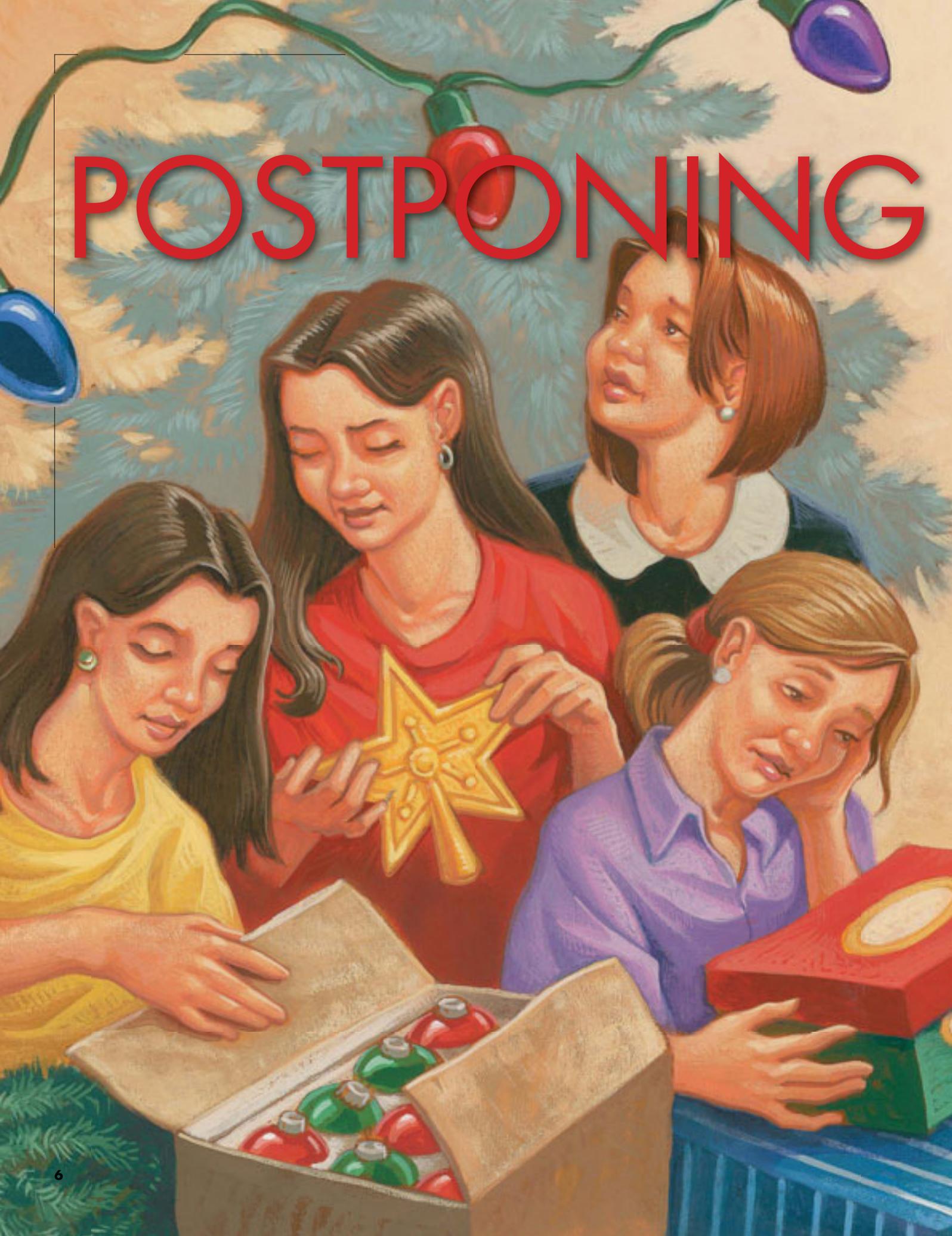


POSTPONING





CHRISTMAS

BY ARIELLE A. SLOAN

How could our parents even consider leaving us behind to go on vacation during Christmastime?

Once again on December 24, my family and I will find ourselves in our little New England home. The snow will cascade outside like sifted powdered sugar. Our woodstove will glow brilliant orange with the light of burning firewood. Mom will stir dark peppermint fudge in the kitchen. Dad will study his tattered copy of the New Testament in the dining room. And my siblings will lock themselves in their bedrooms, wrapping newly purchased gifts for the family. The house will smell like fresh pine and sugar cookies, and Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" will play softly in the living room.

This is the Christmas I cherish today. Unfortunately, however, I did not always appreciate this annual tradition. It was not until the year I turned 16—the year my parents postponed Christmas—that I understood what this holiday was really about.

I remember sitting at the dining room table in the heat of summer, eating a Spanish casserole dinner with my family. My mom cleared her throat during a lull in the conversation and called my name.

"Your grandmother," she said, "is taking a tour of the Holy Land, and she invited us to come with her. Your father and I have saved up enough money to go."

"For heaven's sake, you guys," I replied

hastily. "You don't need my permission to go on vacation. When is it?"

I remember my parents looking at each other for a second. While my mom bit her lip, my dad coughed and said in a quiet tone, "December."

