all the children born in Bethlehem age two and under were to be killed. Being warned in a vision, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. They stayed there until Herod died. At Herod’s death, an angel came to Joseph in a vision, telling him that it was safe to move back to Israel. Hearing that Herod’s son was the current ruler, however, Joseph took his family to Nazareth in Galilee instead of Judea, and thus Christ’s life as Jesus of Nazareth began. Years later He would be baptized, perform miracles, and complete His wonderful, eternal Atonement.







By Elder
Marcus B. Nash
Of the Seventy

Joseph Smith:

STRENGTH OUT OF WEAKNESS

Thousands of years ago, Joseph of old prophesied, “Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; . . . and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word . . . and out of weakness he shall be made strong” (2 Nephi 3:7, 11, 13).

I am intrigued and inspired by this prophecy that “out of weakness he shall be made strong.” It may seem counterintuitive that the Lord would call upon the weak to accomplish a mighty work. Yet those who recognize their weakness can be moved by that very weakness to seek the Lord’s strength. Those who thus humble themselves in faith will be strengthened by Him who has all power in heaven and earth (see Matthew 28:18; Mosiah 4:9).¹

From the time of his youth, Joseph Smith approached the Lord on these terms. When Joseph was in his 15th year, he yearned for forgiveness of sins and longed to learn which church was right. He wrote, “Though my feelings were deep and often poignant, . . . it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong” (see Joseph Smith—History 1:8).

Fully aware of this weakness, he went into the Sacred Grove to learn where he could find the Church of God. He inquired so that he could *do* something about it, so that he could *join* that church (see Joseph Smith—History 1:18). In response to his humble, sincere petition, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph. In doing so, They delivered him from the power of the evil one and prepared the way for the Restoration (see Joseph Smith—History 1:14–19).

If we, like Joseph Smith, will recognize our weakness and turn in faith to the Lord, we too will be made strong.

obliged to labour hard

Joseph Smith did not contest that he was one of “the weak things of the world” (D&C 1:19; 35:13). Years later the Lord addressed him this way: “Unto this end have I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things of the earth” (D&C 124:1).

An Obscure Boy

Joseph described himself as “an obscure boy . . . who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor” (Joseph Smith—History 1:23). He was born into a low social stratum

with limited formal education. His first attempt at writing his history underscores the weak position from which he was called to the work.

“I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] in the State of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instructing me in the christian religion[,] at the age of about ten years my Father Joseph Smith Seignior moved to Palmyra Ontario County in the State of New York and being in indigent circumstances were obliged to labour hard for the support of a large Family having nine children and as it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructid in reading writing and the ground rules of Arithmatic.”²

Joseph felt so keenly his lack of education that he once lamented being trapped in “the little narrow prison almost as it were totel darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”³ Despite this, the Lord called him to translate the Book of Mormon—all 588 pages of it as originally published—which he did in less than 90 days!

Any person who thinks clearly would conclude it to be impossible for the educationally weak Joseph to have accomplished such a thing on his own, and the explanations some have concocted are much more difficult to believe than the true explanation: he was a prophet who translated by the gift and power of God.

Emma’s Witness

Late in her life, Emma Smith recalled that at the time her husband translated the golden plates, he “could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And,

Left: An entry from Joseph Smith’s history written in his own hand. Opposite page: A page from Joseph Smith’s journal. Note the words that have been crossed out.



*New York and being in indigent
obliged to labour hard for the
Family having nine child
and the exertions of all that
any assistance for the supp
therefore we were deprived of*

for the support of a lar...

though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, it is marvelous to me, 'a marvel and a wonder,' as much so as to any one else."⁴

Against the backdrop of this history, it is interesting to look at page one of Joseph's first journal, dated November 27, 1832 (shown at right). He wrote this approximately three and a half years after he had concluded the translation of the Book of Mormon. Note that he writes and then strikes out the following words:

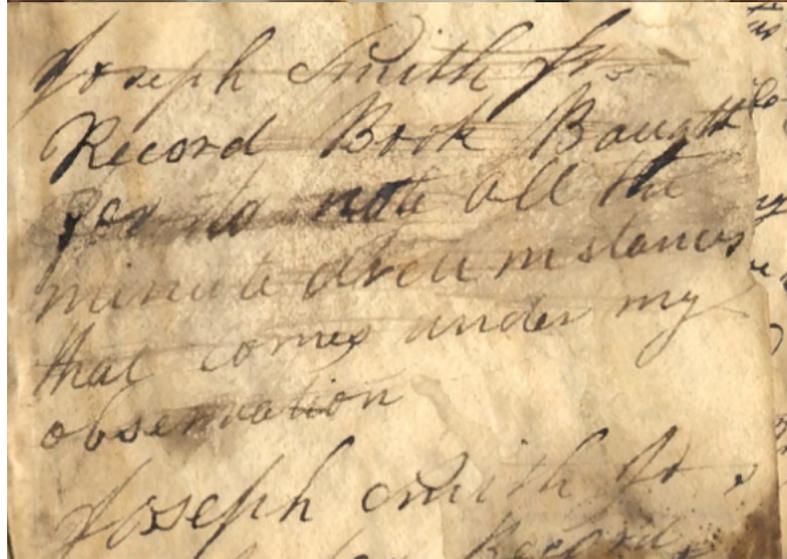
"Joseph Smith Jrs—Record Book Bought for to note all the minute circumstances that comes under my observation."

As I have held this diary and read these crossed-out words, I have imagined Joseph seated in a rustic setting in frontier America, writing the opening sentence and then thinking, "No, that's not quite right; let me try again." So he strikes out the sentence and writes, "Joseph Smith Jrs Book for Record Bought on the 27th of November 1832 for the purpose to keep a minute account of all things that come under my observation &c— —"

Finally, probably not entirely satisfied with the stilted, halting language he had just penned, he writes, "Oh may God grant that I may be directed in all my thoughts Oh bless thy Servent Amen."⁵ I sense in this sentence Joseph feeling his inadequacy and weakness, and calling upon God in faith to direct him in all he does.

Now, contrast that journal entry with a copy of an original manuscript page of the Book of Mormon transcribed sometime between April and June 1829 (shown on the next page).

Note the flowing prose—without punctuation, without strikeouts. This was not a composition. Joseph dictated it word by word as he looked into instruments the Lord had prepared for him, including the Urim and Thummim and at times a seer stone, using a hat to shield his eyes from extraneous light in order to plainly see the words as they appeared (see 2 Nephi 27:6, 19–22; Mosiah 28:13). As you can see, there is a vast difference between the translation of the Book



of Mormon and the journal entry: one was the product of Joseph Smith, the prophet, seer, and revelator; the other was the product of Joseph Smith, the man. If you look closely at this original manuscript of the translation, you will read words that must have been encouraging to Joseph:

"And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7).

Shortly before these words, he had translated the

Family having mine

following: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).

Yes, a theme of the Book of Mormon—and the Prophet Joseph’s life—is that the weak who humbly seek the Lord in faith are made strong, even mighty, in the work of the Lord. This strengthening will occur even in seemingly small things.

For example, Joseph, a poor speller, corrected the spelling of the name *Coriantumr* (see Helaman 1:15) by his primary scribe, Oliver Cowdery. The first time Joseph dictated the name to Oliver, Oliver wrote *Coriantummer*. This was reasonable because no English words end in “mr.” However, Joseph—who was a weak enough speller to accept the spelling the Lord gave to him—corrected the spelling during the translation. We now know that while this is an unusual spelling in English, it is a perfectly good Egyptian spelling and fits well into the Old World setting. Joseph would not have known this but by revelation.⁶

We Can Be Made Strong

The miracle of the translation of the Book of Mormon is one example of how Joseph, out of weakness, was made strong. There is another, more personal lesson: if we, like Joseph, will recognize our weakness and turn in faith to the Lord with all of our heart, determined to do His will, we too will be made strong out of weakness. This does not necessarily mean that the weakness is erased in mortality—but it does mean that such an individual will be made strong by God.

Joseph humbly admitted his imperfections. He remarked that during his youth he “displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature” (Joseph Smith—History 1:28). Later in life he told the Saints in Nauvoo that he “was but a man, and they must not expect [him] to be

perfect; . . . but if they would bear with [his] infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, [he] would likewise bear with their infirmities.”⁷

Joseph never pretended to be perfect or infallible, yet he acknowledged the power of God wielded through him when acting as a prophet: “When I speak as a man it is Joseph only that speaks. But when the Lord speaks through me, it is no more Joseph Smith who speaks; but it is God.”⁸

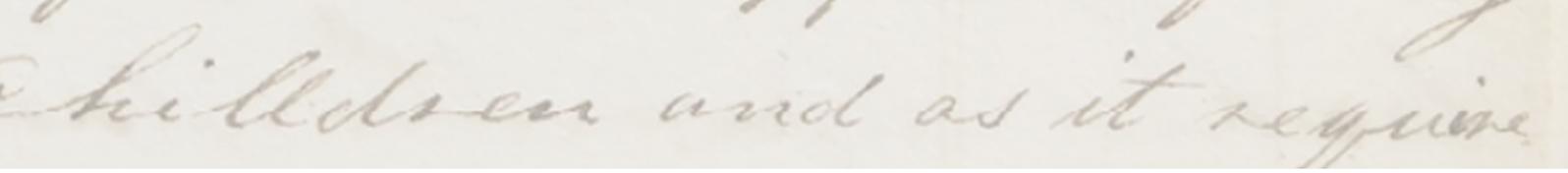
So, out of weakness, Joseph was made strong—strong enough to do “more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men” (D&C 135:3) than any other prophet in all history.

Our unchangeable God will likewise make you and me strong out of weakness—if we will turn to Him in faith with full purpose of heart, as did Joseph.



father. I will go and do the
commandments for I know
commandments unto
shall prepare a way for
finish the thing which

An excerpt from the Book of Mormon manuscript corresponding to 1 Nephi 3:7.



Prayer and Humility

According to His celestial chemistry, the Lord gives us weakness to facilitate our becoming strong in the only way that matters in time and eternity—through Him. He says: “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

According to this scripture, we are given weakness so that we may be humble. Those who choose to humble themselves and to exercise faith in Him will be made strong. Our humility before God, then, is an essential

catalyst for the strength and power of God to be manifest in our lives.

There are those who “think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not” (2 Nephi 9:28). The antidote to this pride is to “consider [our]selves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility” (2 Nephi 9:42).

From the time of his youth, Joseph understood that a great key to cultivating humility is to seek our Heavenly Father through sincere, heartfelt prayer. Daniel Tyler, an early Church member, recalled a time in Kirtland when many had turned against the Prophet. Brother Tyler, present in a meeting where the Prophet prayed with the congregation for the Lord’s help, described the experience in these words:

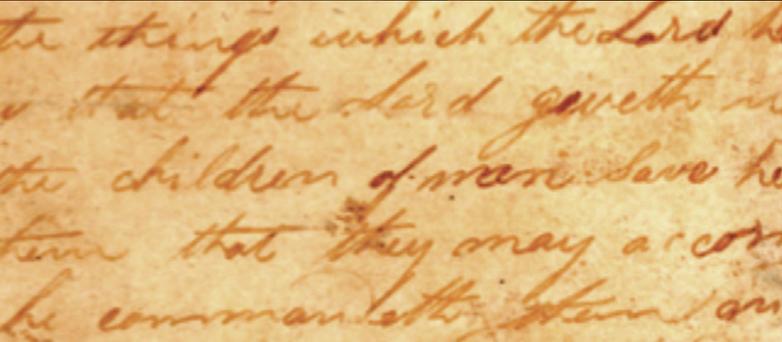
“I had heard men and women pray . . . , but never until then had I heard a man address his Maker as though He was present listening as a kind father would listen to the sorrows of a dutiful child. Joseph was at that time unlearned, but that prayer, which was to a considerable extent in behalf of those who accused him of having gone astray . . . , partook of the learning and eloquence of heaven. . . . It appeared to me as though, in case the vail were taken away, I could see the Lord standing facing His humblest of all servants I had ever seen.”⁹

Out of Weakness, Strength

When Joseph was 17, Moroni told him that “God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

I am confident that at the time, many thought that such a claim was evidence of delusions of grandeur; yet in today’s world with the internet, the name of that obscure farm boy is known around the globe, and of him both good and evil is spoken.

EARLY BOOK OF MORMON AND MANUSCRIPT IMAGES COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY



any assistance

Just before Joseph and Hyrum Smith went to their deaths at Carthage, Illinois, Hyrum read aloud to Joseph and others in the jail room with them and then folded the page that contains the following words:

“And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity.

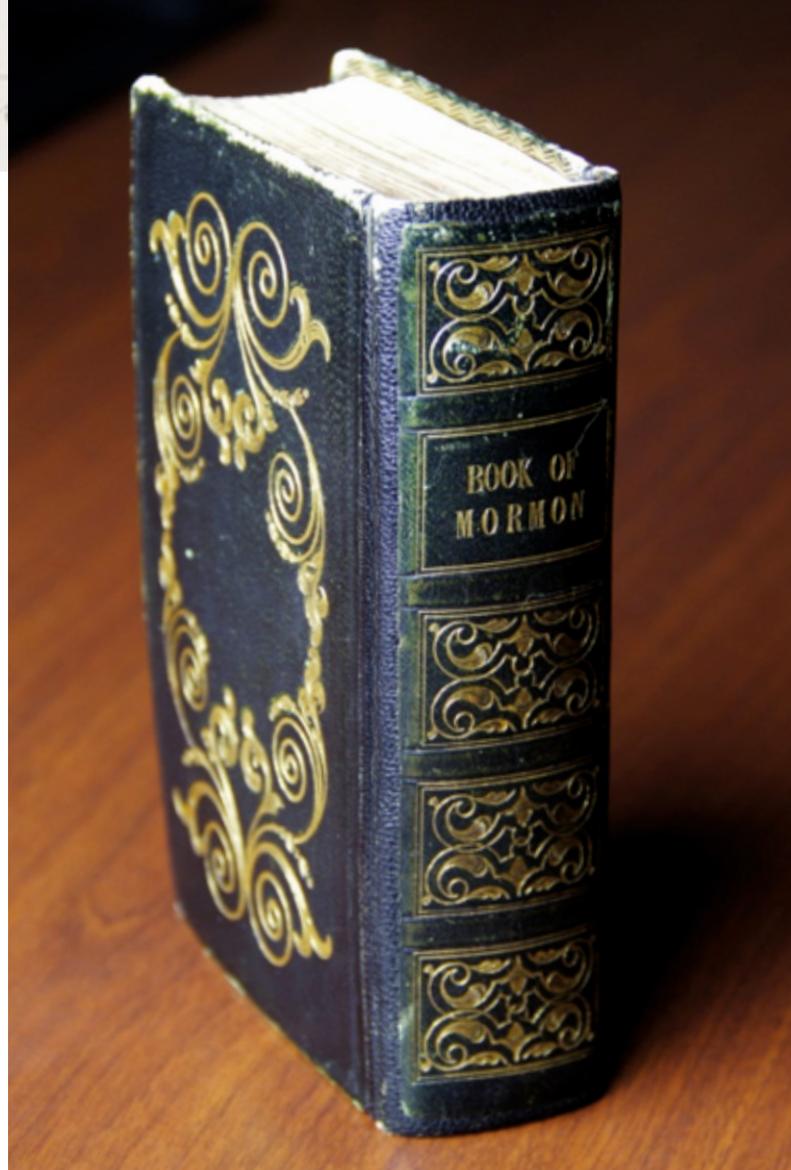
“And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father” (Ether 12:36–37).

In a literal sense it is *out of weakness* that Joseph was made strong. Motivated in part by his weakness, he sought the help of God in faith, determined to act according to His will. He approached our Father in Heaven on these terms throughout his life. As a result, he experienced the First Vision, translated the Book of Mormon, received priesthood keys, organized the restored Church of Christ, and brought to the earth the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Prophet Joseph grew in strength; he was not made mighty in a moment. It came to him, and it will come to you and me, “line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little” (D&C 128:21; see also Isaiah 28:10; 2 Nephi 28:30).

So do not be discouraged; the process of being made strong is gradual and requires patience with a steadfast determination to follow the Savior and abide by His will, come what may.

The Gift Has Returned

William Tyndale, who translated and published the Bible in English in the 16th century, stated to a learned man opposed to placing the Bible into the hands of common people, “If God spare my life, ere many years *I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou dost.*”¹⁰



Just before Joseph and Hyrum Smith went to their deaths at Carthage, Illinois, Hyrum read aloud to Joseph and others from this copy of the Book of Mormon.

In a curious parallel 300 years later, Nancy Towle, a famous itinerant preacher in the 1830s, visited Kirtland to personally observe the “Mormons.” In conversing with Joseph Smith and other Church leaders, she sharply criticized the Church.

According to Towle’s record, Joseph said nothing until she turned to him and demanded that he swear that an angel had shown him where to find the golden plates. He good-naturedly replied that he never swore at all! Failing to rattle him, she tried to belittle him. “Are you not ashamed, of such pretensions?” she asked. “You, who are no more than any ignorant plough-boy of our land!”

Joseph calmly responded, “The gift, has returned back again, as in former times, to illiterate fishermen.”¹¹

So Tyndale's words were prescient: a plough-boy did grow to know more of scripture than probably any man who ever lived, save the Savior.

Certainly, the restored Church and gospel of Jesus Christ are not the work of Joseph Smith, a "plough-boy" of the American frontier. Rather, they are the work of the Lord Jesus Christ restored through Joseph Smith, the Prophet. As he reflected upon his life, Joseph may have resonated with Jacob's observation that "the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things" (Jacob 4:7).

I know that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of God, made strong out of weakness. Said President Brigham Young (1801–77): "I feel like shouting Hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith, the Prophet."¹² While I have not had that privilege in mortality, I take solace in the poetic promise that "millions shall know 'Brother Joseph' again."¹³ I am profoundly grateful for the Prophet and his humility before our God, who made him strong. I am also encouraged by this history and the doctrine that the Lord will make each of us strong out of weakness if we likewise humble ourselves before Him and exercise our faith in Him with the steadfast determination to do His will. ■



JOSEPH'S RAPID ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE AND MATURITY

"Overarching the Prophet Joseph's entire ministry was his comparative youth, his superficial formal education, and his incredibly rapid acquisition of knowledge and maturity. He was 14 at the First Vision and 17 at the first visit from the angel Moroni. He was 21 when he received the golden plates and just 23 when he

From an address, "Out of Weakness He Shall Be Made Strong," given at the 70th Annual Joseph Smith Memorial Devotional in Logan, Utah, USA, on February 10, 2013.

NOTES

1. I thank my colleagues, particularly Richard E. Turley Jr. and Jed Woodworth in the Church History Department, for their thoughtful input.
2. Joseph Smith, in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1: 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson and others (2012), 11.
3. Joseph Smith, "Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832," 4, josephsmithpapers.org.
4. Emma Smith, in "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald*, Oct. 1, 1879, 290; spelling standardized; see also Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," *Ensign*, July 1993, 62–63.
5. Joseph Smith, in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, ed. Dean C. Jessee and others (2008), 9.
6. On "Coriantumr" and the spelling of proper names, see Royal Skousen, in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (1997), 61–93. Using evidence from the original manuscript, Skousen shows that the first time proper names appeared in the text, they were spelled correctly. In subsequent appearances the names may not be spelled correctly, suggesting that Joseph Smith spelled out each name the first time but relied on the scribe's memory thereafter.
7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 522.
8. Edward Stevenson, in Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* (1974), 87.
9. Daniel Tyler, in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Feb. 15, 1892, 127; see also *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 127.
10. William Tyndale, in S. Michael Wilcox, *Fire in the Bones: William Tyndale—Martyr, Father of the English Bible* (2004), 47.
11. *Vicissitudes Illustrated, in the Experience of Nancy Towle, in Europe and America* (1833), 156, 157.
12. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 343.
13. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27.

finished translating the Book of Mormon (in less than 60 working days). Over half of the revelations in our Doctrine and Covenants were given through the Prophet while he was 25 or younger. He was 26 when the First Presidency was organized and 30 when the Kirtland Temple was dedicated."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Joseph, the Man and the Prophet," *Ensign*, May 1996, 71.



We Can Do Better, Part 2:

Finding Your Place

in the Church of Jesus Christ

Don't let others keep you from enjoying the blessings of membership in Christ's Church.



By Betsy VanDenBerghe

Editors' note: No matter how strong our belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ is, it can be difficult to remain faithful if we don't feel like we belong. Church leaders recently addressed this challenge in a video series titled Unity in Diversity. In the September 2017 issue, "We Can Do Better: Welcoming Others into the Fold" examined our responsibility to welcome others. This article, part 2, looks at how we can take responsibility for our own faith, regardless of whether we feel like we belong.

After eight years of not attending church, Paulo (all names have been changed) received a phone call from his bishop in Brazil asking how he was doing. Paulo had longed to return, but many concerns kept him from full activity. How could he avoid comparing himself, still single, to those married with children? Would he

find any friends at church after so long and, if he did, what would they think of him? Would he still be able to feel the Spirit like he had during his conversion and mission or have enough faith to accept callings?

One month after the phone call, Paulo watched President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, give a conference talk called, "Come, Join with Us."¹ "That talk hit me hard," he recalls, and within a few weeks he found himself sitting in the church parking lot, trembling and offering a silent prayer for the strength to get out of the car and enter the building.

"Everything wasn't perfect," he recalls of his first year after returning. It wasn't easy to fit in. Yet a feeling of connectedness to the Savior and a strong desire for a temple recommend helped him overcome his insecurities. He began reading his scriptures and praying again. "If you don't give up, you gain strength and can feel the Lord blessing you," he advises those who struggle to feel accepted. "I have a testimony that this is Christ's Church, but it's in Him you will find true belonging."

Paulo's story represents several points that Church leaders describe in the video series *Unity in Diversity*. Their messages offer hope and advice to those who don't feel like they belong. Sometimes we feel alone even in church, but, as these leaders and members point out, there are things we can do to help get ourselves through challenges such as exclusion or poor treatment by others. We can avoid comparisons, move forward in uncertainty, know that returning is always possible, and above all, trust the Savior.

Avoid Comparisons: We Will All Be Blessed in the End

"When you begin to compare yourself, one with another, it either leads to discouragement or it leads to pride. . . . Blessings come in the near-term. Blessings come in the long-term. Sometimes blessings are in store for us, I believe, after we pass through the veil. . . . Ultimately, we can be assured that the promise of eternal life is for everyone."

—Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Rochelle moved to a modest duplex in an affluent area in the western United States after spending time in a homeless shelter. Divorced and caring for several children, she worked at two jobs, sometimes three, to be able to afford food and rent, and had been less active, off and on, since her conversion.

“Even though just about everyone in my new ward seemed better off than I was,” she explains, “they reached out to me and accepted the way I dress. Everyone really cared.”

Although under significant financial pressure, Rochelle never resented others for their easier circumstances. “I want to be more secure, definitely, but I never looked at my neighbors’ houses and felt that God had left me behind,” she recalls. “I could feel Him walking beside me even through my poor choices.”

Although Rochelle’s work schedule has been a challenge at times, ward leaders and friends ultimately helped her fulfill a yearning to attend the temple. “Going to the temple regularly helps me be grateful for how far I’ve come,” she observes. “I don’t worry that others might seem ahead of me.”

Rochelle admits that she and her daughters struggle and “are not a perfect LDS family.” Yet she also recognizes that

“everyone has problems and no family is really perfect,” a perspective that liberates her from looking sideways at others instead of focusing on her relationship with God.

“My daughters can see what a difference the gospel has made in my life,” she says. “I can feel the difference too and am busy enough with work, family, and Church that I don’t have time for comparisons. I’m just happy to be on the right path.”

Stay Strong: Christ Can Transform You

“This person sitting next to me ignoring me or even wanting to moving away . . . doesn’t change the reality of what Christ feels toward me and the possibilities I have in Christ. . . . Every individual needs to be determined that they’re going to have a place in the kingdom of God [and in] the body of Christ, and others who are thoughtless or careless or worse can’t prohibit that.”

—Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Growing up, Matthew attended church in small branches. He and his wife, a convert from Ukraine, grew accustomed to multiple callings and full engagement with international LDS communities but then moved to the United States. Large wards and different cultural expectations made them feel “unneeded and adrift,” he recalls. “We seemed unable to fit in. We felt ignored, with a lack of uplift and connection on Sundays.”

Their frustration reached a breaking point when, after moving to a different city, Matthew and his wife looked forward to a visit from a local priesthood leader whose purpose in visiting ended up being to ask them to keep their lively toddler under control during sacrament meeting. Deeply hurt, Matthew contemplated never returning to the local meetinghouse. “What stopped me,” he explains, “was my testimony that this is the Lord’s Church and that the Savior wants me there. Participating in the gospel has consequences beyond any hurt or personal encounter I’ll have in this life.”

Church situations can sometimes make us feel lonely, marginalized, and unneeded, a phenomenon that isn’t





unique to Latter-day Saints. Catholic writer David Mills describes the challenge that church-goers face in interacting with those who are “wealthier or poorer, more or less educated than you. They may be of a different race or ethnic group or age than you.” We might not choose any of them for our various social networks, he explains. However, religious commitment involves mingling with people we do not choose and “provides one of the few places left that’s more like a community than a network. . . . You have to learn to love these people, or at least to act lovingly, when you don’t want to.”² Relying on God when you can’t block or unfollow people in your religious community is often the only way to overcome the challenge.

Matthew found this reliance on the divine crucial to staying active in the Church. “The only thing that’s kept me going sometimes is my testimony of Christ,” he explains. “The gospel is bigger than any of us. Christ sees what we cannot see, knows what we can become, and has room for all.”

Jasmin, a member in the southern United States, admits that “I had a hard time getting along with a sister in my ward who seemed to meddle in my life too much, and I let that drive me away.” But when concern for her little boy began to outweigh the uncertainty of what it would be like

to return, Jasmin knew it was time to “not let others’ opinions of me turn me away from Christ—whether or not I felt that someone in the ward looked down on me.”

She mustered up enough courage to venture out in a heavy storm one Sunday to where her small family soon felt embraced by friends who could help them grow in the Church of Jesus Christ. “I regret leaving,” she says. “But I’m grateful that I didn’t give up and that I pushed forward, because the gospel isn’t about others—or even me—it’s about my Savior.”

Take a Step into the Darkness: The Light Will Follow

“The natural man and the natural woman says, ‘There is no way I’m taking this step [and] moving into the darkness until the light moves and I can see where I’m going. The requirement is that we take the step, anticipating that when our foot hits the ground, the light will move.’”

—Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Sometimes it’s difficult for new members to stay rooted in the gospel when they don’t have a complete assurance of what the future holds. Learning about this aspect of faith for Mei-Hsin, a homemaker in Taiwan, involved the gospel admonition to bring children into the world, a challenging



step because “many in my culture have one child or have a pet instead,” she observes. Each pregnancy has required her to have faith to step into the unknown and ignore sometimes intense criticism from relatives and the culture at large.

Often, moving forward requires stepping into the unknown, which can be intimidating to those new in the faith. It requires developing trust that the Lord will help them along the path. Having unease and uncertainty, Elder Bednar assures, is a normal part of our learning and growing process, but sometimes our steps into the unknown—whether they involve forming a family or returning to participation in the Church—can be particularly daunting because the witness comes after the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6). Mei-Hsin and her husband received such a witness after creating a family. “We are happy and so grateful for our children,” she says. “We’ve learned to live frugally, to help and love each other. I’m grateful we brought them into the world.”

Often, the initial steps are the hardest. “The first time we [step into the darkness],” according to Elder Bednar, “it’s not doubt, but there’s a little bit of uncertainty, even a little bit of apprehension, which is quite normal.” While the

process of moving ahead can’t be totally smooth (“not a perfect cycle that’s never interrupted,” he explains), we can gradually grow “line upon line,” with our faith increasing incrementally.

Moving forward takes practice, advises Lazare of Georgia, a convert in the country bordering Russia and Europe. Learning to trust LDS friends was his first step, after which he agreed to accept a priesthood blessing. “Then I could move forward with the missionary discussions,” he explains. As Lazare’s faith in Jesus Christ increased, “I took the big step of baptism even though I wasn’t 100 percent certain. But the Lord gave me courage with each phase, and I am so grateful now that I did it.”

Don’t Give Up

“People who think they’ve sinned too much or gone too far or been away for too long and somehow can’t come back into the circle: My declaration is no one can fall lower than the light of Christ shines. That isn’t possible.”

—Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Growing up in a devout LDS family in Utah, USA, Brian felt like the Church wasn’t for him. “I enjoyed fantasy games, movies, and rock music,” he says, “not Scouts,

scriptures, seminary, and sports.” As soon as he could leave home, he moved into an apartment and “opened myself to the world, including sex and drugs.” After an extended period of what Brian calls “riotous living and experimentation,” he ran into financial troubles and his parents took him in again, although he did not return to church.

The birth of a baby sister caused Brian to reevaluate his views. When he held her for the first time, he recalls, “I knew she was not just another kind of animal.” Somewhat apprehensively, he attended her baby blessing, and when the sacrament came to him, “I passed it on without partaking, but part of me felt spiritually hungry for it.”

Trying to sort out his conflicted feelings, Brian started keeping a journal. “I stayed up writing about my spiritual dilemma late one night,” he says, “and I had my first spiritual experience, though not with the good side.” He felt an evil, hateful, angry force trying to take over his soul. “After that,” he explains, “I knew I needed the Lord.” But having strayed so far, Brian wondered, “Could I be worthy of His help and protection?” He also questioned whether he could ever partake of the sacrament again.

The road back was hard. Giving up cigarettes wasn’t easy, confessing to the bishop took courage, and turning from old friends and activities was difficult. His family, girlfriend, and bishop all supported him, but Brian discovered his main source of strength in Jesus Christ.

“I found the Lord eager to help me,” he remembers. “New opportunities opened to replace my old pursuits. The more effort I put into living the gospel, the clearer my pathway became.” As Brian trusted the Lord and discovered His willingness to forgive and heal, the sacrament took on a greater meaning for him and helped bring him closer to the Savior. “While I’d eaten the bread and water at church as a child hundreds of times, I was finally able to partake of the sacrament for what felt like the first time.”

No One Can Take Your Place

Stepping out of the car and entering church, reaching out to other members, overcoming hurtful situations,

living the gospel without complete assurance about what the future holds, and confessing sins—we all walk difficult and uncertain paths on our way to the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8).

Our personal commitment to following the Savior is essential for safe arrival. While encouragement, love, and acceptance from fellow Church members and leaders are important, each of us may face times when we must be willing to follow the Savior, even if we feel like we’re doing it alone.