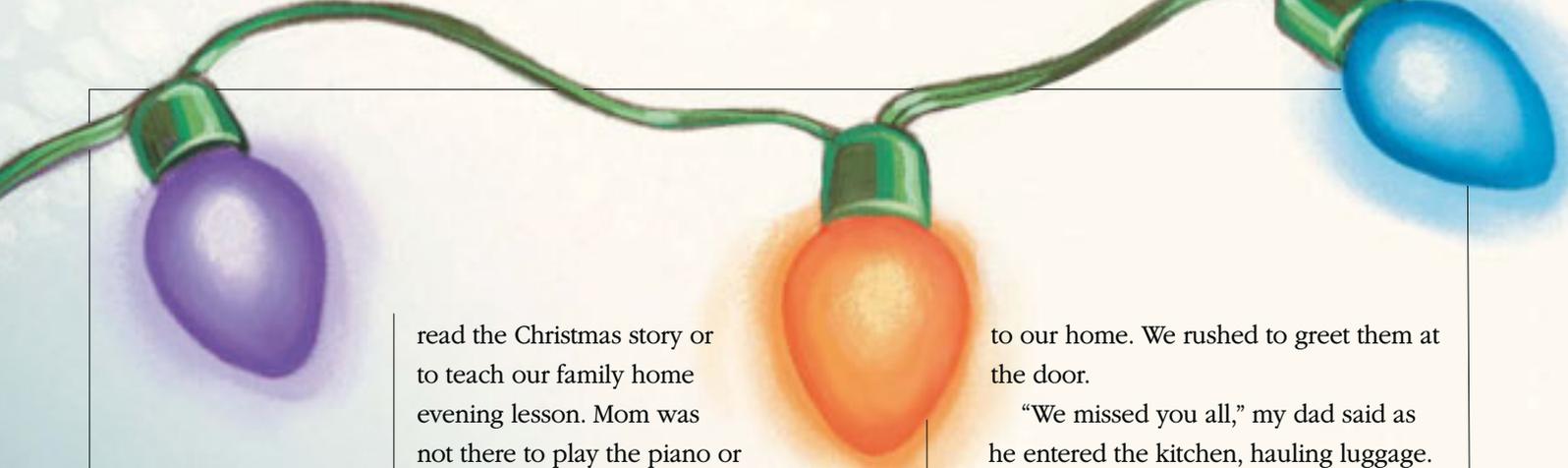
After a long pause, my mom said, "It's a . . . Christmastime tour. We'll be gone until December 28. Do you think you kids would . . . mind . . . if we postponed our family Christmas until then?"

I tried to maintain my composure, but inside I felt sick. "Well, sure," I said. "I mean, I'm not going to stop you from going to the Holy Land. We'll be fine."

My mom smiled, my dad started eating his mashed potatoes, and our conversation went back to normal. However, as I tried to concentrate on my carrots, thoughts about Christmas kept racing through my mind. What would Christmas be like without my parents? I thought. I knew I wouldn't be able to stop them from leaving, but I began to wish I could.

As the holidays loomed nearer, I found myself dwelling on Christmases past. To my great astonishment, I had much difficulty remembering any of my former gifts. I remembered family home evening Christmas carols. I remembered trying to untangle endless strands of Christmas lights with my mom. I remembered helping my dad tie our Christmas tree to the car roof with one too many Boy Scout knots. As I looked back, the realization that my parents would not be here to repeat these traditions depressed me greatly.

I spent December 23rd in New York City with my three sisters, and when my brother came on the 24th, we tried to hold a few Christmas traditions without my parents. However, it was obvious that something about the whole experience felt wrong. Dad was not there to



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read the Christmas story or to teach our family home evening lesson. Mom was not there to play the piano or lead our Christmas carols. Our December 25th was quiet without their laughter and love filling the home. I felt as though my whole Christmas vacation had been ruined. Without my parents, Christmas simply did not feel like Christmas.

On December 28th, however, a small miracle occurred. When Mom and Dad walked in the door at 9:00 a.m., their presence instantly lifted our spirits and brought back the much-needed feeling of Christmas

to our home. We rushed to greet them at the door.

“We missed you all,” my dad said as he entered the kitchen, hauling luggage. “Everywhere we went, we said to each other, ‘We wish the kids were here to see this.’ Christmas just wasn’t the same without you.”

Hugs and kisses were exchanged. Stories and pictures were shared. The presence of my parents in that home brought our family inexplicable joy. I don’t remember what gifts I received that year. I don’t remember what we ate for breakfast that day or where we shopped at after-Christmas sales. I only remember spending time with my family and hoping that Christmas would never end.

I could hardly stand being separated from my parents on Christmas. I cannot imagine the heartbreak I would feel if I were separated from my family for eternity. I cannot imagine how my parents and siblings would feel in the next life saying, “We wish Arielle were here to see this.”

This is why Christmas is far more than a story about heavenly signs, wise men, and mangers. It is the story of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, whose love for us was so great that He sacrificed His own life for our eternal welfare. His atoning sacrifice gave us the opportunity to live with our families and with Heavenly Father forever. I look forward to the day when my family and I can reunite for eternity, just as we did on that morning in December. How grateful I am today for the Savior whose atoning sacrifice makes that reunion possible. **NE**