Take your place in Jesus Christ’s Church. Don’t compare, let Christ transform you, take steps of faith that will be rewarded, and know that it’s never too late to return. “Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Come, Join with Us,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 21–24.
2. David Mills, “Go to Church, Meet Annoying People,” Feb. 1, 2017, aleteia.org/2017/02/01/go-to-church-meet-annoying-people.





THE

Gospel of Jesus Christ

A REFUGE AND PROTECTION

By Getulio Walter Jagher e Silva
Seminaries and Instituts

The Lord wants to protect His people.

During a time of great persecution in the Church, He stressed the importance of gathering to Zion “for a *defense*, and for a *refuge* from the storm” (D&C 115:6; emphasis added).

This refuge and protection is found by living the gospel of Jesus Christ as we “search these commandments” (D&C 1:37). Therefore, let us examine some principles found in the Doctrine and Covenants that, *if understood and lived,*

will bring us protection and will be a refuge against the temptations, evil, and other dangers that we face today.

We Are Protected as We Seek the Holy Ghost

Having the Holy Ghost with us can be a refuge and a protection from the world. The Lord promised that if Oliver Cowdery would “apply unto” the gift of revelation, “it shall deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, when, if it were not so, they would slay you and bring your soul to destruction” (D&C 8:4). Observe that by the voice of the Spirit, Oliver Cowdery could be protected from death and from sin.

Receiving the truth through the power of the Holy Ghost

will also protect us against the precepts of men and the lies and deceptions of Satan. The Lord promised that “they that are wise and have received the truth, and *have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide*, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day” (D&C 45:57; emphasis added). The power of the Holy Ghost writes the truth in our hearts and protects us from deception.

But heeding the promptings of the Spirit doesn’t mean that we will be protected from every trial. Section 122 of the Doctrine and Covenants shows that even when worthy, we can face sorrows and challenges. In the view

and wisdom of God, who “knoweth all these things” (D&C 127:2), “all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7).

We Are Protected as We Follow Living Prophets

On the day the Church was organized, the Lord commanded His Saints to listen to the prophet:

“Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

“For his [the Church President’s] word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

“For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (D&C 21:4–6).

The Lord tells us in the Doctrine and Covenants that “they who will not hear the

voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the *words of the prophets and apostles*, shall be cut off from among the people” (D&C 1:14; emphasis added).

Listening to and applying the teachings of the living prophets will bring protection and security, for they speak of our current problems and tell us what we need to do to overcome these challenges. What a wonderful blessing it is to have living oracles of the Lord.

In Doctrine and Covenants 101:43–62, the Lord uses a parable about an olive vineyard to demonstrate the importance of listening to a living prophet. The parable compares the prophet to a watchman on a tower. In ancient times people built towers where a watchman could see beyond the city and warn the people when the enemy was approaching.

The parable begins: “Build a tower, that one may overlook the land round about, to be a watchman upon the tower, that mine olive trees may not be broken down when the

The teachings in the Doctrine and Covenants can protect us from the difficulties we will face as we prepare for the Lord’s Second Coming.

enemy shall come to spoil and take upon themselves the fruit of my vineyard” (verse 45; emphasis added).

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught about the protection and blessings that come from following the counsel of a living prophet: “It is no small thing, my brothers and sisters, to have a prophet of God in our midst. . . . When we hear the counsel of the Lord expressed through the words of the President of the Church, our response should be

positive and prompt. History has shown that there is safety, peace, prosperity, and happiness in responding to prophetic counsel.”¹

More important than the physical protection that comes from listening to the prophets is the spiritual protection. It is sorely needed, for “Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you” (D&C 50:3). Listening to the prophets protects us from the philosophies of the world and “the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (D&C 123:12).

We Are Protected as We Are Faithful in Marriage

The Lord promises us that the new and everlasting covenant of marriage can be eternal (see D&C 132:19). This doctrine of exaltation is a refuge from the relationship falsehoods that plague our world. Although many worldly voices claim that marriage is old-fashioned, inconvenient, or unnecessary, the voice of the Lord declares, “Whoso forbiddeth to marry

is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man” (D&C 49:15).

The Lord teaches us how to protect our marriages: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22).

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) explained the all-encompassing nature of this commandment:

“When the Lord says *all* thy heart, it allows for no sharing nor dividing nor depriving. And, to the woman it is paraphrased: ‘Thou shalt love thy husband with *all* thy heart and shalt cleave unto him and none else.’

“The words *none else* eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes preeminent in the life of the husband or wife, and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse.”²

What we see affects us greatly for good or for evil. I think that is why the Lord



warns us in the following verse: “He that *looketh* upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out” (D&C 42:23; emphasis added).

To be protected from the attacks of the enemy, our eyes and hearts should be turned only to our spouse and to the Lord. We must not permit our eyes to wander or desire someone other than our spouse. We need to lock our hearts and minds to be protected from that temptation. This is the Lord’s recipe for success in marriage.

We Are Protected as We Serve a Mission

We have many opportunities to serve in the Church, and the Lord “delight[s] to honor those who serve [Him]” (D&C 76:5). Great principles are taught in the Doctrine and Covenants about serving missions.

The Lord promises that “any man that shall go and preach this gospel of the kingdom, and fail not to

continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb, nor joint; and a hair of his head shall not fall to the ground unnoticed. And they shall not go hungry, neither athirst” (D&C 84:80). Note that the Lord does not exempt us from difficulties but promises that we will be in His divine care.

He added, “I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88). If we serve Him, “it shall come to pass that power shall rest upon thee; thou shalt have great faith, and I will be with thee and go before thy face” (D&C 39:12). Those who serve missions with all their hearts have the promise that they “shall be blessed both spiritually and temporally” (D&C 14:11).

The Lord also extends this protection to the families of those who serve: “I, the Lord, give unto them a promise that I will provide for their families; and an effectual door shall be

opened for them, from henceforth” (D&C 118:3).

And faithful missionaries are promised that “your sins are forgiven you, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your back” (D&C 31:5). This blessing is a refuge for our souls.

We Are Protected as We Obey the Law of Tithing

In the Doctrine and Covenants we find the following teaching concerning tithing: “Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people” (D&C 64:23).

I like to say that the law of tithing is contrary to mathematics because 90 will be greater than 100. As we give the Lord 10 percent of our income, He promises to “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; see also 3 Nephi 24:10).

To evaluate how strong our faith is, we can look at

Like watchmen on a tower, prophets see into the distance and warn of approaching enemies.

our attitude toward the law of tithing. Paying tithing is not a question of money; it is a matter of faith.

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, teaches us: “By our decision now to be a full-tithe payer and our steady efforts to obey, we will be strengthened in our faith and, in time, our hearts will be softened. It is that change in our hearts through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, beyond the offering of our money or goods, that makes it possible for the Lord to promise full-tithe payers protection in the last days [see D&C 64:23]. We can have confidence that we will qualify for that blessing of protection if we commit now to pay a full tithe and are steady in doing it.”³

We Are Protected as We Obey the Word of Wisdom

We live in a time when our health can be threatened by many dangerous substances. The Lord, knowing what we face, taught the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1833 that “in consequence of evils and designs

which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom” (D&C 89:4).

Those who keep the Lord’s law of health have the promise that they “shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones [physical health]; and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures [intellectual and spiritual blessings]; and shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint [physical health].”

And the Lord promises safety to those who obey this law: “And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them” (D&C 89:18–21).

This promise does not mean that we will not die, because death is part of the eternal plan. But “the destroying angel, he who comes to punish the unrighteous for their sins, as he in olden time afflicted the corrupt Egyptians in their wickedness [see

Exodus 12:23, 29], shall pass by the Saints.”⁴

We Are Protected as We Stand in Holy Places

The Lord commands us again and again to “stand in holy places” (see D&C 45:32; 87:8; 101:22). Surely our temples are holy places. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught:

“If we realize what we are doing then the endowment will be a protection to us all our lives—a protection which a man who does not go to the temple does not have.

“I have heard my father [President Joseph F. Smith] say that in the hour of trial, in the hour of temptation, he would think of the promises, the covenants that he made in the House of the Lord, and they were a protection to him.”⁵

Together with temples, the chapels and classrooms of Church meetinghouses and our homes are dedicated, holy places. These places are holy if people who inhabit them are pure in heart and live the commandments of God. When we keep the

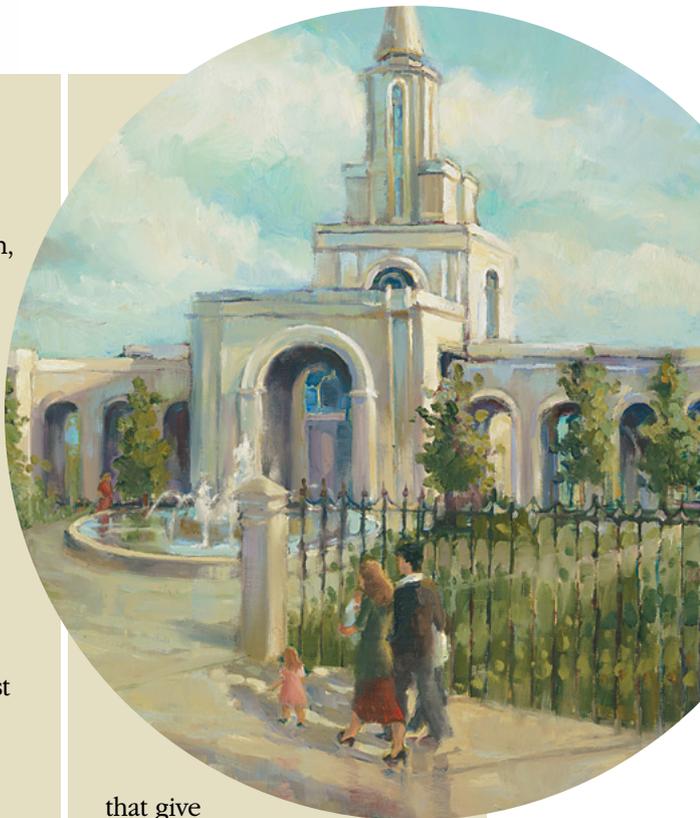
commandments, we enjoy the companionship, direction, and comfort of the Holy Ghost. If He can be our constant companion, then surely we will stand in holy places.

Conclusion

We have seen in the Doctrine and Covenants various forms of protection that the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us when we seek to learn and live these principles. We may ask where to find this protection.

The Lord, showing His love and mercy to the Saints, promised He would be with us: “Be of good cheer, little children; for I am in your midst, and I have not forsaken you” (D&C 61:36). “Hearken, . . . saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1).

When we apply the Atonement and teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ in our lives, we can receive the healing, protection, and refuge



that give us the strength to relieve our burdens, overcome our sins and difficulties, and make us Saints. ■

The author lives in Curitiba, Brazil.

NOTES

1. M. Russell Ballard, “His Word Ye Shall Receive,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 65; *Liahona*, July 2001, 80.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 199.
3. Henry B. Eyring, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 40.
4. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in Conference Report, Oct. 1940, 17; see also *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* (Church Educational System manual, 2001), 211.
5. Joseph Fielding Smith, “The Pearl of Great Price,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1930, 103; see also *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, 259.

SHARING THE SAVIOR'S LOVE AT CHRISTMAS

I was excited to participate in the Church's 2016 "Light the World" Christmas campaign. I looked forward to completing the daily challenges, particularly for day five: "Jesus helped the sick, and so can you."

That day I left work and walked through the gray city streets planning to visit my grandparents. I felt great. It was Christmastime and the world was beautiful. The peal of a charity bell rang through the air. As I neared the streetcar platform, the sound of the bell was drowned out by a homeless woman yelling at the bell ringer.

"You're a fake!" she screamed. "I'm hungry, I'm cold, and you take it all for yourself! You're a fake!"

Most people ignored her, and the bell ringer continued ringing his bell. I put my headphones on, but I could still hear the woman yelling, "You're a fake! I'm hungry. I'm cold."

I remembered I had a 20-dollar bill in my pocket. I considered giving it to the woman. "No," I thought. "If I'm going to give this to someone, I should give it to someone nice." Then the Spirit reminded me of the challenge and whom I was trying to be like. Jesus was the King of kings, yet He served the lowest of the low. I knew what I needed to do.

I walked toward the woman. She wasn't yelling now, but tears ran down her cheeks.

I walked toward the woman. She wasn't yelling now, but her eyes were closed and tears ran down her cheeks. I took the 20-dollar bill from my pocket and handed it to her.

"Rough day?" I asked.

She looked up at me. "Yeah," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said. I wrapped my arms around her, and she cried into my shoulder until the streetcar came.

"Thanks," the woman said when

we said goodbye. "And not just for the money. Thanks for the hug. I needed a hug."

Hugging a random person on the street was not something I had planned on doing, but I know it's something Jesus would have done. I am grateful the Lord gave me the opportunity to serve as He would have. Jesus helped the sick, the poor, and the needy.

So can I. ■

Jordan Wright, Utah, USA



Two large boxes had my name on them but no return address.



CHRISTMAS PACKAGES FOR ME?

I was serving in the California Sacramento Mission during Christmas 2003. My companion and the two other sister missionaries we shared an apartment with began receiving gifts and letters from their relatives and friends. I knew it would not be the same for me.

My family in Argentina had few resources, and their letters were usually delayed two to three months. I was far from my family, but I was happy to spend Christmas in the service of Jesus Christ.

On Christmas Eve, we were getting ready for bed when one of the sisters told me that someone had left some packages at the door with my name on them.

“For me? It can’t be!” I said, amazed. Two large boxes had my name on them but no return address. I was excited, and the other sisters were excited for me too. I opened the packages, which were full of gifts, sweets, children’s drawings, and other items! I couldn’t hold back the tears.

“Who could have sent me these packages?” I wondered. None of us knew, but we all rejoiced because of the generosity.

Several days after Christmas, I still did not know who had sent the packages. So I called the mission office and asked the secretary if she could tell me the name of the mysterious sender. She told me that members in a ward who wanted to remain

anonymous had decided to send packages to me with Christmas goodies. I will always be thankful for the generosity of the ward that brought so much love that Christmas Eve and for the support I received during my mission.

I learned that every member of the Church can make the missionaries—though far from home—feel at home through their encouragement and service. That was one of the best Christmases of my life. I was serving the Savior and felt His love through the members of His Church. ■

Elisabet Andersen Bogado, Neuquén, Argentina

CHRISTMAS THROUGH MY DAUGHTER'S EYES

A quiet calm settled over my family and me as we walked into a barn to see a live nativity. Animals lined the stalls, and a man and woman, dressed as Joseph and Mary, stood with a baby wrapped in the woman's arms. They were quiet and focused on the little child. The whole atmosphere was very peaceful.

My older children, my wife, and I stood while my youngest daughter sat on a hay bale in front of us. She was quiet and still, and her eyes stayed focused on the baby. When the rest of my family was ready to go, I placed a hand on my daughter's shoulder and whispered that it was time to leave. She said she wanted to stay with baby Jesus. Her words touched my heart, and I decided to stay with her.

A few minutes later, I gently took my daughter by the hand and told her we needed to leave. She said

My daughter was quiet and still, and her eyes stayed focused on the baby Jesus.

she still wanted to stay. I put my arm around her and knelt beside her.

It didn't take long for me to feel as if I had traveled back in time and was with Mary and Joseph. I then understood why my daughter wanted to stay. I felt the Spirit wash over me. In that place, I felt that I was in the presence of the Savior. Tears glistened in my eyes as I felt of His love. When it was finally time to leave, I picked up

my little girl. As I turned toward the exit, I heard her tell baby Jesus goodbye and how much she loved Him.

That evening I shared an experience with my daughter that I will treasure for the rest of my life, and I almost missed it. That night, I was given a gift. I felt closer to God and felt His love for me. I am grateful for the Savior and the

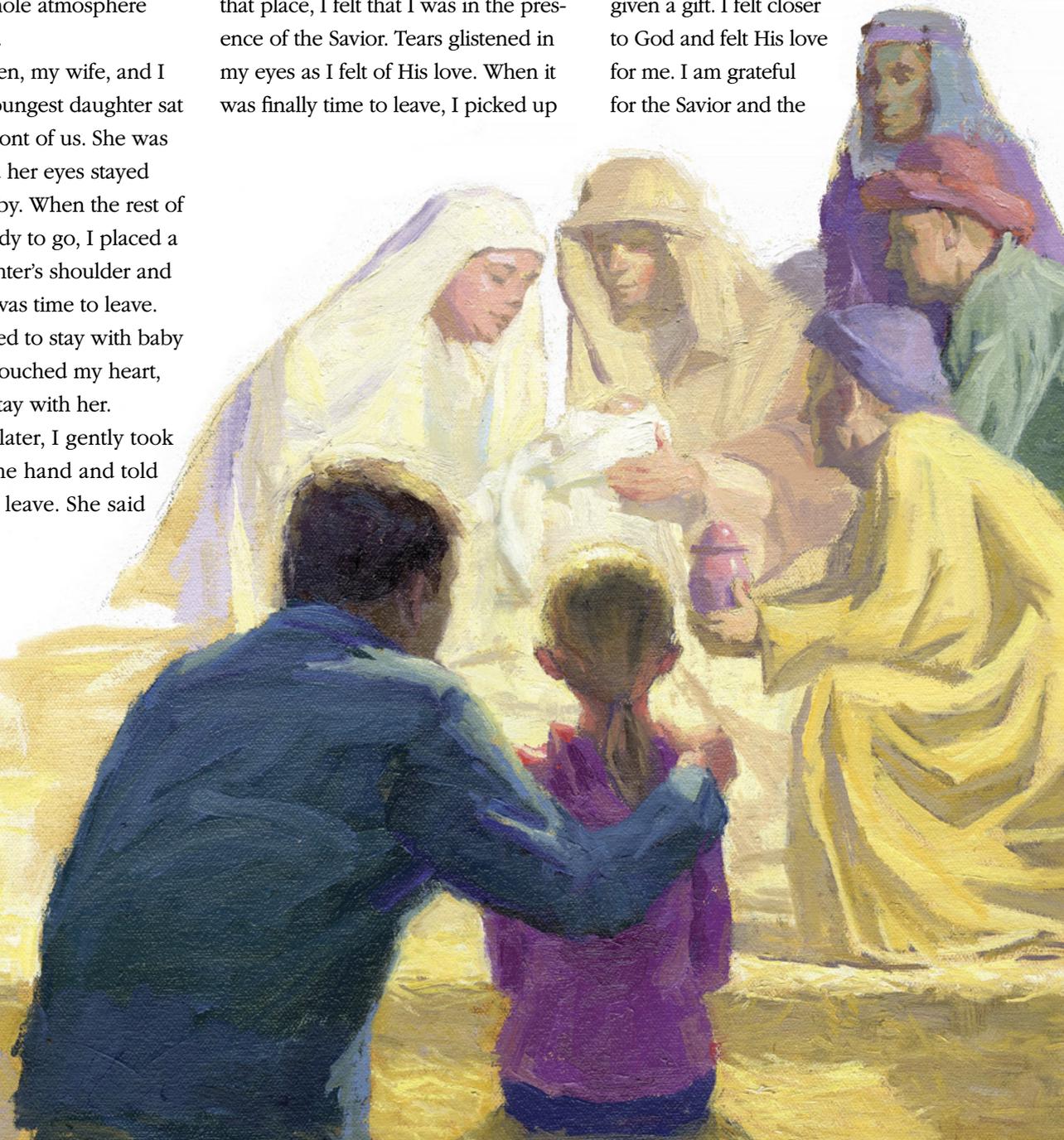


ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN GARNIS

A FAMILY GIFT FOR THE SAVIOR

opportunity to remember His birth. I know that the Savior's life, example, and Atonement constitute a wonderful gift of never-ending love from God to all His children. I will always cherish this gift deep in my heart. ■

Aaron Adams, South Carolina, USA



As December approached, I was busy preparing for the rush of the Christmas season. For four years, Christmas festivities had been held in our home, but this year I felt overwhelmed. When I discussed with my husband everything we needed to do—buy presents, prepare food, and do many other things—we decided to cancel the Christmas party and do something different this Christmas. We wanted to do something that we could give as a gift for the Savior.

Throughout December, we held family home evenings about the life of Jesus Christ, went to the temple, and planned family service projects. My husband was a bishop at the time, and we decided that on Christmas Day we would sing for all the widows in the ward. As a family, we began to practice several hymns we would sing. My children loved to sing “Away in a Manger” (*Hymns*, no. 206).

On Christmas Eve, we made cards with special Christmas messages and prepared treats to take on our visits. I was pleased to see our family so united and happy to serve others with such love. I could feel the spirit of Christmas.

On Christmas Day, our children were eager to make the visits. With each home we visited, we felt happier, and it seemed that the hymns became better each time we sang. When we arrived at the last house, it looked like no one was home. We waited a few minutes, and the children began to get restless. Eventually an elderly widow came out to meet us with her Sunday clothes on and her hair nicely combed. When she saw us, her eyes filled with tears. I became emotional as well and could hardly sing.

As we returned home, our five-year-old daughter told us she didn't want to go home but wanted to keep singing. Before I could respond, my nine-year-old said, “We'll just do it again next year!”

For our family, this was an unforgettable Christmas because we lifted others and showed our love for Jesus Christ. As I reflected on the events of the day, I felt the love of the Lord and remembered His words, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). ■

Maria Aparecida da Kiyama Silva, São Paulo, Brazil





PORTRAITS OF FAITH

The dedication of the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple in 2016 has given Josephine the opportunity to attend weekly. In the temple she finds strength and healing for dealing with the trials of life.

LESLIE NILSSON, PHOTOGRAPHER

Josephine Scere

Pennsylvania, USA

I was born into hardship. My mother was an immigrant from Liberia, we were poor, and I was abused as a child while left in the care of people my mother thought she could trust. That has made certain things really hard in my life.

What has kept me so determined to live the gospel is my trials.

Life is hard whether you're a Latter-day Saint or not. My strength comes from my relationship with my Savior and with my son, Enoch. Keeping the covenants I made in the temple also gives me strength.

Truth is truth, regardless. You don't have to argue it. You don't have to prove it. It just is. It's real, and it's real for everyone. It's real for people who live in Salt Lake City, Utah, and it's real for people who live in the slums of Philadelphia. I think that's what should carry us.

See more about Josephine's story at lds.org/go/portraitsE1217.

Learn more about temples at temples/lds.org.

Mongolia's Got Talent!

By Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, Petra Chou,
and Odgerel Ochirjav

Last December a choir from the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia East and West Stakes reached the semi-finals of the nationally televised show *Mongolia's Got Talent*. The choir—composed of seminary and institute students, half of whom are returned missionaries—never thought they would have this kind of opportunity to share their beliefs and talents.

In 2015 an Area Seventy visited Mongolia and provided training concerning the public affairs efforts of the Church. Odgerel Ochirjav, president of the Ulaanbaatar Mongolia West Stake, was unsure how to proceed. Then in January 2016 his brother-in-law called and said, “I was watching *Mongolia's Got Talent*. . . . I had a strong impression that your Church choir should participate.”

President Ochirjav discussed the idea with the choir director, Sister Unurjargal Purev. She and the choir members were enthusiastic about the possibility. The choir became known as Zion, or “SION,” an acronym in

Mongolian for *spirit, faith, mind,* and *unity*.

The First Round

For the first round of the competition in March 2016, SION performed a mash-up of two songs. One judge said, “I see your faces light up! . . . We need to put your video on YouTube to showcase this show to the world.”

Another judge asked the choir what they would do if they won the grand prize of U.S. \$50,000. He was impressed when they said they wanted to donate it all, as a special Christmas gift, to an orphanage.

The Second Round

Of the 400 participants, SION was among the 200 who advanced to the second round, but their performance was scheduled for the same day as a multi-stake youth conference, which involved half of the 35 choir members. The choir decided to go to the second round, so they hired a bus and, following their performance, traveled eight hours to the youth conference.

Of the 200 acts, SION was among the 32 to advance to

Relatively few
Mongolians know
about the Church,
but this choir
helped change
that.

the semi-finals. The choir began to be featured on social media related to *Mongolia's Got Talent*.

The Semi-finals

They practiced from June to September to prepare for



the semi-finals. On the day of the performance, they woke up at 4:00 a.m. in -29 degrees F (-34 degrees C) weather. Sister Nomuungerel Enkhtuvshin, a choir member, said, “Many members of our group caught a cold. But they got better as we prayed for them.”

People throughout Mongolia viewed the show and texted in their votes.

Brother Shijir Purevdorj said, “As a result of this TV show, many people are cultivating a positive attitude toward the Church.”

The Blessings

Choir members themselves also received blessings. Brother Odgerel Tumursukh said, “We devoted our attention and time for a whole year while managing our jobs and other

facets of our lives. Although it was difficult, we have received many blessings. I have learned to manage my time and make sacrifices for the Lord.”

In addition to increasing their faith, members of the choir gained self-confidence, developed friendships, and learned unity. “Singing in the choir has helped us to learn how to forgive and support one another,” said Brother Ganbaatar Ulziiduuren. “We have become more united.” Sister Bilguunzaya Tungalagtuul learned “that I should never doubt myself or think that I can’t do something.”

Brother Bayartsogt Lhagvajav said, “Singing in the choir has brought many blessings to my family, and it also helped me to receive the answers I was seeking for some time. Our leaders offered us solution[s]. . . . It has affirmed my testimony that our

leaders are called of God.”

“When I participated in *Mongolia’s Got Talent*,” Sister Onon Dalaikhuu explained, “I learned that encouraging and supporting each other [was the] key to [our] success.” Sister Dalaikhuu’s responsibilities included organizing crew members, which helped strengthen her leadership abilities. She added, “We felt that [the] Lord guided and influenced us. Many of us were sick, busy, tired, and feeling overwhelmed. However, when we prayed together, somehow we would find more power and desire to endure.”

Although the choir didn’t receive enough votes to move on to the finals, their performances gave the Church significant exposure throughout Mongolia. President Ochirjav explains, “We were obedient to an assignment by our priesthood leaders, and the Lord prepared a way. . . . Now the whole city [Ulaanbaatar] talks

about the Mormon choir’s participation in

Mongolia’s Got Talent.” ■

The authors live in Utah, USA, and Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.



My **Gift** to the Savior

By Cherstan Pixton

Russia is very cold in the winter and often overcast, making the days gloomy and somewhat miserable. It was late November and on top of the depressing weather, I was feeling lonely, inadequate, and incapable of being a good missionary. I had just been assigned to train a new companion, and while Sister Hart was wonderful, the pressure was now on me to learn the language better, be an example, and find someone—anyone—to teach.

We had just gotten word that our new mission president was going to hold a zone conference in Yekaterinburg, five hours from our area of Perm. Early on a chilly December morning, Sister Hart and I went to the train station.

As we waited I pondered on the feelings I'd been having. I thought of the upcoming holidays and my longing to be with my family. The

excitement to be on a mission had faded and now I felt like I hadn't accomplished much as a missionary in my nine months out. Finally the call for our train's arrival chimed, so we boarded and took our seats. I found myself thinking of the Savior. I closed my eyes and prayed that I would be able to know how to rid myself of these feelings and better focus on Him.

At the zone conference the next day, President Rust's talk was beautiful and heartfelt. When Sister Rust got up to speak, she shared a simple story about how the Savior is the shepherd who would go and find the one sheep that had wandered off and bring that sheep back to the fold. She talked about the sacrifices the Savior has made for us, and finally she bore a powerful testimony of the opportunity that we as missionaries have to serve Him by bringing His lost sheep to

I felt inadequate as a missionary. What could I do to stop focusing on myself and start focusing on the Savior?

the fold. Sister Rust challenged us to think of what gift we could give to the Savior for Christmas.

When she made that challenge, I felt the strongest impression that the gift that I was supposed to give to the Savior was to simply talk to more people. Up until that point I had been terrified to start up conversations with complete strangers



—especially in Russian! I didn't want them to think I was dumb for not understanding them, so it was just easier not to say anything at all. I knew, however, at that moment, exactly what I needed to do. I needed to stop thinking of myself and start thinking of my brothers and sisters. I set a goal to speak to someone about the gospel on every transportation vehicle I took for the rest of the month and to devote that as my Christmas gift to the Savior.

When Sister Hart and I boarded another

train back to Perm the next morning, I started on my goal by talking to the people I sat next to. They weren't very interested in what I had to share, but at least I tried!

Every day was a struggle as I fought to give my gift to the Savior, but slowly I found myself feeling happier and more confident—I felt I was better fulfilling my calling as a missionary. Christmas came and went, but I decided that I would continue talking to people. I started talking to them not only when we took

public transportation but also on the streets, in the store, at the library, and everywhere else we went.

We didn't find anyone to teach through my talking to people more; however, I feel that I planted gospel seeds. We made new friends with bus drivers, people at our local grocery store, and others. The best part was that when we saw someone again, we would often see them smile, and they would be the one to say hello to us first. I have faith that those seeds we planted will someday blossom when new opportunities arise for those people to learn about the gospel.

Heavenly Father works in small and simple ways, and sometimes it just starts with a simple "hello."

Thinking back now to that time on the train to Yekaterinburg, I realize that Heavenly Father answered my prayer. He helped me see that missionary work isn't about me—it's about others, and when we put others above ourselves and our own worries and sorrows, we find the happiness we are all seeking. It's amazing to me how giving the Savior is, for even when we strive to give Him everything we can, He blesses us and gives us back a hundredfold. ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.



ILLUSTRATION BY DINARA MIRTAIPOVA

Finding Her Faith Again

*The way back isn't always easy,
but it's always there.*

By David Dickson
Church Magazines

The words “[Falling] away into forbidden paths and [becoming] lost” (1 Nephi 8:28) probably don't sound very hopeful to most of us as we read them in the Book of Mormon. Quite the opposite, really. It's all too easy to imagine a sort of gloomy finality for this group of people described in Lehi's vision of the tree of life—the group who tasted the fruit and then left it behind.

But Te Oranoa M., age 17, from New Zealand has a different take on things. “What inspires me about this scripture,” she says, “is that it doesn't say they are lost forever.”

What an incredible insight! And it's one that comes from personal experience. “I, myself, fell away from the Church,” she says, “but I have been able to come back.”

Fading Away

Te Oranoa grew up in the Church and talks about gaining her own testimony and even setting spiritual goals. “But that testimony grew cold,” she says.

In some ways, she found common ground with Amulek, particularly in the way he described himself to the people of Ammonihah: “I did harden my heart, for I was called many times

and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know” (Alma 10:6).

For Te Oranoa, that scripture hits close to home. “Just like Amulek, I knew all these spiritual things, and the Spirit was telling me to do certain things, but because I was being a bit stubborn and a bit prideful, I wouldn't do them. Afterward, my testimony kind of faded away.”

In the end, Amulek's story would become more than merely familiar to Te Oranoa. It would also become a turning point on the road back.

Finding a Warm Memory

Even during the time when her faith had grown cold, she could still remember sweet experiences from before. Te Oranoa never forgot how she'd felt when attending the temple

with her youth group or going to a youth conference.

“There was a pattern,” she says. “I'd feel really good when I came to church, but I didn't feel good when I missed church.”

There finally came a day when Te Oranoa decided to see if she could connect with those good feelings again. The first thing she did was to read through recent general conference addresses.

An October 2016 general conference address, “Learn from Alma and Amulek,” by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, woke something in Te Oranoa's soul. She recognized a lot of her own life and feelings as President Uchtdorf described how Amulek's faith had faded. She also remembered more strongly than



*“You can turn
back to the
Lord whenever
you want.”*

ever the happiness she had enjoyed when her faith was stronger. Instantly, she wanted to make some changes.

“I was hoping to find something to reignite that fire of my testimony,” she explains, “so I read President Uchtdorf’s talk, and yes, I felt on fire!”

Hoping for Eternity

Te Oranoa’s path back to faith hasn’t always been easy, but there is a particular light at the end of the tunnel that keeps her going: the hope of an eternal family.

“Families can be together forever,” she says. “That’s my biggest dream, my biggest hope in life. Whenever I want to learn about something, or I find a doctrine hard to understand, I try and relate it back to eternal families. For example, why is Jesus Christ’s Atonement important to me? For one thing, I need His Atonement in my life so I can be worthy to enter the temple and be sealed to my family for all eternity.”

Turning to God

It’s perhaps worth remembering that the people in Lehi’s vision who fell away after tasting the fruit did, in fact, still *taste* it. They must have known of its goodness, even if only briefly. And they can discover it again. That’s the hope Te Oranoa clings to, for herself and for others.

“You don’t have to keep going down those forbidden paths for the rest of your life,” she says. “You can turn back to the Lord whenever you want.” ■





THE MAGIC OF *Christmas* *Carols*

A CAROL FOR JOAQUÍN

Caroling isn't much of an Argentine Christmas tradition. In fact, Christmas here is quite different from the traditional snowy scene you might think of. Because we live in the Southern Hemisphere, Christmas always makes *me* think of a large fruit salad!

So when my parents suggested we try caroling as a family, my siblings and I felt a mix of confusion and excitement. We weren't sure of our musical abilities, so we decided to make and bring some cookies to give the people we visited a reason to smile, at least.

A man named Joaquín had been a part of our ward for as long as I could remember. That December he had gotten very sick and could no longer attend sacrament meeting. My dad and brothers were among those who took the sacrament to him in the hospital after church on Sundays.

On the Sunday before Christmas, our whole family jumped into the car to visit Joaquín, hoping we would bring a warm Christmas spirit. When we arrived, the nurse directed us to his bed. He had his scriptures and a hymnal at his bedside, as if he had been expecting us.

He was so obviously happy that we were there, and we all immediately felt such love for him. My brothers prepared, blessed, and passed the sacrament. Before leaving, we sang the beautiful melody in "Far, Far Away on Judea's Plains": "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, goodwill to men" (*Hymns*, no. 212).

Certainly it was peace and goodwill that entered our hearts as he called us "angels" and thanked us for visiting, when all we had wanted was to bring those feelings to him.

Julia G., Buenos Aires, Argentina

THE LAST STOP OF THE NIGHT

It was Christmas Eve, and I did *not* want to be out caroling.

However, my mom thought it would be fun if the family piled into our old car and drove down icy neighborhood roads to sing carols to three widows in our ward, and my dad was happy to support her suggestion.

I felt awkward. Who would want to hear us? I would die of embarrassment if I saw anyone I knew. Grumbling and sulking, I crawled into the back seat with my brother and sister.

The drive to the first apartment was only a few blocks away. Nobody answered. We drove to the second stop. Again, no answer. My spirits began to rise.

As we pulled into the narrow driveway of our last stop, I thought, “Please let no one be home.”

It was now dark outside. As my mother knocked and waited, the front porch remained dark. Good. Soon we would be home, where I could escape into my bedroom.

Suddenly the porch light snapped on and the door opened. I was so embarrassed. I felt certain we had disturbed her.

“Come in, come in,” the small, wiry woman said. She pointed to her old upright piano.

“Do you play?” she asked my mother. “Let’s sing around the piano.”

Her warmth and enthusiasm softened my heart. Maybe she didn’t mind

so much that we were there. We had sung a few songs when she offered us hot chocolate.

“Can you come help?” she asked me. As we entered the kitchen, I was stunned to see a beautiful table set that was delightfully decorated for Christmas. It was so festive! At each place setting was a small, carefully wrapped package.

“Who is this for?” I asked. I knew she lived alone.

“For my neighbors,” she explained. “Every Christmas I invite those like myself—those with no family nearby—over for Christmas breakfast and a little treat.”

The idea exploded in my 13-year-old brain. Admiration filled my stubborn heart. How beautiful this room was. How beautiful this petite older sister was. How beautiful was my mother to bring us here. At last I was happy.

At church the next month this sister thanked us again for visiting. She told us we were the only ones that year who had remembered *her*. A few months later she passed away unexpectedly.

I look back at that Christmas and feel thankful for wonderful parents and for this older sister, each of whom wanted to bring Christmas cheer to others. ■

Brooke K., Utah, USA





Eight Reasons Christmas Is a **GREAT TIME** to Be a **MISSIONARY**

There's something about the holidays that makes sharing the gospel even better!

By Charlotte Larcabal

Church Magazines

You love your friends. You love the gospel. And you have no idea how to put the two together.

If this sounds like you, you're not alone. Lots of people want to share the gospel with their friends but are terrified about seeming pushy or weird. Sharing the gospel can be nerve-racking.

But never fear! Even if you've never mentioned the Church to anyone before, your holiday season can be filled with tons of normal, easy, and totally doable missionary moments. How?

The first thing to do is pray. Try asking Heavenly Father for opportunities to share the gospel. Pray to know who to talk to or invite and pray for the courage to actually do it!

The second thing is to start. And start *now*. Here's a secret: Missionary work is *so easy* around Christmas. Why? We've got eight reasons.

1. Everybody loves a good party.

Chances are, your ward or maybe even your family will be planning a Christmas party. Invite a friend to join in on the fun! There will probably be a song or a message that's all about the Savior, and it could be just what your friend needs to hear.

2. Inviting people to church at Christmastime is totally normal.

There's something about Christmas that makes people want to go to church! This is a great time to let your friends know that they are welcome to see how the members of your church worship the Savior.

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

I had been talking to a neighbor who is very interested in the gospel. I invited her to Mutual, but something always kept her from coming. One night I realized that I had not prayed about it. Right away, I knelt down and prayed for the Holy Ghost to be with me and to guide me. After I prayed, I waited for an answer but received none. Puzzled, I tried again, but this time I felt prompted to thank God for all the blessings I have. I also prayed that I could help others realize the many blessings they have and all the blessings they could have thanks to the Savior's power. I felt strongly that no matter how long it takes, my Father in Heaven will be with me every step of the way, lending me patience and blessing me more. Soon after those prayers, my friend came to Mutual with me!

Elora C., age 14, Arizona, USA





3. Christmas treats are the perfect way to make an invitation or a gospel message a little sweeter.

A plate of cookies along with your favorite scripture? Some fudge and a quote about Christmas? Yes, please!

4. Families tend to be gathered together.

Spending time with family is a big part of Christmas traditions, so it should be pretty easy to talk about your family, your holiday traditions, and your beliefs about families.

5. Lights and cocoa are all the rage.

Drink cocoa or check out the Christmas decorations around town for family home evening or a Mutual activity. Holiday activities are fun for everyone, and it's a great way for a friend to see how you live your religion.

MIGHT NOT SEEM LIKE MUCH

A while back, my friend from church moved away, and I was left the only Mormon at my school. My Sunday School teacher had recently talked to us about how we could share the gospel with our friends. I prayed to know how I could do this, and I definitely received an answer. I was talking with one of my friends, and we started talking about his stance on dating. I explained that I don't believe in dating until the age of 16, and to my surprise, he had some of the same standards. It might not seem like much, but it was really an answer to my prayers, and my testimony of prayer has been strengthened.

David S., age 13, Texas, USA

6. The Christmas Mormon Messages are awesome and easy to share.

Bring the Christmas spirit to social media by sharing “A Savior Is Born—Christmas Video”! How many of your Facebook friends would love to see a little angel help a grumpy janitor in “The Reason Behind Christmas” or a sweet story about selflessness in “The Coat: A Story of Charity”? Search LDS.org or the Mormon Channel for these and other great Christmas messages to share.

7. Christmas is a celebration of the Savior.

Many Christians will be a bit more focused on the Savior around Christmas. In addition to sharing daily service ideas, Mormon.org will also highlight the Savior’s teachings and ways to “Light the World.” That might be exactly what your friends are looking for to celebrate Christ at Christmas.

8. There are so many ways to give and serve around Christmas!

Service is an amazing way to be a missionary, and there are many opportunities to serve others around the holidays. You could visit a nursing home, sing Christmas carols to a neighbor, or donate goods to a local shelter. You can find service ideas for the first 25 days in December by visiting Mormon.org.

What are you waiting for?

Because of the gospel, you know about Jesus Christ and all the hope that He brings. That’s an amazing gift, and it’s one you can give to others. If you sincerely ask Heavenly Father for opportunities to share the gospel, He will inspire you to know who you can talk to. Christmas is a time of sharing, of giving, and of remembering Jesus Christ. ■



A SEASON OF CELEBRATION

“This is a season of rejoicing! A season of celebration! A wonderful time when we acknowledge that our Almighty God sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the world! To redeem us!”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “Can We See the Christ in Christmas?” (First Presidency Christmas devotional, Dec. 6, 2009), broadcasts.lds.org; “How to See the Christ in Christmas,” *New Era*, Dec. 2013, 48.

A photograph of a weathered wooden door with a metal strap, set in a stone wall. The door has a small hole in the middle. The wall is made of rough, light-colored stone. There are some green plants growing on the wall above the door.

EACH OF US IS AN
INNKEEPER
WHO DECIDES IF
THERE IS ROOM
FOR JESUS!

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926-2004),
"Settle This in Your Hearts," Oct. 1992
general conference



By President
Thomas S. Monson

HOW TO FEEL THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas is a glorious season of the year. It is also a busy time for most of us. It is my hope and prayer that we may not become so caught up in the pressures of the season that we place our emphasis on the wrong things and miss the simple joys of commemorating the birth of the Holy One of Bethlehem.

Finding the real joy of Christmas comes not in the hurrying and the scurrying to get more done. We find the real joy of Christmas when we **make the Savior the focus of the season.**

Our celebration of Christmas should be a reflection of the love

and selflessness taught by the Savior. **Giving**, not getting, brings to full bloom the Christmas spirit. We **feel more kindly** one to another. We reach out in love to help those less fortunate. Our **hearts are softened.** Enemies are forgiven, friends remembered, and God obeyed. The spirit of Christmas illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world's busy life and become more interested in people than in things. To catch the real meaning of the spirit of Christmas, we need only **seek the Spirit of Christ.**

May we **give as the Savior gave.** To give of oneself is a holy gift. We give as a remembrance of all

the Savior has given. May we also give gifts that have eternal value, along with our gifts that eventually break or are forgotten. How much better the world would be if we all gave gifts of understanding and compassion, of service and friendship, of kindness and gentleness.

As the Christmas season envelops us with all its glory, may we, as did the Wise Men, seek a bright, particular star to guide us in our celebration of the Savior's birth. May we all make the journey to Bethlehem in spirit, taking with us a tender, caring heart as our gift to the Savior. ■

From the 2013 First Presidency Christmas Devotional.



“I’ve been praying for something important, but I don’t know if I have received an answer. How will I recognize it?”

Receiving answers to prayers has been described as a process: first you study your question in your mind; then you ask God if your answer is right. If your answer is right, the Lord will “speak peace to your mind” (D&C 6:23).

But what if you don’t feel an overwhelming sense of peace? Or what if you feel like you have an answer, but you’re not sure if it’s you or the Holy Ghost?

According to Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Revelation comes in small increments over time and is granted according to our desire, worthiness, and preparation.”¹ It doesn’t always come suddenly; most of the time it comes “line upon line, precept upon precept” (2 Nephi 28:30), and often you have to take a step in one direction even *before* you feel like you have a full answer. Sometimes you might not get an answer at all—that’s when you need to act anyway with faith that God will answer when the time is right.

If you’re worried about whether your answer is coming from you or from the Holy Ghost, remember that the best answer will be one that “inviteth and enticeth [you] to do good, and to love God, and to serve him” (Moroni 7:13).

NOTE

1. David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” April 2011 general conference.



Decide and Wait for the Spirit

One summer I didn’t feel like the Lord had given me an answer about an important decision. I had prayed sincerely every day to know His will for me, and I told Him what I desired to do. Still without a distinct answer, I made my decision. I immediately felt the Spirit witnessing to me that the decision I made would help me grow and become more like my Father in Heaven. Sometimes we need to act to receive an answer—Heavenly Father respects our agency and our righteous desires. If we are living worthily, His Spirit will guide us through our desires because they will be aligned with His.

Amanda H., age 16, Utah, USA

Pray for Help

I have prayed and received answers for many things, but the instances that stand out the most are the ones regarding schoolwork. Prior to an exam, I would pray to be calm and to be able to recall the information I had studied. Many times I remembered whole paragraphs of information that I know I never would have been able to remember without His help. He has blessed my life dearly, and I value the power of prayer and His influence I feel through it.

Emily B., age 18, Queensland, Australia





Be Patient and Observant

A while ago, I challenged myself to pray for service opportunities. I thought of ways I could help others, but I did not receive what I believed was a prompting. I was getting discouraged, when my mom shared with me Alma 5:40: “Whatsoever is good cometh from God.” I realized that the quiet thoughts of service I had were actually promptings from the Holy Ghost. I know that our prayers are always answered; we just have to be patient, be observant, and trust in the Lord.

Lybee B., age 16, Oregon, USA



Trust in the Spirit

When you learn to trust in the Holy Ghost and develop the ability to recognize the way that Heavenly Father answers you, you will see how accessible the Spirit is to you. His voice prompts us so gently that if we are preoccupied with the things of the world, we will not notice the delicate whisperings and feelings that come from on high. If, however, we are living the way we should, then we will always have the promise that we will know in our heart what the Spirit is saying in response to our supplications.

Sister Ribeiro, age 24, Brazil Porto Alegre South Mission



Try It and See!

Sometimes the Lord requires us to act on our faith before we get a complete answer.

Do you want to know if the Word of Wisdom is truly a commandment from God? Then live it! Do you want to know if the Book of Mormon is true? Then read it! Trust the promise in John 7:17: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

Preston O., age 19, Utah, USA



By the Power of Christ

I was watching the Face to Face broadcast with Elder Rasband and Sister Oscarson when a youth asked this same question about receiving answers. Sister Oscarson quoted Moroni 7:16, “By the power



INSPIRATION COMES A PIECE AT A TIME

“When we seek inspiration to help make decisions,

the Lord gives gentle promptings. These require us to think, to exercise faith, to work, to struggle at times, and to act. Seldom does the whole answer to a decisively important matter or complex problem come all at once. More often, it comes a piece at a time, without the end in sight.”

Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer,” Oct. 1989 general conference.

and gift of Christ . . . ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.” That scripture shows us that we will be able to know the will of God for us with a perfect knowledge. Feel the Spirit and you will know the answer.

Sara S., age 17, Santa Catarina, Brazil

UPCOMING QUESTION

“Sometimes I don’t feel worthy to be loved by the Savior. How can I overcome this feeling and recognize my self-worth?”

Submit your answer and, if desired, a high-resolution photograph by January 15, 2018, at iahona.lds.org (click “Submit an Article”).

Responses may be edited for length or clarity.

OUR SPACE



MAKING NEW FRIENDS

When my parents told me that my family was going to move, I was very excited to make new friends. When we arrived in our new city, we went to church. I could feel the Spirit very strongly there, and I knew things would go well.

Soon after, I began at my new school. I was one of the only Mormons in the school. When I walked in, I felt very out of place. I could tell I was different from the other students.

Over the first week or so, I tried to make friends. But I felt so awkward! I tried sitting by different people each class and eating lunch at different

tables every day. It didn't seem like I was making any progress.

I decided to strive to be a better example to my peers. I focused on Personal Progress and diligent scripture study. As I worked hard, I realized more fully that I am a daughter of God and that He loves me.

As time went by and I continued to do these things, I noticed something: I had begun to make friends at school. It was almost like people were drawn to me. They commented on how I stood out. I realized that it was because I was letting my light shine. I had different mannerisms than my classmates. I dressed modestly, I used

good language, and I was kind to others.

We are all children of God. I'm so grateful that I let my light shine, even though I felt out of place. I know that we are never alone if we are on the Lord's side! ■

Rebekah C., Prince Edward Island, Canada

COULD I SHARE THE BOOK OF MORMON?

During Mutual, we were given an assignment to become missionaries by getting a companion, sharing our testimonies with a nonmember, and giving our nonmember friend a copy of the Book of Mormon.

After Mutual, I asked my mother for some advice. She promised me that if I prayed in faith and asked Heavenly Father, He would surely answer.

It took me two weeks to find someone who would accept the Book of Mormon. At first, I was rejected again and again. I was so tired of getting hurt that I was about to give up.

One night, I had a dream about a woman who was a close friend to my family. As I dreamed, I realized that she was the one for me and my companion to visit. When I woke up, I thanked the Lord for helping me.

At the next Mutual, my companion and I wrote our testimonies on the front page of the book and made a fruit basket for the woman. We went to her house, knocked on her door, and waited. Even though I was scared that she might reject it, I told myself to have a little faith. She finally came outside with a happy face and accepted the Book of Mormon.

Through this experience, I learned that when you have a little faith and you know that Heavenly Father is there, you can easily feel that the impossible is possible. ■

Rapunzel L., American Samoa

MY VACATION FROM PIANO LESSONS

One week, I decided to declare a holiday from practicing the piano. My piano teacher did not authorize this holiday and neither did my mom. For a full week I didn't practice. I thought it was great because I had a good time relaxing and doing other things.

The fun stopped on Thursday night, when my mom reminded me that my piano lesson was the next morning. I thought I had a solution: I woke up an hour earlier and started to practice. But I realized that my efforts were too little, too late. I had enjoyed the freedom to choose, but I hadn't considered the consequences.

The next morning when I met with my teacher, the consequences started to unfold. I had to admit that I hadn't practiced, and my teacher told me I should make up all the practice time I missed, in addition to my regular practice time.

I am grateful for the lessons I learned about agency, responsibility, and accountability. Every choice has a consequence, and I learned that I will make better decisions if I take time to consider the consequences first. ■

Blake H., Utah, USA

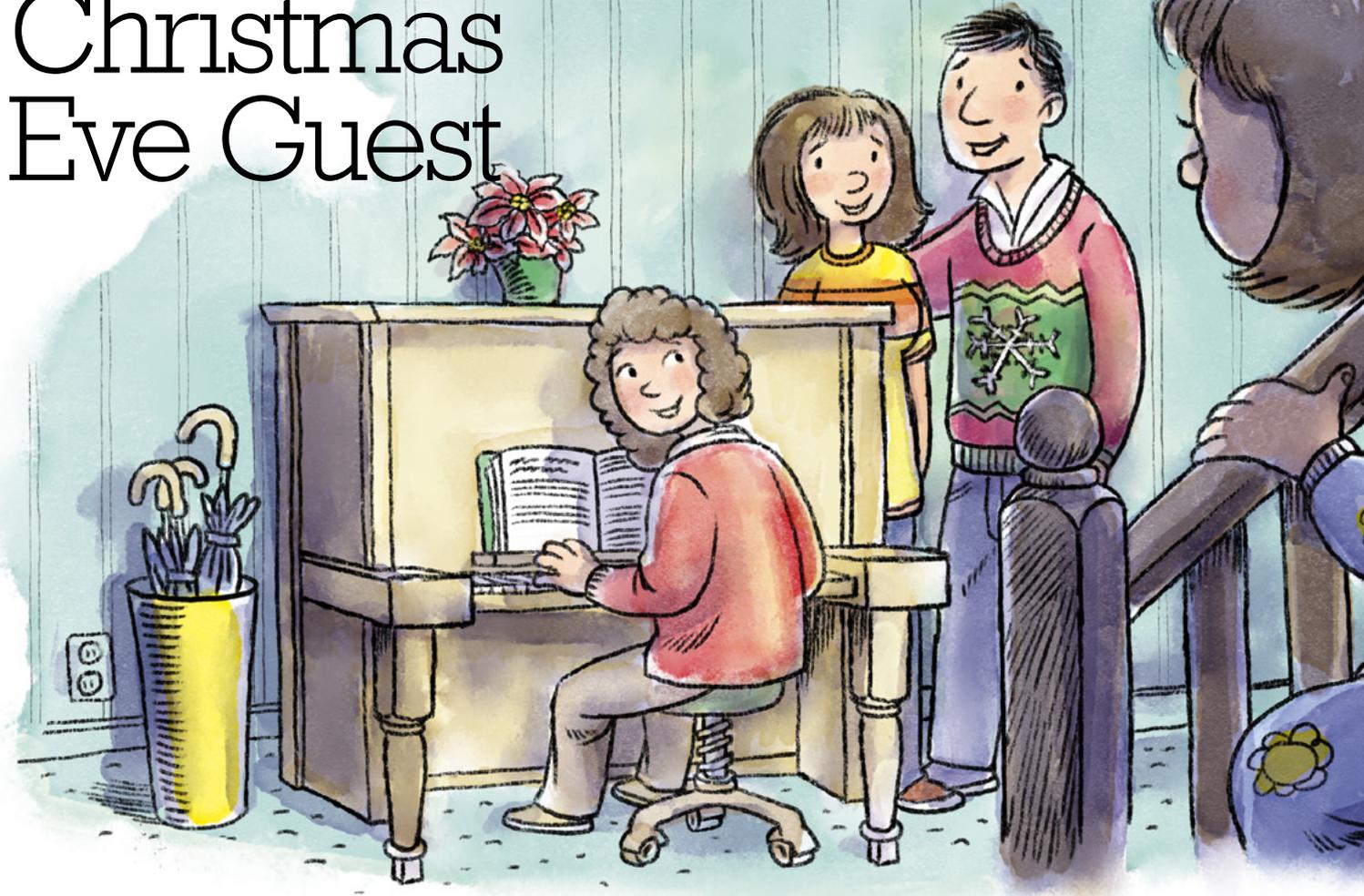


IT'S YOUR TURN

The *Liahona* welcomes your experiences and insights. Have a favorite scripture? Received an answer to prayer? Showed courage in living the gospel? Submit your story at liahona.lds.org (click "Submit an Article or Feedback").

The Christmas Eve Guest

*It was always the best night of the year.
Now it would be ruined!*



By Holly K. Worthington

Based on a true story

“Sing the carols of the Christ child: Let your neighbors know you care” (Children’s Songbook, 51).

Clara loved her family’s Christmas Eve traditions. First they ate baked fish for dinner and Christmas cookies for dessert. Then they visited the Christmas market. When they got home, they read the Christmas story from the Bible together. And before bed they lit the Christmas tree for the first time and got to open one present each. It was Clara’s favorite night of the year. She could hardly wait!

Until Mom made an announcement.

“We’re having a special Christmas Eve guest this year. Remember Ms. Rainer?”

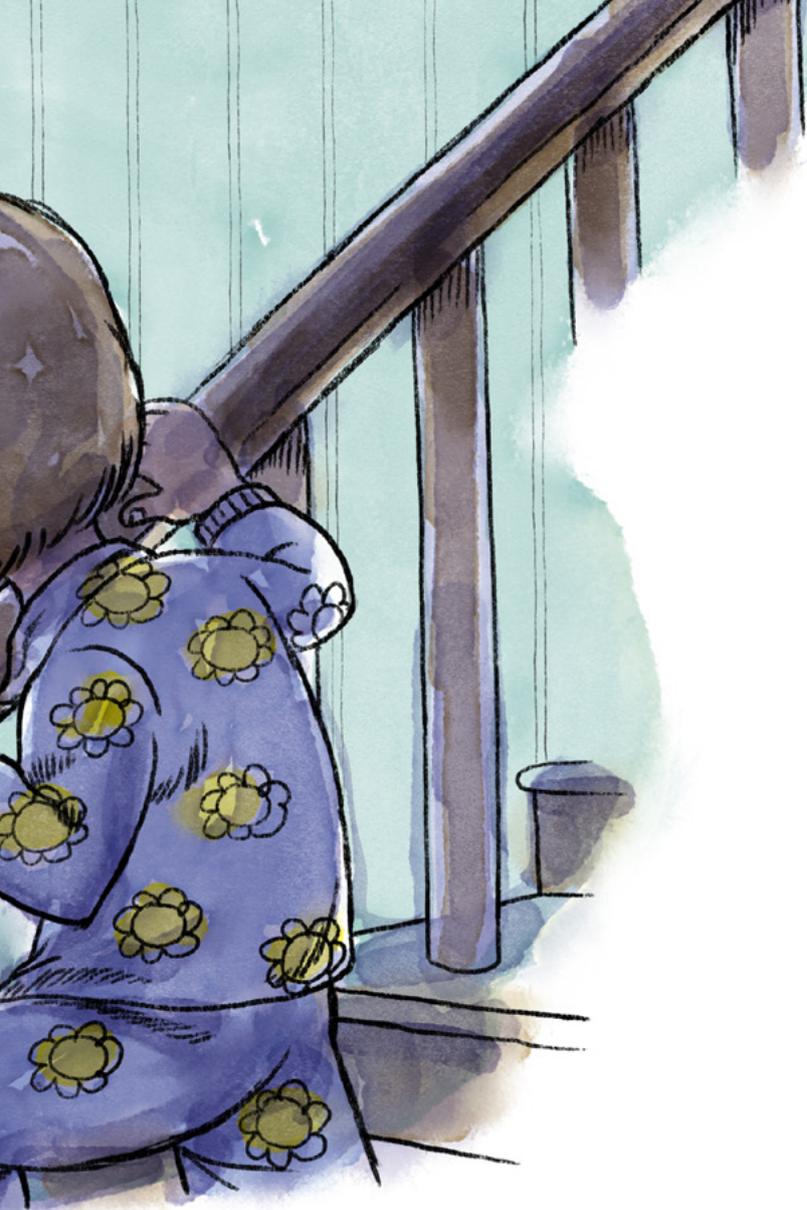
Clara groaned. “The neighbor Dad invited to church last week?”

“That’s right. Dad’s picking her up now.”

Clara plopped into a chair. How could she relax and have fun with a stranger around? Christmas Eve was ruined! Well, Ms. Rainer hadn’t come to church when Dad invited her. Maybe she wouldn’t come this time either.

But when Dad came through the door, the “special guest” was with him. Ms. Rainer looked tired and kind of sad. Clara said hello. But she didn’t want to say anything else. At dinner she just focused on her food while Mom and Dad chatted with Ms. Rainer.

“Have you ever taken dance lessons?” asked a soft voice. Clara saw that Ms. Rainer was waiting for her to answer. She nodded and looked back down at her plate.



“Me too,” said Ms. Rainer, her voice still quiet. “What’s your favorite dance style?”

Clara shrugged and pushed her vegetables around her plate.

“I love ballet,” Ms. Rainer said. “I was on a dance team at university. One year we traveled all over Europe. It was amazing.”

Clara looked up. That did sound amazing.

“What else do you like?” asked Clara.

Ms. Rainer gave a small smile. “Playing the piano. And math.”

Clara’s eyes got big. “Really? Math is my favorite subject!”

Clara talked to Ms. Rainer for the rest of dinner. She found out that Ms. Rainer had a college degree in math

and was studying to become a math professor when she met her husband. He had made some bad choices and was now in prison.

After dinner Clara stayed by Ms. Rainer while they walked around the Christmas market. And when they read the Christmas story, she shared her scriptures with Ms. Rainer so she could follow along.

Soon it was time to open presents. Clara got some cozy purple pajamas. She couldn’t wait to put them on! But she felt a little bad that Ms. Rainer didn’t have a present.

Just then Mom handed a gift to Ms. Rainer. Ms. Rainer smiled shyly and unwrapped a pair of dark blue socks. She looked up at Mom with watery eyes. “Thank you. You really didn’t need to get me anything.”

Clara went to her bedroom and put on her new pajamas. She couldn’t stop thinking about Ms. Rainer. She seemed so grateful to get socks for Christmas!

As Clara slipped her own fuzzy socks on, she heard beautiful music begin to play. She ran downstairs to find Mom and Dad singing carols while Ms. Rainer played the piano. Clara joined in. As she sang, a warm feeling grew in her heart. “I guess it’s not so bad to have a guest on Christmas Eve,” she thought.

On Sunday, Ms. Rainer came to church and sat with Clara’s family during sacrament meeting. She looked really happy. Clara smiled as she shared her hymnbook with Ms. Rainer. Maybe it was time to add a new Christmas Eve tradition. ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.



I show love to my neighbor who lives alone by visiting her and drawing her pictures!

Jill K., age 10, California, USA



By Elder
Paul B. Pieper
Of the Seventy

Be Brave and SHARE!



Our family has lived in many places all over the world. We have met lots of different people and had many chances to share the gospel. Our children have blessed others by sharing their testimonies.

When our children were young, we lived in the country of Kazakhstan. There were no missionaries there at that time. When friends or neighbors wanted to hear about the gospel, *we* got to be the missionaries!

Our daughter Marné shared the gospel with her friend Alyona. Alyona decided to be baptized with permission from her mother, who was later baptized with Alyona's younger sister. Recently Alyona married a righteous young man in the Manhattan New York Temple, and Marné got to be there! She was so happy that she had helped her friend learn about Jesus Christ.

When we lived in Virginia, USA, our son Chris was in Primary. One of Chris's friends and his family started meeting with the missionaries. Chris helped teach the family. He prepared before each lesson and helped answer their questions. The family decided to be baptized. After that, Chris never worried if he could serve a mission. He knew he could do it!

Another time a man came to work on our house. My wife thanked him when he was done. "We'd like to give you a gift," she said. She gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon.

The man became upset. He didn't understand what we believe. He thought we didn't believe in Jesus Christ.

Chris was brave and shared his testimony with the man. Chris said he was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He said he believed in Jesus.

Many of Heavenly Father's children don't know about the gospel. Others don't realize that we believe in Jesus. These people need someone who will be kind and talk to them. We can be brave and share our testimonies.

We can help others learn about Jesus Christ! ■

The Church Today

*Use these to share
Church history stories!*



President Monson

The Saints built a beautiful city in the Salt Lake Valley and spent 40 years building the Salt Lake Temple. The Church has grown a lot since those early days. Now there are 156 finished temples around the world, and the Book of Mormon has been translated into 110 languages! President Thomas S. Monson is our prophet today. How can you help the Church continue to grow?

We hope you enjoyed this year's series of Church history figures!
You can find past figures at liahona.lds.org.

The **RED** Ticket

Uh oh! Daniel was losing another ticket.



By Darcie Jensen Morris

Based on a true story

"Whenever I am good and kind and help someone I see, I feel so very happy" (Children's Songbook, 197).

Mateo looked at the math problem on the board and quickly wrote it down in his notebook. Math was his favorite subject, so he really wanted to pay attention. But he could barely hear what Mrs. Santos was saying because his friend Daniel was talking.

"Shh! Daniel, I can't hear!" Mateo whispered. But Daniel kept talking. Finally Mrs. Santos heard him.

"Daniel, you're interrupting again," Mrs. Santos said. "You've already had a warning. Now you need to give me a ticket."

Daniel slowly reached into his desk and handed her a red ticket. His shoulders slumped, and he looked down at the floor. Mrs. Santos gave tickets to students who behaved well and followed directions. The students wrote their names on the tickets and put them in a jar each day. But you had to give a ticket back if you misbehaved. Every Friday, Mrs. Santos pulled a ticket out of the jar, and the winner got to choose a prize from the

class treasure chest! Daniel had to give a lot of tickets back for talking, so his name wasn't drawn very often. Mateo felt bad that Daniel was losing another ticket.

At recess Mateo ran out to the field to play football. He saw Daniel standing alone by the swings. He could tell Daniel was crying. Mateo wanted to help him feel better.

"Do you want to play football?" Mateo asked.

Daniel didn't say anything. Mateo tried to talk to him more, but Daniel just turned away.

"Well, I'll be at the football field if you change your mind."

Mateo went to play with his other friends, but he kept thinking about Daniel. Mateo was turning eight and was going to be baptized soon. He wanted to be like Jesus and be a good friend. Was there something he could do to help Daniel not get in trouble?

The next day, the class was reading a story in small groups. But instead of reading, Daniel was tossing his book high into the air.

Mateo tried to stop him. "Daniel, we need to read the book, not play with it."

Daniel tossed the book again. Mrs. Santos saw it

almost hit the ceiling. She walked over to Daniel and held out her hand for a ticket. Daniel reached into his desk. Panic crossed his face as he kept searching.

"Oh no! He must be out of tickets!" Mateo thought. No tickets meant Daniel would have to stay inside for recess. Mateo's mind started racing. What could he do? Then he had a good thought.

"Daniel," Mrs. Santos said, "if you don't have a ticket for me, then—"

Mateo took a deep breath. "May I pay for him, Mrs. Santos?" he asked.

The class went quiet. No one had ever asked her that before. Mateo wasn't sure what she would say.

Mrs. Santos looked surprised. Then she smiled. "You're a very good friend. Yes, you may pay Daniel's ticket for him." Mateo handed Mrs. Santos one of his tickets.

"Thanks, Mateo," said Daniel.

"Sure!" said Mateo. "Do you want to read together now?"

Daniel nodded and picked up his book.

As Daniel started reading, Mateo felt warm and happy inside. That good idea had come from the Holy Ghost! Mateo knew that Jesus had wanted him to help Daniel—because He loves Daniel. And Mateo felt Jesus's love too! ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



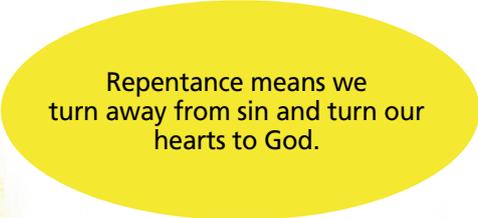
JESUS PAID FOR US

Mateo paid Daniel's ticket because he cared about him. We can't pay for someone else's sins, but Jesus Christ can! Because He loves us, Jesus paid the price for all of our sins. When we do something wrong, we can repent and be forgiven. Jesus can help us do better!

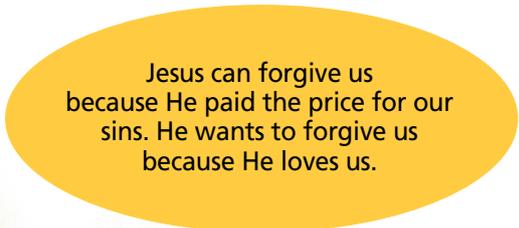


By Elder
Dale G. Renlund
Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

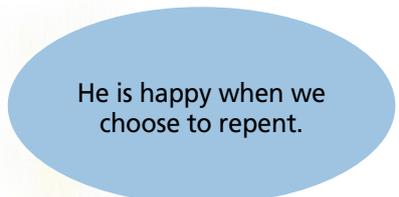
How can repenting help me feel happy?



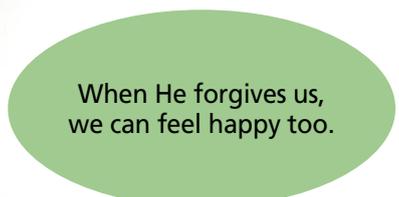
Repentance means we
turn away from sin and turn our
hearts to God.



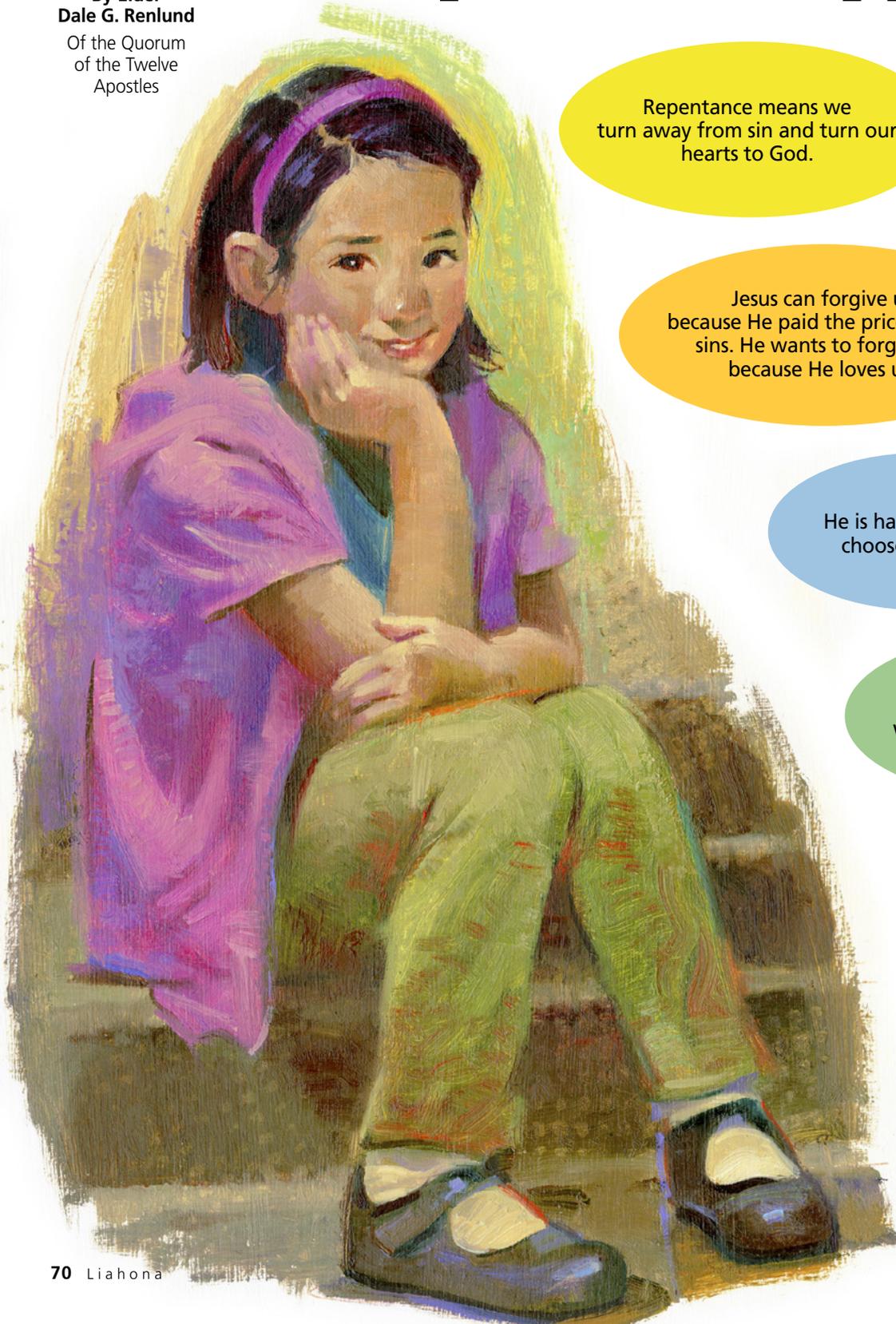
Jesus can forgive us
because He paid the price for our
sins. He wants to forgive us
because He loves us.



He is happy when we
choose to repent.

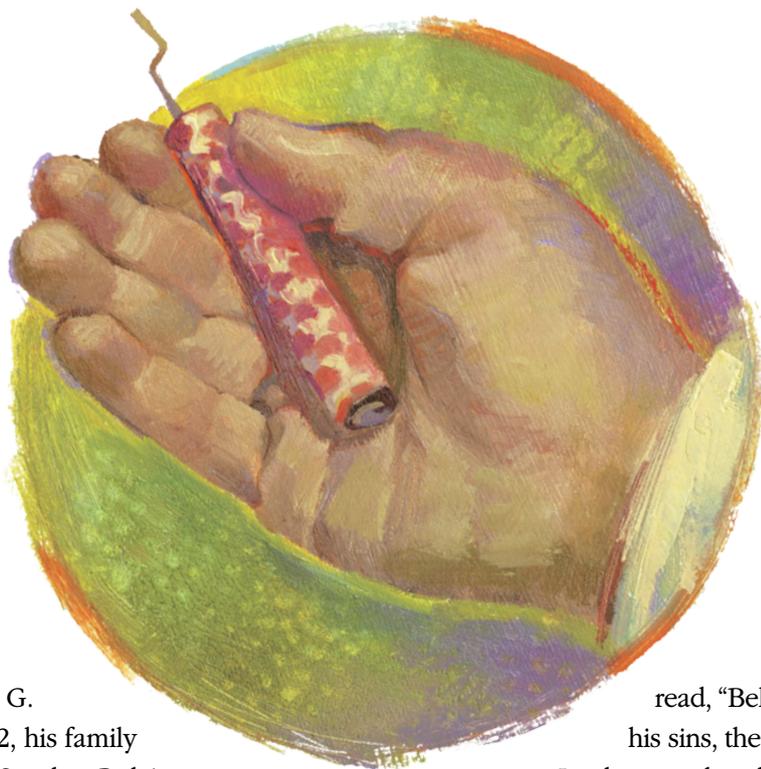


When He forgives us,
we can feel happy too.



From "Repentance:
A Joyful Choice,"
Ensign or Liahona,
Nov. 2016, 121–124.

The Firecracker



When Elder Dale G. Renlund was 12, his family lived in Sweden. One Sunday, Dale's friend Steffan brought a large firecracker and some matches into the Church building. Dale was excited. Dale took the firecracker and lit the fuse. He was going to snuff out the fuse, but he burned his fingers and dropped the firecracker! Dale and Steffan watched in horror as the fuse kept burning.

The firecracker exploded! An awful smell filled the chapel. Dale and Steffan quickly picked up the pieces of firecracker and opened the windows to let the smell out. They hoped no one would notice.

As people came to sacrament meeting, they *did* notice. The smell was so strong that people couldn't focus on the meeting. Dale felt very embarrassed and ashamed. He knew that what he had done had disappointed Heavenly Father.

After church, President Lindberg, the branch president, asked Dale to come to his office because he could tell that something was wrong. Dale told President Lindberg how sorry he was about the firecracker.

President Lindberg was kind. He opened the scriptures and asked Dale to read some underlined verses. Dale

read, "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:42–43).

When Dale finished reading, he saw President Lindberg smile. He felt he had been forgiven. As Dale left the office, he felt happy.

Elder Renlund learned that he could be forgiven when he did something wrong. He could feel happy when he repented and kept Heavenly Father's commandments. ■



Dec. 12

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Dec. 11

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in" (Matthew 25:35).

Dec. 15

"Blessed are the merciful" (Matthew 5:7).

Dec. 16

"[I was] naked, and ye clothed me" (Matthew 25:36).

Dec. 18

"Ye must watch and pray always" (3 Nephi 18:15).

Dec. 14

"Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1).

Dec. 13

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12).

Dec. 17

"Ye shall meet together oft" (3 Nephi 18:22).

Dec. 19

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Matthew 5:12).

Dec. 20

"Seek ye the kingdom of God" (Luke 12:31).

Dec. 21

“Forgive men their trespasses”
(Matthew 6:14).

Dec. 25

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”
(Matthew 5:16).

Dec. 23

“I was sick, and ye visited me”
(Matthew 25:36).

Dec. 22

“That which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (3 Nephi 27:21).

Dec. 24

“It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer”
(Matthew 21:13).

Each day, read something that Jesus taught and then think about how you can follow His teaching. Then color in the star!

Next year we'll be collecting stars from children around the world! Send us a star and tell us how you were a shining example. Don't forget to include a photo, if you have one. Send it in at iahona.lds.org.

IMAGE FROM GETTY IMAGES

Teachings of Jesus

Find more about the teachings of Jesus Christ at Mormon.org in December! The first 10 days of this activity can be found in the digital version of this article at iahona.lds.org or in the Gospel Library app.

Make Room for Him

Words by Larry Hiller
Music by Michael F. Moody

Litlingly ♩ = 76-84

1. When Ba - by Je - sus came to earth So man - y years a -
 (2. Just) like the inn of Beth - le - hem, Our lives can be so
 (3. We) can't go back to Beth - le - hem To let the Dear Child

mp

go, The inn was full, no room to spare. Poor
 full Of all the bus - y things we do That
 in. But we can o - pen our heart's door to

Ma - ry found no safe place there For our dear
 some - times, with - out mean - ing to, We don't leave
 young and old, to rich and poor, And share Christ's

Sa - vior's birth. _____ 2. Just
 room for Him. _____ 3. We
 love with them, _____

And share Christ's love with them. _____

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 This song may be copied for incidental, noncommercial church or home use.
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OUR PAGE



We talked about the importance of the temple in our life and family. We made models of the temple with our families.

Primary children in a ward in São Paulo, Brazil



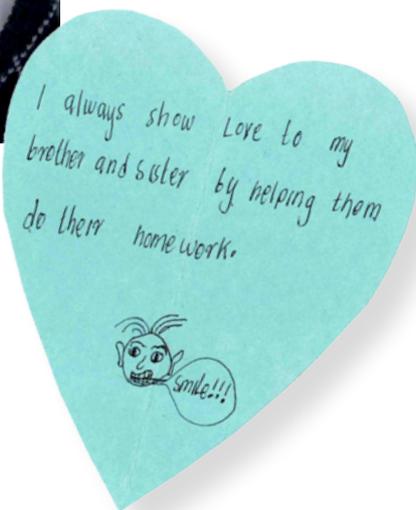
I always show love to my brother and sister by helping them do their homework. Smile!

Benjamin S., age 11, Kenya



We went to the beach for our vacation and made a CTR shield in the sand.

Sofia, Matias, and Tomás O., Argentina



THE ALMIGHTY

*Everyone asks themselves,
"Who is the Almighty?"
Many don't know.
They don't know He is in
the eyes of children,
When you feel the
breeze whisper,
In the heart of the valiant,
In the smile of your loved ones,
And you don't call Him only
"God" or "the Almighty"
But rather call Him . . .
"my Heavenly Father."*

**Adriana G., age 9,
Chile**

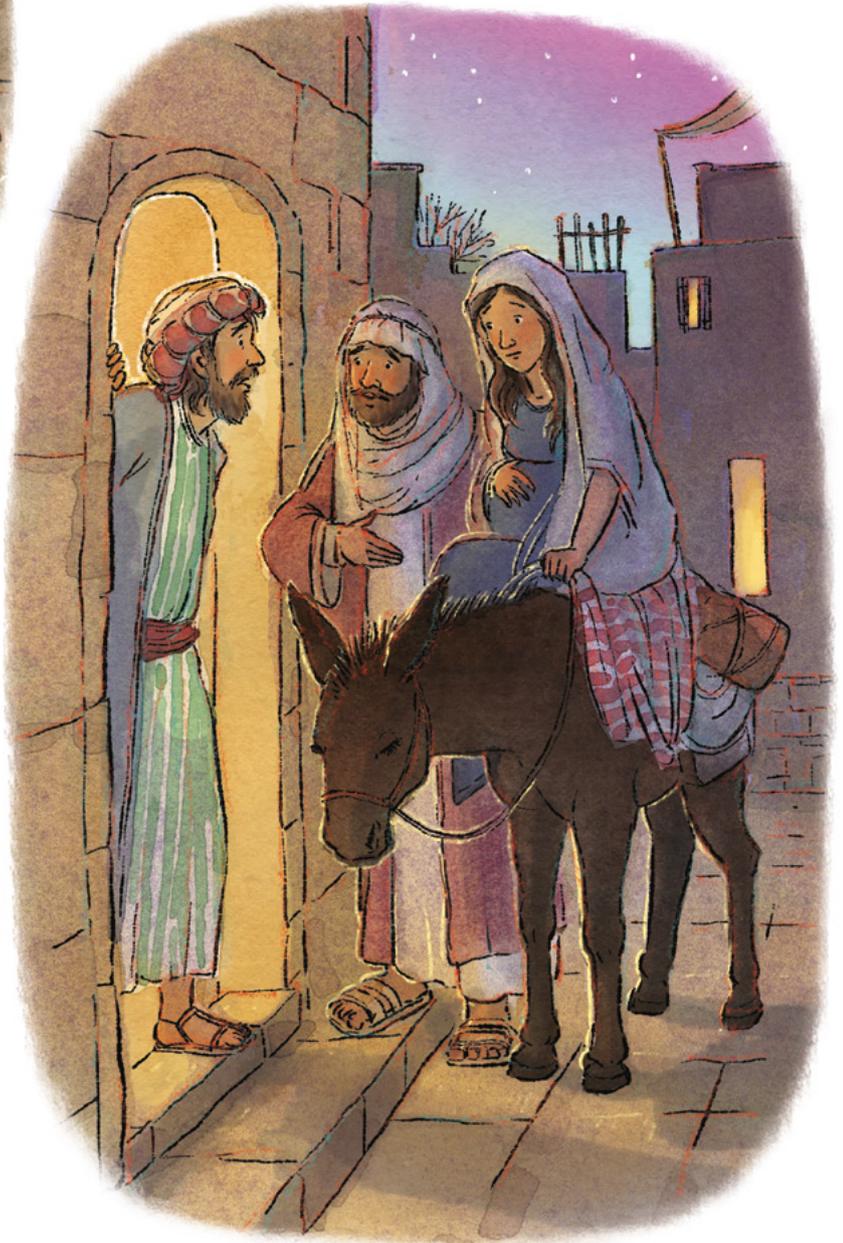
Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem

By Kim Webb Reid



An angel came to Mary and told her that God was happy with her. She was going to be Jesus's mother!

Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. It was almost time for Jesus to be born. So many people were visiting Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph couldn't find a room to stay in. An innkeeper let them stay in a stable.

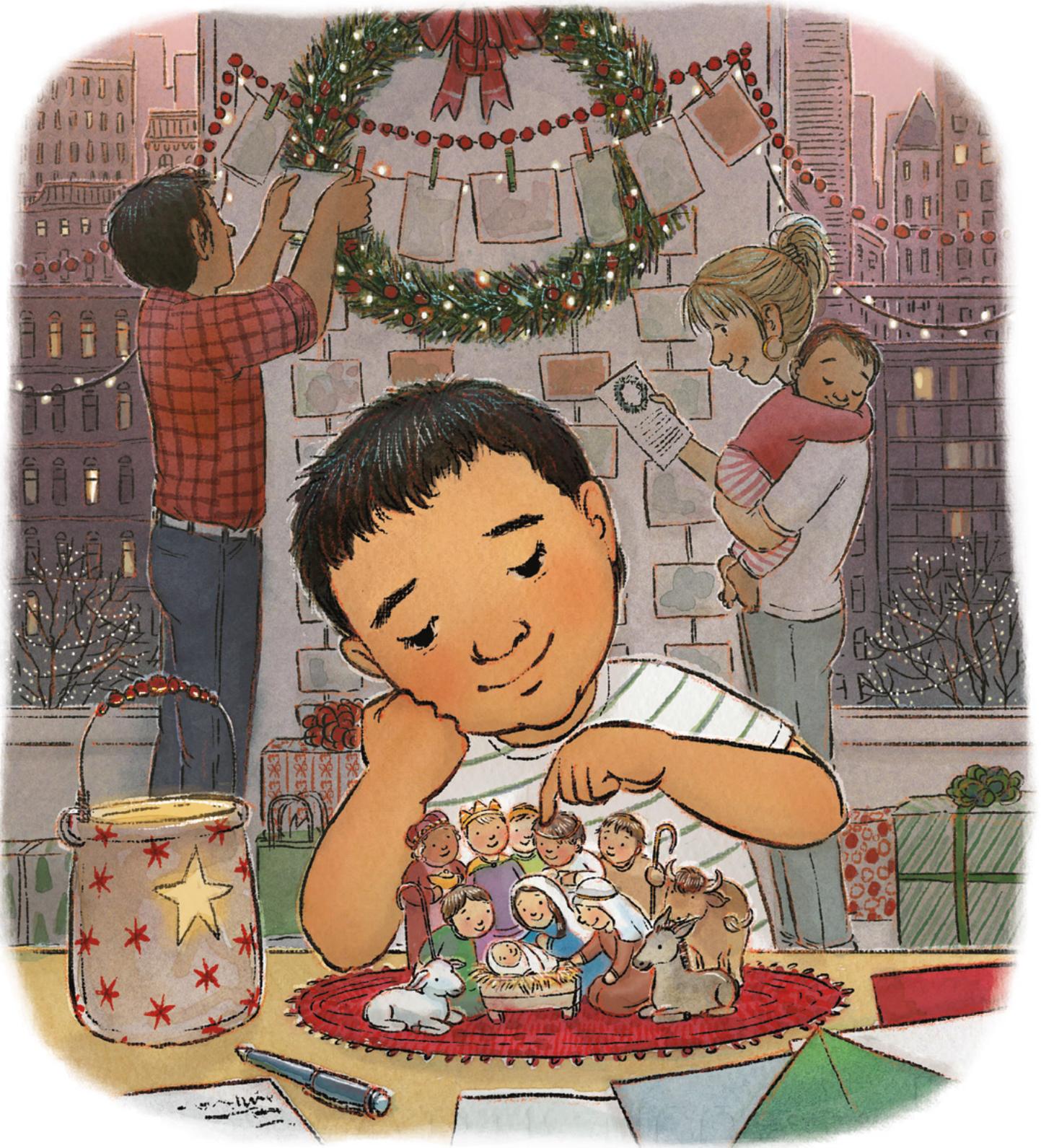




Soon Jesus was born. A bright new star appeared to tell everyone that the Light of the World had come to earth.

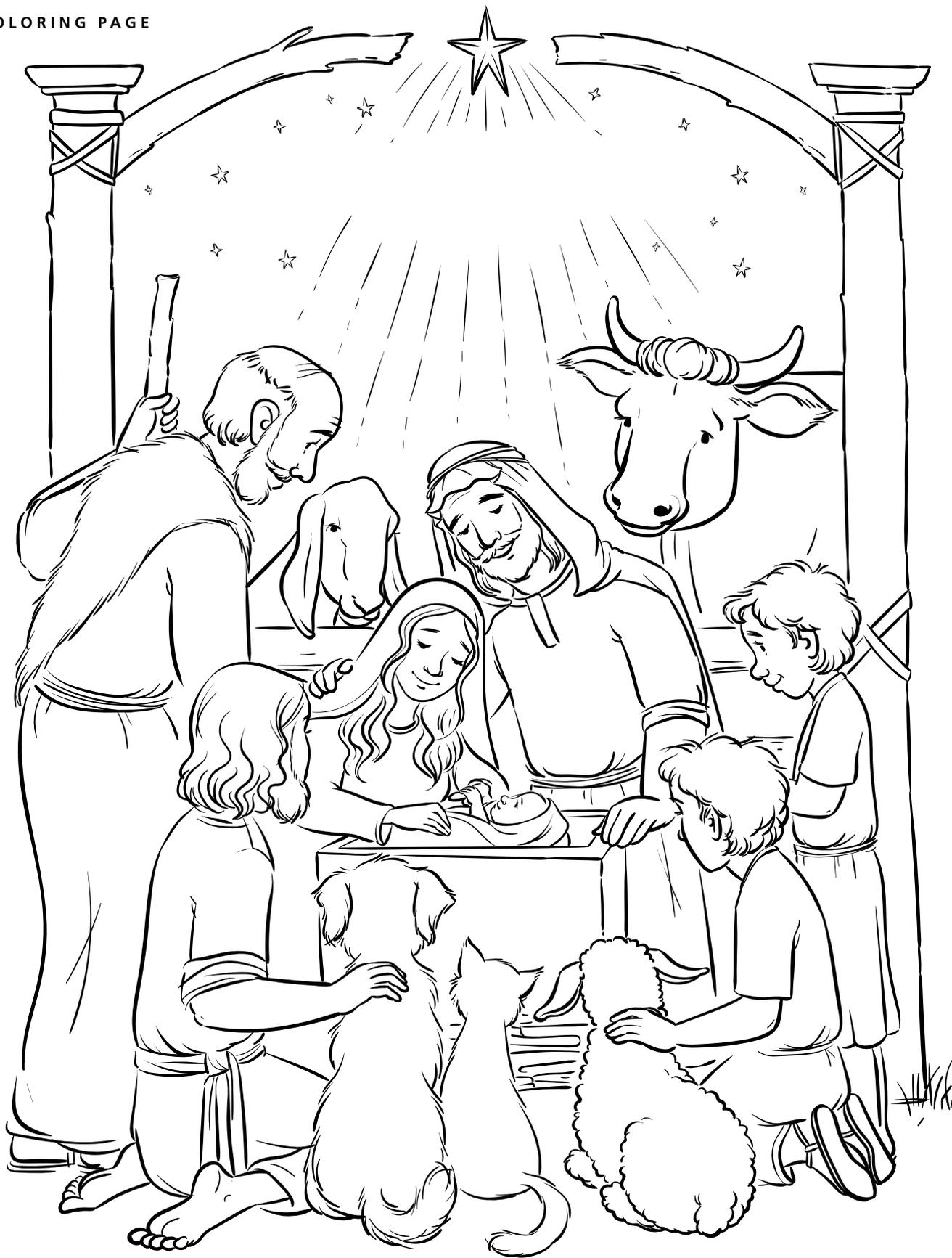


An angel told some shepherds that Jesus was born. They hurried to see the baby Jesus lying in a manger.



Jesus came to earth because He loves me. I will follow His light this Christmas and all year! ■

From Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20



"And [the shepherds] came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger" (Luke 2:16).

ILLUSTRATION BY APRYL STOTT



By Joseph Smith
(1805–44)

First President
of the Church

VALIANT IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

You cannot be too good.

I am a lover of the cause of Christ and of virtue, chastity, and an upright, steady course of conduct, and a holy walk.

I believe in living a virtuous, upright and holy life before God and feel it my duty to persuade all [people] in my power to do the same, that they may cease to do evil and learn to do well, and break off their sins by righteousness.

Strengthening our faith by adding every good quality that adorns the children of the blessed Jesus, we can pray in the season of prayer; we can love our neighbor as ourselves, and be faithful in tribulation, knowing that the reward of such is greater in the kingdom of heaven. What a consolation! What a joy! Let me live the life of the righteous, and let my reward be like his! . . .



As one that greatly desires the salvation of men, let me remind you all to strive with godly zeal for virtue, holiness, and the commandments of the Lord. Be good, be wise, be just, be liberal [with your means]; and above all, be charitable, always abounding in all good works. . . .

Be meek and lowly, upright and pure; render good for evil. . . . Be humble and patient in all circumstances of life; we shall then triumph more gloriously.

We feel to exhort our brethren [and sisters] with boldness, to be humble

and prayerful, to walk indeed as children of the light and of the day, that they may have grace to withstand every temptation, and to overcome every evil in the worthy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The reflection that everyone is to receive according to his own diligence and perseverance while in the vineyard, ought to inspire everyone who is called to be a minister of these glad tidings. . . .

Our trust is in God, and we are determined, His grace assisting us, to maintain the cause and hold out faithful unto the end, that we may be crowned with crowns of celestial glory, and enter into the rest that is prepared for the children of God. . . .

You cannot be too good. Patience is heavenly, obedience is noble, forgiveness is merciful, and exaltation is godly; and he that holds out faithful to the end shall in no wise lose his reward. A good man [or woman] will endure all things to honor Christ. ■

From Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2011), 352–56.



**JESUS PRESENTED
IN THE TEMPLE,
BY CHRISTEN DALSGAARD**

*"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
"For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
"Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
"A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."
—Luke 2:29–32; see also verses 25–35.*

Also in This Issue

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

My **Gift** to the Savior

As a missionary, I felt inadequate. Then I realized that I needed to stop focusing on myself and start focusing on the Savior.



FOR YOUTH

p. 54



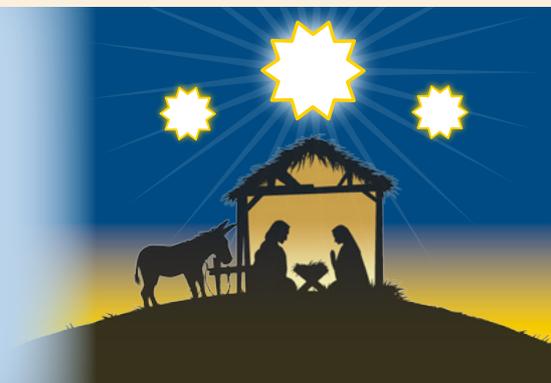
Eight Reasons Christmas Is a **Great Time** to Be a **Missionary**

Have you wanted to share the gospel with your friends but don't know how? Here's why the Christmas season is one of the easiest times of year to be a missionary!

FOR CHILDREN

Teachings of Jesus

Prepare for Christmas this month by using these stars to follow Jesus's teachings.



p. 72



ENGLISH

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS