



LDS



Perpetual



Christmas



Advent



Calendar

Courtesy of LDS Holistic Living
Have a happy, healthy holiday season!

"What will you and I give for Christmas this year? Let us in our lives give to our Lord and Savior the gift of gratitude by living His teachings and following in His footsteps. It was said of Him that He 'went about doing good.' As we do likewise, the Christmas spirit will be ours."



~President Thomas S. Monson

HOW TO USE THIS CALENDAR

The beauty of this calendar is that you can use it any way you want! Ideally suited for those 5 to 105 years old, doing something in this calendar daily will help to bring in the true spirit of Christmas.

THE 1 minute ADVENT

Every morning before heading out the door, or every night before going to sleep, you can simply read the day's thought.

THE 5 minute ADVENT

Combining the day's thought and then singing the song for the day is quite a nice way to set a tone.

THE 10 minute ADVENT

Doing the thought, song and story does not take that long and can leave some lasting principles for you to ponder throughout the day.

THE 30 minute or more ADVENT

Incorporating all 4 options—the thought, song, story and activity - into your day may take more time, but is well worth it. Oftentimes home-schooling families will use this calendar as a Christmas Unit Study.

DO WHATEVER YOU HAVE TIME AND ABILITY FOR! YOU WILL BE GLAD YOU DID.

SUPPLY LIST

ITEM	WHERE TO BUY	COST
Nativity or picture of Christ	ldscatalog.com, Distribution Center or Deseret Book	Free—\$1
DVD Stories of Christmas Has Mr. Kreuger's Christmas, Nora's Christmas Gift, The Story of the Other Wise Man, and The Nativity	ldscatalog.com or the Distribution Center	\$5
DVD/VHS Joy to the World	On YouTube.com or ldscatalog.com or the Distribution Center	Free- \$6.20
Stationary		
DVD Church History	ldscatalog.com or the Distribution Center	\$6
Scriptures	ldscatalog.com, Distribution Center or Deseret Book or the missionaries	Free—\$100
Journal		
Potted plant or flowers		

FREE COPIES OF THIS PERPETUAL ADVENT CALENDAR ARE LOCATED AT
LDSholisticLiving.com

December 1

THE REAL STORY BEHIND THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Catholics in England were prohibited by law from practicing their faith, both in private and in public from 1558 to 1829. Being a Catholic was treated as a crime. There was no restored gospel at the time, however there were good Christians who knew without doubt the true church was not one that was mainly created merely for the convenience of King Henry the Eighth who wanted to sin and have a church justify his actions. So in secret they continued to teach their children their Christian religion. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written in England during this time frame. It was written to help children learn about their religion. The entire song is written in symbolism and hidden meanings because it was illegal to have anything in writing that would indicate adherence to the Catholic faith. To be caught could mean imprisonment, hanging, or drawn and quartered.

Christmas referred to a twelve day period that starts with Christmas day. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" referred to a twelve day period that began Christmas day. While the world may have celebrated Christmas for about twelve hours, these Christians celebrated it for twelve days as a reminder that the gifts of God are with us for twelve months of the year. It also represented the idea that we should be thankful for the gifts of God and follow His teachings for all twelve months of the year and not just one day a year. The song begins, "On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me..." The "true love" represents God, as our greatest love should be for Him. The word worship means that which we love the most. The "me" who receives these presents is the Christian man or woman.

1. The "partridge in a pear tree" was Jesus Christ who died on a structure made from the wood of a tree. In ancient times a partridge was often used as mythological symbol of a divine, sacred king.
2. The "two turtle doves" were the Old and New Testaments - another gift from God. Doves symbolize peace and the Gospel contained in these scriptures, when practiced, brings peace.
3. The "three French hens" were faith, hope and love - the three gifts of the Spirit that abide (I Corinthians 13). The French hens can also represent God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost.
4. The "four calling birds" were the four Gospels which sing the song of salvation through Jesus Christ.
5. The "five golden rings" were the first five books of the Bible also called the "Books of Moses."
6. The "six geese a-laying" were the six days of creation.
7. The "seven swans a swimming" were "seven gifts of the Holy Spirit." (I Corinthians 12:8-11, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4:10-11) "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to other divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." (I Corinthians 12:8-11)
8. The "eight maids a milking" were the eight beatitudes.
9. The "nine ladies dancing" were nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22)
10. The "ten lords a-leaping" were the Ten Commandments.
11. The "eleven pipers piping" were the eleven faithful disciples.
12. The "twelve drummers drumming" were the twelve points of the Apostles' Creed.

THOUGHT

Matt. 2:2,
10-11

SONG The 12 Days of Christmas

ACTIVITY

Gather Christmas items to discuss the spiritual meaning of Christmas symbols



December 2

A HEART TO FILL

Ellen Dibble Cox, "A Heart to Fill," *Ensign*, Dec. 2001, 58

It was turning out to be another rushed and harried holiday season.

When I was younger, I had envisioned peaceful Christmases filled with twinkling lights and glistening snow, with me seated before a fireplace and surrounded by my dream family.

To my disappointment, however, as a young adult I still had not seen the fulfillment of that dream. Instead, my time and energy during Christmas were being spent on my work as a schoolteacher and on various holiday-related activities. As my involvement in these activities increased and my to-do list grew longer, I felt more and more overwhelmed.

In the middle of the chaos came a request from a friend for our young single adult group to sing at a local nursing home. It was to be a family home evening presentation for the elderly patients there. I must admit that I didn't really want to go, but I halfheartedly consented anyway.

Monday evening came, and when I got to the nursing home I was relieved that the hour had arrived—the service project would soon be erased from my to-do list. A group of patients in wheelchairs had been gathered together in a cold, sterile room. A woman with silver hair and a tremulous voice opened our family home evening with prayer.

She petitioned our Heavenly Father and sincerely and humbly said, "We thank Thee for all of our many blessings." *Blessings?* I was puzzled by the thought. How could she see her world of wheelchairs, bedpans, hospital food, lonely days and nights, dependency, crippled limbs, and faded youth as blessings? The woman finished the prayer, and my thoughts were filled with wonder at her expression of gratitude.

Our group stood and began to sing.

Slipped feet tapped on foot rests, gnarled fingers kept time, and smiles appeared at the sound of the familiar melodies. Their expressions mirrored ours as we sang of Christmas delights and heavenly gifts. Something warm and magical gradually seemed to fill the room.

I gazed into the ageless eyes of the onlookers and found myself floating in their warmth and wisdom. They too had been teachers or carolers in a choir—married, single, parents, or childless.

The final notes of the closing song drifted softly around the room: "Sleep in heavenly peace." A benediction was offered. My spirit was subdued and quieted.

My view of Christmas and of life began to change that night. For one moment I could see that I didn't need to worry so much about what I felt was lacking in my own life. I sensed that within the withered physical bodies of those to whom we had sung were spirits filled with happiness, gratitude, and God's love. No matter the person's age or station in life, a portion of that love and happiness was there, if only I had eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to fill—with gratitude.

THOUGHT

D&C 76:22-24

SONG

"The Little Drummer Boy"

Come they told me
Pa rum pum pum pum
A new born King to see
Pa rum pum pum pum

Our finest gifts we bring
Pa rum pum pum pum
To lay before the King
Pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum

So to honor Him
Pa rum pum pum pum
When we come

Little baby
Pa rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too
Pa rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring
Pa rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give our
King

Pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum

Shall I play for you
Pa rum pum pum pum
On my drum

Mary nodded
Pa rum pum pum pum
The ox and lamb kept
time

Pa rum pum pum pum
I played my drum for
Him

Pa rum pum pum pum
I played my best for
Him

Pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum

The He smiled at me
Pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum

ACTIVITY

Plant, or give
someone, flowers

December 3

OUR LITTLE GIFT

Joshua DeMoux, "Our Little Gift," *Liahona*, Dec. 2002, 32

It was our first Christmas away from home. Elders Heemeyer, Bright, Kehoe, Schulze, Westover, and I had all gathered in one apartment to share Christmas Eve. We hoped that spending the evening together as a missionary district might make it easier to be away from home.

It was about 5:30 in the afternoon, and we were all a little discouraged. Setting up appointments with investigators and finding new people to teach had been difficult recently. "Come back after Christmas," everyone said.

After talking for a few minutes, Elder Schulze suggested we go caroling to the homes of our investigators and some of the members. We all thought it was a great idea, and we planned a short program. We would start with two hymns and a spiritual thought. Then we would conclude with another hymn and a prayer. The whole program would be only 20 minutes long, but we all felt pleased with it.

Before we left, we knelt to pray. Then we set out into the cold night on the south side of Chicago, Illinois, in the United States.

Our first stop was the apartment of a member whose daughter and two grandchildren were investigating the Church. We certainly weren't the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, but for six elders we sounded pretty good. After we shared our program, the family told us our "gift" was the best they had ever received.

Soon we were at a different apartment presenting our program to another family. At every stop, our enthusiasm and joy grew. We kept hearing the same response: "This is the best gift ever. You really brought the Christmas spirit."

That night I came to better understand the true meaning of Christmas—that sharing and serving others are what Jesus Christ's ministry is all about. And while we were busy in the service of others and of the Savior, home didn't really seem so far away.



THOUGHT

"I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the World: I have obeyed his sayings, and realize His promise, and the knowledge I have of Him, the wisdom of this world cannot give, nor can it take away." Discourses of Brigham Young

SONG

"Joy to the World" #201

Joy to the world,
the Lord is come;
Let earth receive
her King! Let ev'ry
heart prepare him
room, And Saints
and angels sing,
And Saints and
angels sing, And
Saints, and Saints
and angels sing.

ACTIVITY

Write a thank you letter to a missionary

December 4

inside prison walls

David A. Albrecht, "Inside Prison Walls," *Ensign*, Dec. 1995, 18

Because December 25 last year came on an unusually warm and sunny Sabbath morning, the day felt different from most Christmases. I got up early, put on my Sunday clothes, and left the house. My children had agreed that the presents could wait until after church. I am one of three bishops who help serve the needs of twenty-eight hundred prison inmates housed in Utah State Prison facilities in and near Draper, Utah. Along with many other members and leaders from nearby stakes and wards, I strive to carry out the Savior's admonition, "I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (**Matt. 25:36**).

My plan that morning was to speak about the true meaning of Christmas to inmate congregations at four different prison facilities. I hoped to uplift their spirits and assure them of God's love for them as well as mine. At my first stop, I was pleased to find that prison officers had already set up chairs, hymnals, and a microphone for our meeting in a visiting room. The spirit of Christmas was off to a good start! A record number of inmates came to church that day. Before I spoke, I looked into the faces of several inmates whom I had learned to love. I saw Eric*, whom I had blessed soon after I was called as bishop several months earlier. Midway through the blessing I felt impressed to tell him that Heavenly Father loves him and that if he were present, he would encircle Eric in his arms of love. I learned vividly that day that Heavenly Father loves every one of these men and women, for they are his sons and daughters. I know that he wants them to repent and return to him, for Jesus Christ atoned for their sins just as he atoned for everyone else's.

I looked into the faces of the inmate choir members and remembered my first Sunday as a new branch president in the prison system. The choir sang a medley of Latter-day Saint hymns that day, and I will never forget the strong spirit I felt. I had thought that the Spirit would be absent within the walls of prison, but I was wrong: the Spirit is there very powerfully. As the choir sang that first Sunday, my wife leaned over and said, "I've never seen music make you cry like this." I looked into the face of Carl, who had spent hours crocheting his family a Christmas-tree skirt one year. I remembered the time we brought Carl's son to see his father at a prison family home evening. When it came time to leave, Carl embraced his son, and tears ran down the cheeks of the fourteen-year-old. My heart filled with compassion when I realized that this boy had no memories of his father's being outside of prison.

Andrew's face brought back the memory of his telling me about being incarcerated in a foreign prison. To pass the time, he had whistled the hymn "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." One of the guards overheard him, and Andrew soon learned that the guard was a counselor in his local bishopric. Andrew expressed love for that man, who befriended him and made his prison time more tolerable. My next stop was at a youth facility. I peered into the faces of a number of young men, many of whom were the ages of two of my own sons. I silently renewed my hope that this early intervention facility combined with Church programs would turn these young men around. I recalled an interview with one young inmate during which he agonized over his past sins and resolved to start down the path to repentance. On each subsequent visit I noticed that his countenance had brightened and that his eyes sparkled more. I felt grateful to the Savior for his atonement and for the opportunity we all have to repent.

My next visit was to a women's prison. As I walked into the meeting room, I could feel the Spirit. Many inmates' eyes filled with tears as we talked about the birth and life of the Savior. Looking into the beautiful face of Angela, I remembered visiting with her as she grieved over the unexpected death of her 48-year-old husband. She had been unable to attend the funeral, but she did see the service on video. She relied on her faith to get her through that difficult experience. One face I wanted to see wasn't present. Beth had died of complications from AIDS a few weeks earlier. When I visited her in the hospital just prior to her death, she had reached for my hand as we talked about death, the spirit world, the Resurrection, her children, love, the Savior, and other sacred things. As tears rolled down her cheeks, I gave her a final earthly priesthood blessing. When I reached my final destination, the men were already midway through their meeting. I saw Todd, who had humbly shared his past with me and explained how his heart had changed after he learned the principles of the gospel in an institute class. He was now living the gospel in an environment where it is difficult to do so. I saw my friend Alan, who had told me of a terrible dilemma he faced. He was scheduled to be released from his short sentence just prior to his wife's giving birth to their third child, but he knew in his heart that he was guilty of another offense to which he had pleaded not guilty. If he changed his plea, he would have to serve additional time and miss the birth of his child.

After receiving a blessing, he stated, "I know what I will do." He is now serving the additional time. Though separated, this man and his family kneel together in prayer at nine o'clock each evening, wherever they may be. I remember Alan leaving a choir practice once at that hour so he could go to a corner and join his family in that sacred act.

After my last prison meeting, I hurried home so I could attend sacrament meeting with my family on this sacred Christmas Day. As I sat with my family in our chapel, I noticed that the hymns seemed more worshipful that day, the administration of the sacrament seemed more reverent, and the prayers and talks seemed to have more impact. That afternoon, even the opening of gifts seemed more meaningful. On this Christmas Day of Sabbath observance and service, the birth of the Savior seemed more real to me than ever before.

THOUGHT

Luke 6:38

SONG

"O Little Town of Bethlehem" #208

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by; Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting Light. The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.

ACTIVITY

Get magazines, catalogs, or old books, cut out photos and sayings and make a Christmas collage



December 5

THE CHRISTMAS BABY

Kimberley A. Little, "The Christmas Baby," *Friend*, Dec. 1989, 4

Three weeks before Christmas Dad gathered the family together for family home evening. He and Mom sat on the couch, while the four children, Lisa, Janie, Brian, and Kevin sat on the floor. "I have something important to tell you," he said soberly after the opening song and prayer. "You know that I've been laid off from my job until at least January, so I'm afraid that there won't be many Christmas presents this year, even from Santa. I hope that you children won't be too disappointed."

"Can we still put up our Christmas decorations?" Lisa asked. "We can decorate the house with the things we have packed away," Mom answered. "Christmas will still be Christmas, even without a lot of presents."

"Are we still getting a baby?" Kevin piped up. "That would be the best Christmas present." Dad nodded. "The adoption agency called last week and said that our baby from Korea would be coming anytime." "Is the baby a boy or a girl?" Janie asked. Dad chuckled. "We won't know until the baby arrives. That's going to be a surprise." "Surprise!" Brian repeated, clapping his hands. "Where's Korea?" Lisa asked. "Korea is across the ocean. This baby doesn't have any parents and needs a loving mother, father, brothers, and sisters."

"We have all those things in our family!" Janie exclaimed. "That's right," Dad said. "We want to give the love we have to this baby too. Now, let's have our lesson." After family home evening was over and the younger children were in bed, Lisa pulled the four flannel stockings out of the box in the closet. Each had a child's name on it in red flannel letters. Her own looked old and worn after eleven years. Next came Janie's, then Kevin's and Brian's. Brian's stocking was the newest and looked the best. Next Christmas Mom would make another stocking for the new baby. "May I hang them on the mantel, Mom?" Lisa called into the kitchen.

Mom came to the door, wiping wet hands on her faded jeans. "Just yours. I'm sure that Janie and the boys will want to hang their own stockings in the morning." Lisa nodded. *I hope that at least our stockings are filled to the top with goodies*, she thought. *It will be hard enough to see a tree without all the usual wrapped packages under it. Of course, acting out the story of Jesus' birth is special, and we'll still do that.* Each Christmas Eve the family acted out the story while Dad read aloud from the Bible and the Book of Mormon. It was Janie's turn to be Mary this year, and Kevin would play Joseph. Lisa supposed that she would be the angel and Brian a little shepherd. He was too big to be the Baby Jesus, so they'd have to use a doll for that role this year.

The family made December as special as they could without spending any money. The mountains near their home had lots of good pine trees, and after getting the necessary permit, they cut down a little one and hauled it home in their station wagon. Then they unpacked boxes of ornaments and decorated the tree. The children created cards out of red and green construction paper decorated with glitter. They wrote poems for the greeting inside, then delivered them to friends and neighbors. This year Christmas Eve was on Sunday, and the family all participated in the Christmas programs at church. Lisa enjoyed singing the Primary songs and listening to the ward choir during sacrament meeting. On the drive home Lisa thought about their tree and the few gifts under it. It was difficult not to feel disappointed. As they walked in the door, the telephone rang. Mom answered it. At first a look of surprise crossed her face, then she cried, "Oh yes! We'll be there as fast as we can." She hung up and turned to the family.

"Lisa, can you tend the younger children for a few hours? Dad and I need to go to the airport." "Now? Today's Christmas Eve." Mom nodded as Dad hurried to get their coats. "I think we just might have a surprise gift for Christmas. We'll have our program when we get back tonight." The children waved good-bye from the window, and Janie murmured, "I wonder what it is. Mom and Dad were so excited. Maybe it's the baby! Or it might be that Grandma's coming from California." Lisa smiled at her sister. "I don't think it's Grandma—we'd have been getting a room ready for her. I guess we'll have to just wait and see." The rest of the afternoon Lisa kept her brothers and sister occupied with stories and games. It was nearly dinnertime when their parents returned. The front door opened with a whoosh of cold winter air, and Lisa, Janie, Kevin, and Brian ran to the door, practically stumbling over each other. "Where's Grandma?" Kevin asked excitedly. Mother laughed. "It's not Grandma, honey, but it is somebody we've been waiting for."

Dad went over to the couch, opened his great, heavy coat, and pulled out a large bundle. The bundle was a huge red and green stocking with blue and gold bows tied all over it. Inside was a baby boy with black hair and brown skin. He opened his tiny almond eyes and blinked sleepily. On his head perched a red santa hat with a shiny silver bell. Janie cried, "Our stockings on the mantel might be empty right now, but this one's full to the top!" Lisa thought that she would burst with happiness. Everybody was smiling at everybody else, and there were tears in Mom's eyes. "We have our Christmas baby now," Kevin cried, and he hurried to set up the manger bed with Janie's doll cradle. "Please get me the scriptures, Lisa," Dad said. He gave her a warm, understanding look, and the heavy, anxious feeling she'd had the past three weeks lifted from her heart. Lisa pulled the book of scriptures from the bookcase. When she gave it to Dad, he gently put the baby in her arms. It didn't matter anymore that there weren't many presents under the tree. They had each other, and the spirit of Jesus Christ had come to their house that night through a tiny baby from halfway across the world.

THOUGHT

"A happy home is but an earlier heaven. President George Albert Smith asked, 'Do we want our homes to be happy? If we do, let them be the abiding place of prayer, thanksgiving and gratitude' Pres. Monson

SONG

"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen"

God rest ye merry,
gentlemen
Let nothing you
dismay
Remember, Christ,
our Saviour
Was born on
Christmas day
To save us all from
Satan's power
When we were
gone astray
O tidings of com-
fort and joy,
Comfort and joy
O tidings of com-
fort and joy

ACTIVITY

Exchange gifts
of service

December 6

WRAPPED UP IN MYSELF

Todd F. Cope, "Wrapped Up in Myself," *New Era*, Dec. 2001, 35

It was just a few days before Christmas in Western Australia, and all the missionaries were excited about the scheduled mission Christmas party. But no one could have been as excited as I was. It had been two weeks since I had received any mail from home, so I was sure I would receive my Christmas package at the mission party. In our mission, all mail went to the mission office and was forwarded from there. A short mail strike had just ended, so the office staff had decided to hold everyone's mail and bring it to the party as early Christmas presents. Anyone who knows how much letters and packages mean to a missionary will appreciate the intent behind this plan.

There were 108 missionaries in our mission, but only 107 got mail that day. It was difficult watching everyone with their Christmas packages, cards, and letters, but I tried to appear as though I was having a good time. My parents had told me in an earlier letter that a package was on its way. So I kept telling myself that it must have been delayed by the mail strike.

The day after the party was the last mail delivery day before Christmas. Once again I was disappointed when no mail arrived from home. I began to focus on Christmas day and the dinner my companion and I had been invited to enjoy at the home of some Church members. I knew this family from my first area of service and always looked forward to the quality and quantity of the food they typically prepared for the missionaries.

On Christmas Eve, we received a call from the zone leaders, who informed us that the mission president had decided no one was to leave their area on Christmas Day. They instructed us to cancel all plans to do so. I was devastated. It just did not seem fair that all of these things should make my Christmas so miserable. I kept thinking, Here I am dedicating my life to the work of the Lord and this is the "thanks" I get.

Since we had no telephone in our apartment, my companion and I had to impose on our landlady to phone our regrets to the family. Sensing our disappointment at having to cancel our plans, she invited us to join her for Christmas dinner. We gladly accepted the invitation. Upon returning to our apartment, I lay staring at our borrowed 12-inch aluminum Christmas tree. It sure didn't look like any of the trees we had back home. This isn't what Christmas is all about, I kept thinking until I fell asleep.

I awoke Christmas morning to find a Christmas present under our little tree. It was addressed to me from my companion. Overwhelmed by shame, I pretended I didn't see the gift. I suggested that we get dressed and go do some contacting at the city park. As we rode our bikes to the center of town, we did not see a single person. There were no children to race us on our bicycles and no cars to contend with at the intersections. The normally bustling park was completely deserted. With little reason to stay in town, we headed back to our apartment. Along the way, we stopped at the only shop open for business. My companion began visiting with the shopkeeper, so I tried discreetly select a gift.

This was not easy since the store catered mainly to convenience shopping. I did manage to make my purchase, and we returned home. I made up an excuse to keep my companion occupied while I placed the box of chocolate-covered hazelnuts under the tree. Unfortunately, he saw me and suggested that I open my gift from him. I will never forget the embarrassment I felt as I unwrapped the present. Inside the homemade wrapping paper I found several little items, including a mechanical pencil and some erasers.

There was little monetary value to the gifts, but the value of the lesson I learned can hardly be measured. At that moment, I recognized that I had been right the previous evening. This isn't what Christmas is all about. It's not about packages, presents, and decorations. Christmas is about thinking of others and giving of oneself. I had become so wrapped up in self-pity that I had completely forgotten the true meaning of this special day.

My companion, though, just as far away from home as I was, had remembered the purpose of Christmas. He went to the effort of buying, wrapping, and putting the gift under the tree without my even knowing. He quietly gave me the joy I seemed unable to find on my own. My sad attempt to make up for my thoughtlessness was just that, a sad attempt.

I have come to look upon that Christmas experience as one of my favorites. My missionary companion gave me one of the greatest gifts anyone could receive—an understanding of the true meaning of Christmas. I still have the pencil given to me those many years ago. Each time I use it, I am reminded of the real gift he gave me that morning.

THOUGHT

"The gospel of Jesus Christ is the way of peace. To the extent we follow it and incorporate it in our lives, to this extent will we be blessed and prospered. What a wonderful thing it is to be involved in this glorious work.

Let us rejoice in our great opportunity. Let us serve with gladness." President Hinckley

SONG

"O come, O come, Emmanuel"

O come, O come,
Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

ACTIVITY

Watch the film "The Story of the Other Wise Man"

December 7

CHRISTMAS Every Day *A true story*

By Elder F. Enzo Busche, emeritus member of the Seventy

When I was a child growing up and learning about life, I did not have the security of my father and mother telling me who I was, how I could find lasting happiness, and what would happen to me if I were to die. My parents did not have the gospel of Jesus Christ, so my childhood was very uncertain in many ways and often full of fear. But in all the memories of my childhood, there is at least one of peace and joy. This is the memory of Christmas.

Christmastime was celebrated in the traditions and customs of my home country of Germany, and it was specifically for the children. Four Sundays before Christmas Day, preparations for something holy and beautiful could be felt in our home. A little wreath with four candles on it was placed on the family table.

On the first Sunday, the first candle was lit. As a family we sat around the table, singing Christmas songs and preparing little gifts that each of us would give to each member of the family. On the fourth Sunday, the last candle was lit, and expectations for the coming joyous events were growing extreme.

A Christmas tree did not appear in our home until December 24. On that day, we children had to stay outside, go on errands, and play by ourselves. I still remember how time seemed to not pass at all.

We children were taught that the Christmas tree and all of its glory and beauty, along with presents and food and cookies, came from the little Christ Child. This lack of logic did not bother us children. We believed that there was a Christ-child person of a supernatural existence who cared for us in such a way that once a year He would come in person to fulfill all of our hopes and dreams. In preparation, we cleaned the rooms where we slept. We put on our best clothes. We had our gifts ready to give. When the sun started to set on that special day, we were invited to get ready to enter the living room.

As was the custom, the doors to the living room had been locked because we children were not to go into that room. It became a place of great mystery. Once in a while we heard some rustling of papers, and once in a while the more courageous of us tried to peek in the keyhole—only to learn that the key was in it from the inside and the door was locked.

When Mother finally decided that we were clean, orderly, dressed, our hair groomed, and had our rooms in order, we were asked to listen carefully. Suddenly we heard a little bell ringing, and our hearts beat close to explosion. This was it! This was the moment when the doors were unlocked and we were allowed to go into the living room. And there it was—a Christmas tree standing from the floor to the ceiling! We became aware of its beautiful, fresh-cut smell and that it was glowing with candles. Our father, who happened to be already inside the room when we walked in, was watching it carefully so that nothing caught on fire.

The Christmas tree had many decorations that we as children would see only at Christmastime. In the center of the tree was a wax sculpture of a little Christ Child surrounded by glowing angels of gold paper and silk. Our family gathered around the tree and sang four or five Christmas songs. Then we children were invited to find our own corner of presents, which had been covered by a blanket.

This Christmas Eve tradition developed in us powerful feelings of holiness, joy, love, gratitude, and security. These feelings, radiating from the symbols of the little wax figure of the Christ Child, which we saw only at Christmastime, had a great influence on all of us. Many years later, when I was grown up and had my own family, we heard the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ when the missionaries knocked on our door. There was something in these missionaries—a glow of trust, a glow of hope, a glow of security, and a glow of love—that looked in the beginning to us like a fairy tale.

Could it be true? Could it really be true that we are all children of a loving Heavenly Father, and that through the Spirit of Jesus Christ I could come to an understanding of the feelings I had had at Christmastime in my childhood? Because this door opened, the understanding that led to our conversion and baptism helped us see that we could experience Christmas every day when we focus always on Him, listen to Him, and embrace Him with a loving, grateful heart. What joy came to my family when we opened our souls to the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

As Christmastime is nearing, I know that by always remembering Jesus Christ, always being focused on Him, always being faithful to Him, and always loving Him, we can feel like Christmas every day of our lives just as I felt it in my childhood on December 24. This is my hope for all children—that you may be blessed with these same feelings in your family at this Christmastime.

THOUGHT

Isaiah 25:1

SONG

“Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” #209

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations, rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem!
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn king.

Hail! the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings,
Ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die;
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!

ACTIVITY

Display a picture of Christ, or a nativity scene, prominently in the home.

December 8

WHAT DOES THE 'X' in Xmas mean?

By R.C. Sproul

The X in Christmas is used like the R in R.C. My given name at birth was Robert Charles, although before I was even taken home from the hospital my parents called me by my initials, R.C., and nobody seems to be too scandalized by that.

X can mean so many things. For example, when we want to denote an unknown quantity, we use the symbol X. People seem to express chagrin about seeing Christ's name dropped and replaced by this symbol for an unknown quantity X.

There's no X in Christmas

First of all, you have to understand that it is not the letter X that is put into Christmas. We see the English letter X there, but actually what it involves is the first letter of the Greek name for Christ, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ. Christos is the New Testament Greek for Christ. The first letter of the Greek word Christos is transliterated into our alphabet as an X. X represents the Greek letter chi, which is the first letter of Christ's name. That X has come through church history to be a shorthand symbol for the name of Christ.

X has a long and sacred history

The idea of X as an abbreviation for the name of Christ came into use in our culture with no intent to show any disrespect for Jesus. The church has used the symbol of the fish historically because it is an acronym. Fish in Greek (ichthus) involved the use of the first letters for the Greek phrase "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." So the early Christians would take the first letter of those words and put those letters together to spell the Greek word for fish. That's how the symbol of the fish became the universal symbol of Christendom. There's a long and sacred history of the use of X to symbolize the name of Christ, and from its origin, it has meant no disrespect.

Adapted from Now, That's a Good Question! ©1996 by R.C. Sproul.

THOUGHT

"As we lift our eyes heavenward and then remember to look outward into the lives of others, as we remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive, we, during this Christmas season, will come to see a bright, particular star that will guide us to our precious opportunity."

President Monson

SONG

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

#214

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

ACTIVITY

Play a board game with family today



December 9

THE HAPPIEST PERSON ON EARTH

Melissa Greenwalt, "The Happiest Person on Earth," New Era, Dec. 1996, 9

For our family, Christmas begins in October. Each year my mother puts up our artificial tree and strings the lights around it the weekend before Halloween. This is her way of reminding herself the holiday season is near and she needs to prepare for it.

My family is rather small, consisting of my mother, my younger brother, and myself. Being divorced, my mother has had to work very hard for the little we have. Christmas had never been a festive occasion in our home. We never had very much. Sometimes my brother and I would feel embarrassed as we compared our few presents to the many our friends received. Everyone else always seemed to have so much more than we did.

A few years ago, after my mother put up the Christmas tree, she turned to where my brother and I were silently watching and delivered her annual speech, which always contained the same ideas. "Well, kids," she would say, "this year is going to be a really hard Christmas. I'm sorry I can't give you very much." Once again we accepted the fact that Christmas that year would be another poor one. Within a week of her talk with us, there was a knock at our door. It was two missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They taught our family, we were eventually converted, and in early December we were baptized.

Christmas that year could have been the worst. My mother was working 16 hours a day, and I was baby-sitting whenever I could to try to help. Even so, we just barely had enough money for our family to survive. We were really feeling down, and our mood affected everything we did. My brother and my mother started to argue more than they usually did. I was ill, so I was not in a good mood either. I didn't want Christmas to come that year. There seemed to be no Christmas cheer in our house.

This soon changed. On the night of December 23, someone knocked on our door. When my mother answered it, nobody was there, but on our doorstep were two large boxes. They were filled with food, treats, and even presents! Who did this? Our home was filled with excitement as we wondered who our mystery friends were.

The next morning Howard, an elderly man who lived across the street from us, came to our door. We were surprised to see him because the only time he had ever come over before was to complain about our barking dog. He asked my mother if he could come inside. When my mother let him into the house, he started crying. When we tried to find what was wrong, he shouted through his tears, "It's Christmas and people are dying!" After he calmed down we learned of his wife's death several years before at Christmastime. Then he told us his grandson had been killed in a recent plane crash. We invited him to spend Christmas Eve with us. He came back later with a cake to share.

I will always remember that Christmas Eve. Howard came over and some of the ward members also came to visit, bringing their Christmas cheer. Our last visitors of the evening were the missionaries who had baptized our family two weeks before. They gave me a gift. It was a copy of the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. I read, amazed by some of the revelations Joseph Smith had received. As I read, I knew immediately it was true. It was that Christmas Eve that I gained my testimony of the truthfulness of these volumes of scripture. I felt the Spirit very strongly that night. I went to bed feeling I was the happiest person on earth.

I awoke the next morning, knowing there would be no presents from Santa. I wondered why this was my favorite Christmas. Why had it been so good when our family had almost nothing? Tears filled my eyes as I realized how foolish I had been. I didn't have less than my friends; I had more. I had a knowledge of the meaning of Christmas. I knew I had a Heavenly Father and Savior who loved me. That Christmas, at age 15, I realized what Christmas was really about. It is not how many presents you receive or how much you have that makes a good Christmas. It is loving others, having the knowledge that you are loved, and having a testimony of Jesus Christ. It is a holiday to celebrate His birth and life. Our family tree still goes up in October. It is a reminder that the holiday season is near. However, instead of reminding me of all the money we have to save or the presents we need to buy, it reminds me of that special Christmas, the Christmas I received the greatest gift of all.

THOUGHT

D&C 78:19

SONG

"I Saw Three Ships"

I saw three ships
come sailing
in, On Christmas
Day, on Christmas
Day.
I saw three ships
come sailing in,
On Christmas Day
in the morning.

And what was in
those ships all
three,
On Christmas
Day, on Christmas
Day.
And what was in
those ships all
three,
On Christmas Day
in the morning?

The Virgin Mary
and Christ were
there,
on Christmas Day,
on Christmas Day.
The virgin Mary
and Christ were
there,
On Christmas Day
in the morning.

Then let us all
rejoice again,
On Christmas
Day, on Christmas
Day.
Then let us all
rejoice again,
On Christmas Day
in the morning.

ACTIVITY

Start a family
gratitude jour-
nal, where
everyone
writes at least
one sentence
each day

December 10

A candy maker's witness

A candy maker in Indiana wanted to make a candy that would be a witness of his faith, so he made the Christmas Candy Cane. He incorporated several symbols of the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ.

He began with a stick of pure white hard candy. White to symbolize the Virgin Birth and sinless nature of Jesus; and hard to symbolize the Solid Rock, the foundation of the Church, and the firmness of the promises of God.

The candy maker made the candy in the form of a "J" to represent the precious name of Jesus, who came to earth as the Savior of all mankind. It could also represent the staff of the Good Shepherd with which He reaches down into the ditches of the world to lift out the fallen lambs, who, like all sheep have gone astray.

Thinking that the candy was somewhat plain, the candy maker stained it with several small red stripes representing the stripes Jesus received when He was beaten before His Crucifixion; The stripes that the Bible says we are healed by. The large red stripe is for the blood shed by Christ on the cross so that mankind would have the promise of eternal life.

As time passed, the candy became known simply as a candy cane. It is now a standard decoration we see at Christmas time, but not nearly carrying the meaning that was originally intended. But the meaning is still there to those who have "eyes to see." Perhaps this story of the origin of the "candy cane" will help you to witness the wonder of God's Gift at this blessed time of the year.

--Author Unknown



THOUGHT

"So Moroni fulfilled two biblical prophecies in coming to Joseph Smith: the fourteenth chapter of Revelation (Rev. 14) and the twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah (Isa. 29). He did come to earth as an angel. He did deliver to Joseph Smith the golden record which had been prepared under the direction of Almighty God."

Elder M. E. Petersen

SONG

**"Angels We Have
Heard on High"**
#203

Angels we have
heard on high
Sweetly singing
o'er the plains,
And the mountains
in reply Echo-
ing their joyous
strains. Gloria in
excelsis Deo. Glo-
ria in excelsis Deo.

ACTIVITY

Attend a community concert, or take a drive enjoying the Christmas lights

December 11

THE THREE TREES

Once upon a mountain top, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up. The first little tree looked up at the stars and said: "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!" The second little tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. "I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world! The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in a busy town. I don't want to leave the mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me they'll raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world.

Years, passed. The rain came, the sun shone and the little trees grew tall. One day three wood cutters climbed the mountain. The first wood cutter looked at the first tree and said, "This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining ax, the first tree fell. "Now I shall make a beautiful chest, I shall hold wonderful treasure!" the first tree said.

The second wood cutter looked at the second tree and said, "This tree is strong. It's perfect for me." With a swoop of his shining ax, the second tree fell. "Now I shall sail mighty waters!" thought the second tree. "I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!"

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last wood cutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven. But the wood cutter never even looked up. "Any kind of tree will do for me." He muttered. With a swoop of his shining ax, the third tree fell.

The first tree rejoiced when the wood cutter brought her to a carpenter's shop. But the carpenter fashioned the tree into a feed box for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, or treasure. She was coated with saw dust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals. The second tree smiled when the wood cutter took her to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead the once strong tree was hammered and awed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail to an ocean, or even a river, instead she was taken to a little lake. The third tree was confused when the wood cutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. "What happened?" The once tall tree wondered. "All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God..."

Many days and nights passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her newborn baby in the feed box. "I wish I could make a cradle for him." Her husband whispered. The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. "This manger is beautiful." She said. And suddenly the first tree knew he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.

One evening a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree quietly sailed out into the lake. Soon a thundering and a thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered. She knew she did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through the wind and the rain. The tired man awoke. He stood up, stretched out his hand, and said, "Peace." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew he was carrying the king of heaven and earth.

One Friday morning, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten wood pile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hand to her. She felt ugly and harsh and cruel. But on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything. It had made the third tree strong. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.

THOUGHT

"The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "It is a great thing to inquire at the hands of God, or to come into

His presence." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 22.) The special language of prayer reminds us of the greatness of that privilege. I pray that all of us will be more sensitive to the importance of using this reverent and loving language as we offer our public and private prayers." *Elder Dallin H. Oaks*

SONG

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

Let There Be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me.

Let There Be Peace on Earth, the peace that was meant to be! With God as our Father, brothers all are we.

Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me. Let this be the moment now.

With ev'ry breath I take, let this be my solemn vow

ACTIVITY

At the beginning of each hour today, say a short prayer of thanks

December 12

CHRISTMAS in THE HOLY LAND

Kathleen Lubeck, "Christmas in the Holy Land," *New Era*, Dec. 1987, 20

The sun arched down through the sky on this December evening in Israel while Ian and Krista Boyd watched. It looked as if the sun had melted, washing its liquid colors across the horizon. The silhouetted town of Bethlehem was etched against the sky, a simple village yet magnificent in the sunset. An old shepherd, stooped with age, walked slowly across the rocky fields, leading a dozen or so shaggy sheep across the uneven terrain. As he leaned into his staff he seemed ageless, as if he could have lived this year or many centuries ago. Ian, 14, and his sister Krista, 16, watched the old man and the sheep disappear from their view. Ian and Krista live in Israel. They moved there from Salt Lake City two and a half years ago with their family. They've found that living in this new land has not only been an adventure; it's brought the scriptures to life for them. This evening they walked past olive trees in the shepherd's fields. That same type of tree is also found in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Savior suffered just before his crucifixion.

This night they were thinking of some other shepherds who had been in these fields some 20 centuries ago—the night when the angel of the Lord came to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. The angel said to them, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11). That night the angels sang praises to God in the shepherds' field, full of joy that the Savior was to be born, in Bethlehem. Now, Ian and Krista gathered with the handful of Church members from Jerusalem to do that same thing—sing praises to God and rejoice that the Savior was born in that tiny village on the horizon, Bethlehem. As the sunset passed into the cool, dark night, Ian and Krista gathered closer around a giant bonfire with a younger brother and sister, Aaron, 11, and Tia, 7. It was one of those nights when the peaceful stillness of the night and the joyful purpose of their meeting together drew a veil of quiet solemnity over those gathered together. It was once again a holy night.

A prayer was offered. Then a branch member spoke about the significance of these fields where they were gathered. These were the fields where the widowed Ruth had gleaned wheat after faithfully following her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Bethlehem. Ruth was converted and joined Naomi in worshipping the God of Israel. She married Boaz and was the great-grandmother of David, through whose lineage the Savior was born. The branch president started to read Luke's account of the Savior's birth, how Joseph went to Bethlehem to pay his taxes and how Mary, who was expecting a child, came too. "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). The shepherds, after hearing the powerful message brought to them by the angel and after hearing the heavenly chorus rejoicing over the birth of the Savior, went quickly to Bethlehem to see the new-born Savior: "They came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. . . . And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:16, 17, 20). They *knew* who this child was, and they returned thanks to God for the great privilege they had had of seeing the Son of God.

Christmas in the Holy Land is wonderful, but different than they thought it might be, say Ian and Krista. And it's certainly not like it is in the United States, they say. "Here the whole country doesn't celebrate Christmas, just a small minority, so it's not a big celebration for most of the people in the country," says Krista. "The Christian Arabs celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem, and the Arab villages might have nativity scenes, but Christmas doesn't surround you like it does in the States. And there's no feeling of commercialism here." Ian agrees. "Christmas doesn't have the glamour here that it has in the States. There are no Christmas lights, and people aren't wishing you Merry Christmas all over the place, and the stores aren't geared for Christmas. It's like a surprise, the way it comes up, because there aren't the things here to remind you that it's Christmas except the calendar," he says. "But I like it here because it's the place where it all happened. There's not the hurry of the Christmas season, and the stores aren't crowded. For me it's become more of a spiritual time instead of a materialistic time, and it's easier to remember the real meaning of Christmas," says Ian. Many Church members in Israel have found that their Christmas celebration comes from within—you carry it with you, inside, says one woman. The home and the branch become the focus of the Christmas celebration. And your feelings toward the Savior and your actions toward others build the spirit of Christmas within, she says.

"We make Christmas in our home," says Krista. "Mom has spices cooking on the stove the day before Christmas, so it smells like Christmas. It's peaceful and quiet, with Christmas music playing in the background. This year we didn't give a lot of presents. Each of us gave one present to every other person in our family. There weren't a lot of gifts, but we tried to give something that the other person really wanted. "This year, instead of attacking our presents, we were handing out presents to each other and watching everyone open theirs. It's more fun to get excited for what someone else receives than for what you get," she said. "I remember times when I was younger, coming back to school after Christmas and all my friends telling me what they got. I would feel bad because I didn't get such and such a thing. Here you don't have to worry about that."

Part of the family celebration this year was a little black treasure box with gold writing on it. It was empty at first. Each of the family members drew the name of another person in the family. "We would try to do a lot of nice things for that person, like give them a few treats, make their bed, clean their room, things like that. Then each time we did that, we'd secretly put a coin in the treasure box and try to fill it up with good deeds," says Ian. On Christmas Day it was filled with golden shekels. What has being in Israel meant for Ian and Krista? "I've learned a lot more about the Savior," says Ian. "Not just about the Christmas story because I've seen the place he was born and where he was buried, but I've gained a greater knowledge of the Bible. We study it in Hebrew in the schools, so my knowledge of the scriptures has really grown since I've been here." "I feel closer to the Savior since living here," says Krista. "You can walk around and maybe two miles away are the shepherds' fields or the Church of the Nativity, where they think the Savior was born. All you have to do is catch a bus to the Garden Tomb to see where he was resurrected. It's really exciting to be able to go to all these places that you read about in the Bible and to feel the spirit that's there. Even though there's a spirit of strife and fighting in Israel, you can still feel the spirit of the Savior through it all, around everywhere. It's been a wonderful experience."

THOUGHT

"I believe in the beauty of nature—the flowers, the fruit, the sky, the peaks, and the plains from which they rise. I see and believe in the beauty of animals."

President Gordon B. Hinckley

SONG

"Far, Far Away on Judea's Plains"
#212

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, good will
to men; Peace on
earth, good will to
men.

ACTIVITY

Take a long
walk, appreci-
ating the
beauty of the
season



December 13

gifts for a newborn king

Geraldine A. Garretson, "Gifts for a Newborn King," *The Friend (Liahona)*, Dec. 1995, 6

If you were visiting a king, what gift would you take? When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Wise Men saw his star and brought him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. You might have chosen gold for a king, but what are frankincense and myrrh? Let's take a trip back in time to find out. Imagine yourself in ancient Egypt, where mummies are being prepared. Strange, aromatic fragrances fill the air. Next, you are taken to a temple of the ancient Greeks. Clouds of strong-smelling incense surround the statues of their gods. Later, in old Jerusalem, in the great temple, you find the same mysterious aromas.

Then, while traveling northward by camel caravan along harsh trails on the Arabian peninsula, you sniff the same perfumes. You ask the caravan leader what makes those exciting smells. He looks at you in astonishment. "How could you not know about frankincense and myrrh?" he asks. "How could you not value the perfumes of kings?"

Frankincense and myrrh, your host explains, come from the sap of two kinds of scraggly trees growing at the southern tip of Arabia. A chisel is used to remove the papery outer bark of these trees. The liquid oozes out and hardens into yellow see-through globs called "tears" that are harvested. Only certain families are trusted to harvest the frankincense and myrrh, and whole kingdoms are supported by trading and selling them.

Frankincense is in great demand for use in the temple ceremonies of many religions, as well as for home religious use. It is burned to make fragrant smoke, and it is made into perfumes to wear. People think that a pleasant smell is holy and good. They think that it will please God and will help protect them from evil spirits and diseases.

Myrrh, he tells you, is used for expensive medicines and cosmetics, as well as for perfumes and incense, and it is often used in ointments for embalming the dead. It is also used in cooking, swallowed as a medicine for many ailments, and put on wounds to promote healing.

You ask about price, do some quick figuring, and are astonished to find that frankincense costs about U.S.\$500 a pound and myrrh U.S.\$4,000 a pound. The caravan leader then tells you that his precious cargo is carried on the backs of camels more than 3,200 kilometers, then sent by sea to faraway kings and temples.

You thank your host and return to the present to find out more. You discover that frankincense comes from Boswellia trees and that our word *frankincense* means "pure incense." You can buy it today for only U.S.\$15 a pound! It is still used to make incense. In Arabia one kind is boiled to make a medicine for stomach-aches. Another is chewed to benefit the teeth and gums.

Myrrh, whose name means "bitter," comes from the Commiphora Myrrha tree. Today it also sells for about U.S.\$15 a pound and is used in perfumes, mouthwashes, toothpastes, and medicines.

Your caravan leader would be surprised and sad to learn that frankincense and myrrh are no longer considered important. Many towns and kingdoms built on their trade now lie in ruins. Instead of the 3,000 U.S. tons once harvested annually, only a few tons are now produced. Some of the ancient trees are even being cut up for firewood and their leaves fed to camels. However, in Arabia, Africa, and India, you can still find the trees and men who tend them. As was true anciently, the best frankincense and myrrh come from a small area in southern Oman in Arabia.

We don't know what happened to the gifts that the Wise Men brought to Baby Jesus, but his family must have appreciated such kingly tributes. The Wise Men chose well. Their gifts were fitting symbols of godhood and royalty for the King of kings.

THOUGHT

"Kindness pardons others' weaknesses and faults. Kindness is extended to all—to the aged and the young, to animals, to those low of station as well as the high."

President Ezra Taft Benson

SONG

"We Three Kings"

We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder Star.

Chorus: O, star of wonder, star of might,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to the perfect light.

Born a babe on Bethlehem's plain;
Gold we bring to crown Him again;
King forever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign (Chorus)

Frankincense to offer have I;
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God on High.(Chorus)

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Seal'd in the stone-cold tomb.
(Chorus)

Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and sacrifice,
Heaven sings, "Hallelujah!"
Hallelujah!" Earth replies.

ACTIVITY

Send a heartfelt Christmas card to someone

December 14

gifts for a newborn king

Bernadine Beatie, "Joyeux Noël," *Tambulit*, Dec. 1988, 2

"Of course, *Maman* (Mama)!" Louis said. "First I will take the socks you knitted to Monsieur Dubois, then I will meet my friends." Louis looked at the clock. He still had plenty of time. The puppet show did not start for another hour. "Here!" His mother handed Louis a small, brightly wrapped package. "And remember to wish Monsieur Dubois *Joyeux Noël* (Merry Christmas) and invite him again to have Christmas dinner with us."

"He will not come, *Maman*. He will just smile and say that Christmas is a time for families as he does every year."

"Too bad! Nothing is as sad as being old and alone at Christmastime. I do wish we could make him understand that our Christmas would be happier if we could share it with him." Louis nodded politely, though he did not think that he would be any happier if Monsieur Dubois came for dinner. Christmas was perfect for Louis, just as it was.

"Hurry home as soon as the show is over, Louis. *Grandpère* (Grandfather) will be arriving soon." Louis smiled excitedly. "Do you think that *Grandpère* has finished my music box?"

"Perhaps," his mother answered, "but do not ask him. He is always busy, and making a music box takes a long time." Louis was very proud of his grandfather, a fine craftsman who owned a shop in the city, where he repaired watches and clocks. In his spare time he had been making a music box for Louis, one that would play "La Marseillaise" (French national anthem). Louis hurried to meet his friends. He decided to take the gift to Monsieur Dubois after the puppet show. He hastily stuffed the package into his pocket. His mother would not mind when he explained what he had done.

When the show was over, the children did not stop to visit with each other as they usually did. Christmas Eve was a special time, and they were all eager to get home. Outside, Louis talked for just a moment with the other boys. Then he remembered Monsieur Dubois and felt in his pocket. His eyes widened in distress. "The gift for Monsieur Dubois is gone!" he cried. One after another Louis turned his pockets inside out. Followed by his friends, he ran back inside the hall where the puppet show had been. They searched the cloakroom, then the hall, looking up and down the aisles and beneath the seats. The package was not there. "*Maman* will be angry and disappointed in me!" Louis said. "Even if I don't tell her, I'm sure she will find out," Louis said sadly. When Louis got home, *Grandpère* had just arrived from the city, and *Maman* was smiling and hurrying about. Louis's heart rose. He was lucky; he had only to remain silent. *Maman* was much too busy now to ask him about Monsieur Dubois. His grandfather placed a hand on Louis's shoulder. "Ah, how you have grown, *mon petit* (my little one)!" His dark eyes twinkled. "I have a surprise for you."

"The music box!" Louis cried. "Close your eyes," *Grandpère* said. Louis obeyed, smiling. "Now!" *Grandpère* cried. "La Marseillaise" tinkled and chimed from a small, beautifully carved music box, and—wonder of wonders—two tiny soldiers moved in a slow circle on top of the box. Louis clapped his hands. "It's wonderful, *Grandpère*! I have never had so fine a gift. No one in the world has so kind a *grandpère* as I." *Grandpère's* eyes were bright. "And without you, my grandson, and your mother and father, I would be a lonely old man." Louis swallowed uncomfortably, for suddenly he saw the face of Monsieur Dubois, who had no one. All that evening, try as he might, he could not get the thought of the lonely old man out of his mind—not even when he placed his shoes before the fireplace so that *Père Noël* (Father Christmas) [Santa Claus] could put a gift or two in them. And when Louis awakened before daylight on Christmas morning, his first thoughts were of Monsieur Dubois. His heart was heavy. Even the music box on the table beside his bed did not help.

Suddenly Louis knew what he must do. He must take Monsieur Dubois a gift, a very fine gift, so that the old man would know that he was not forgotten at Christmas. He must go at once and be back before his parents and grandfather awakened. As he dressed, Louis forced back a feeling of sadness. The music box was the only gift that he had that was fine enough for Monsieur Dubois. It was still dark outside, and Louis had to ring several times before Monsieur Dubois opened the door. "*Joyeux Noël*, Louis!" Monsieur Dubois greeted him. "Come in! Come in! You are early this morning."

"*Joyeux Noël*, Monsieur." Louis smiled. "I—I was supposed to bring your gift yesterday, but I have brought it for you today, instead." Louis wound the music box and placed it on the table. He stood back, listening to the tinkling music and watching the proud little soldiers. "Is it not beautiful?"

"Yes, Louis, very beautiful." Monsieur Dubois's eyes were thoughtful. "Now tell me, Louis, why did you bring me one of your gifts?" Louis hung his head. "Come, Louis. Tell me," Monsieur Dubois insisted, smiling kindly. Before he realized it, Louis told the whole story. "I—I'm sorry, Monsieur," he finished. "I hoped that the music box was a fine enough gift to make up for my carelessness."

"It is the finest gift that I have ever received, Louis," Monsieur Dubois said softly. "But I want you to keep it for me. Each Christmas bring it here, and we will play it together." Louis's face cleared. "You are not angry, Monsieur?"

"No, Louis. I am not angry."

"And you will have Christmas dinner with us? Please, Monsieur!" Louis pleaded. "Our Christmas will be happier if we can share it with you," Louis said, repeating his mother's words. And, strangely, they were no longer just words. Now he understood them. Monsieur Dubois seemed to understand, too, for his face brightened like a Christmas candle. "Wait for me, Louis," he cried. "I will put on my finest suit." Then Monsieur Dubois laughed. "Today, Louis, you and I have both learned something important. We have learned the real meaning of Christmas."

THOUGHT

"As the clatter and clamor of life bustle about us, we hear shouting to "come here" and to "go there." In the midst of the noise and seductive voices that compete for our time and interest, a solitary figure stands on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, calling quietly to us, "Follow me."
Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

SONG

"What Child is This?"

What child is this,
who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap, is
sleeping?
Whom angels
greet with an-
them's sweet,
While shepherds
watch are keep-
ing?
This, this is Christ
the King,
Whom shepherds
guard and angels
sing:
Haste, haste to
bring him laud,
The Babe, the Son
of Mary!

ACTIVITY

Make sure to hang a symbol or a sign in your home or car window that reflects your belief in the Savior

December 15

A Christmas Memory

By Laura J. Newby

The Christmas memory I treasure most came about during the winter of 1969. This recollection is dear to me for the feelings it never fails to stir up inside my heart.

I had just turned seven years old, and it was a time of great difficulty for my family. My father was serving a second tour of duty as an LDS chaplain in the jungles of Vietnam, fighting along side of the soldiers whom he served, while my mother was left at home to raise my brothers and sisters and I. This was very stressful, as you can well imagine, but added to that was the fact that we had just buried one of my younger sisters a few short months before.

Mother struggled to care for her five remaining children as best she could, but it was harder than ever, for emotions in our family were as raw and tender as never before, especially for her.

Still, life must go on. Christmas was coming soon, and there was no money for which to buy more than the barest of necessities. Somehow, though, she managed to provide a few, meager gifts for us, but Christmas would definitely be sparse that year.

Then came the miracle.

Mother bundled us all up warmly, and announced that we were going to drive from our home in Ogden, down to the ZCMI store in Salt Lake City. There we found a most kind and generous benefactor who insisted upon buying each of us children a pair of nice shoes. I remember feeling so excited with this surprise, not just because I was getting something new, but because I hadn't recalled ever having been inside of such an elegant, expensive-looking store! My mother, on the other hand, mainly remembers trying to find shoes for us which wouldn't cost our benefactor an arm and a leg! She wasn't used to such prices! Our benefactor, though, insisted that money was not to be considered in our selections. Well..., we, of course, drove happily home, carrying our precious bundles. It had been a most exciting evening.

But the miracle wasn't over yet!

Christmas Day found a knock at our door. Upon opening it, we found this same benefactor and his wife, bearing arm loads of brightly wrapped gifts. There were presents for each one of us, as well as gifts for the family to share together.

This wasn't the first time these giving, charitable individuals had bestowed to us expressions of love. A couple of days or so following the funeral of my sister, we were invited to their lovely home. My father was with us then, having been given a week's furlough from the war, so this was a sad yet joyous time for us all. The visit to our benefactors' home was a wonderful gesture of love towards my family, and it brought about some much needed gaiety in a week which had been filled with sorrow. We had a grand time during that visit. We swam in their neighbor's pool, ate scrumptious barbecued food,... but what was the funniest part of our visit was being able to use their brand new full-sized ping-pong table! Oh, what a treat that was!

And the giving didn't stop there! When these dear people saw what delight that ping-pong table gave us children, before we left for home they presented it to us as a gift! Can you believe that? They were dear friends to my parents, but that didn't mean that they needed to do something such as this! Yet they did.

Well, needless to say, when these sweet individuals arrived at our doorstep bearing still more gifts, we children couldn't quite believe our eyes. Was it really possible for anyone to be so giving?! I seem to remember my mother's tears of gratitude and love towards our benefactors, gratitude and love ever so much deeper than mere words can express. All of our hearts were deeply touched that day, and forever would be.

Perhaps many of you know of my family's benefactors. These dear friends, who were such examples to us, are Marion D. Hanks, and his wife Maxine. They truly emulated, and continue to emulate, our Savior's life in their gifts of time, sacrifice, devotion to their fellowmen, and love.

THOUGHT

"It is important to recognize that the laws governing prayer are as immutable as those governing science. Response is predicated upon our having the proper attitude and so living that we are entitled to the whisperings of the Spirit. We must keep ourselves in tune with the Holy Ghost."

Elder Franklin D. Richards

SONG

"We Wish You A Merry Christmas"

We wish you a Merry Christmas,
We wish you a Merry Christmas,
We wish you a Merry Christmas,
And a Happy New Year.

Good tidings to you,
And all of your kin,
Good tidings for Christmas,
And a Happy New Year.

ACTIVITY

Pray for someone in need as a family for the rest of the month. Be specific as to the blessings they stand in need of.

December 16

THE BABY JESUS

"The Baby Jesus," Tumbulilit, Dec. 1984, 1

When the Savior was just eight days old, Mary and Joseph gave Him the name Jesus, as the angel Gabriel had instructed them. A short time later they took Jesus to the temple "to offer a sacrifice according to ... the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons."

A devout man named Simeon had been promised through the power of the Holy Ghost that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. When Simeon "came by the spirit into the temple," he saw Mary and Joseph and the baby. Happily he reached out and took the baby into his arms "and blessed God," knowing at last that the Savior had come. Simeon also prophesied that Jesus would be a blessing to all people. Then he blessed Mary and Joseph and told Mary of the terrible suffering she would endure because of the way Jesus would be treated.

Also in the temple that day was Anna, an aged prophetess. When she saw the baby Jesus, the Spirit of the Lord bore testimony within her that the child she beheld was the promised Messiah. Anna thanked the Lord for her knowledge of this wonderful event, and she hastened to tell all who would listen of its importance.

Joseph and Mary returned with the baby Jesus to their home. There Mary cared for Him just as every mother cares for her child. She loved Jesus very much.

At this time King Herod ruled over the people of Palestine and the lands around it. He was a cruel and greedy man, and he had put many people to death because he did not want anyone to take his place as king.

One day certain wise men from the East who had seen the bright new star in the heavens came to Jerusalem. They knew that the star was a sign that the Messiah had been born. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" they asked, "for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

When Herod heard about a *new* king of the Jews, he became very upset. He called all the learned men of his kingdom together and asked them where the promised Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem of Judea:" they answered, "for thus it is written by the prophet [Micah]."

King Herod was very clever as well as very cruel. He pretended to be excited about the Messiah and told the Wise Men, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

The Wise Men left and, guided by the star, soon came to the house where Mary, Joseph, and the Child were staying. There they "fell down, and worshipped [Jesus]: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

God warned the Wise Men in a dream not to return to Herod, so they traveled back to their own country by a different route. The Lord also sent an angel to warn Joseph of the danger. The angel told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, and assured Joseph that he would be told when it was safe to return. Joseph quickly obeyed, leaving with Mary and Jesus while it was still night.

King Herod soon realized that the Wise Men had left without reporting back to him. He became more and more angry about the rumors that a king of the Jews had been born. Finally his jealousy became so great that he ordered that all the children under the age of two years within his kingdom be put to death.

King Herod's wickedness caused much sorrow in the land, but he did not succeed in killing the King of the Jews. After Herod's death, the angel of the Lord directed Joseph to take Mary and young Jesus back to the land of Israel. And so the family returned to Nazareth, where Jesus could grow and learn and prepare for His mission in life.

THOUGHT

"As I read the account of the birth of my Savior, I long to have the experience the Wise Men had—to be led by a star; or to experience what the shepherds did—to be invited to Bethlehem, invited by a choir of angels. I want to kneel at the manger and smell the clean straw and see that tiny baby with His earthly mother, to witness for myself this miracle. I believe that in every mortal there is an instinctive desire to come unto Christ. Perhaps we have a basic human need, because each of us is a child of God, to make that commitment to the spiritual part of our being. We each try to meet this need according to what we know."
*Sister Betty Jo N. Jepsen
First Counselor in the
Primary General Presidency*

SONG

"Away in a Manger"
#206

Away in a manger, no
crib for his bed, The
little Lord Jesus laid
down his sweet head;
The stars in the heavens
looked down
where he lay, The little
Lord Jesus, asleep on
the hay.

ACTIVITY

Watch the film
"Mr. Krueger's
Christmas"

December 17

CHRISTMAS IS FOR LOVE

Christmas is for love. It is for joy, for giving and sharing, for laughter, for reuniting with family and friends, for tinsel and brightly covered packages. But, mostly Christmas is for love. I had not believed this until a small elfin like pupil with wide innocent eyes and soft rosy cheeks gave me a wondrous gift one Christmas.

Matthew was a 10 year old orphan who lived with his aunt, a bitter, middle aged woman greatly annoyed with the burden of caring for her dead sister's son. She never failed to remind young Matthew, if it hadn't been for her generosity, he would be a vagrant, homeless waif. Still, with all the scolding and chilliness at home, he was a sweet and gentle child.

I had not noticed Matthew particularly until he began staying after class each day [at the risk of arousing his aunt's anger so I learned later] to help me straighten up the room. We did this quietly and comfortably, not speaking much, but enjoying the solitude of that hour of the day. When we did talk, Matthew spoke mostly of his mother. Though he was quite young when she died, he remembered a kind, gentle, loving woman who always spent time with him.

As Christmas drew near however, Matthew failed to stay after school each day. I looked forward to his coming, and when the days passed and he continued to scamper hurriedly from the room after class, I stopped him one afternoon and asked him why he no longer helped me in the room. I told him how I had missed him, and his large brown eyes lit up eagerly as he replied, 'Did you really miss me?' I explained how he had been my best helper, 'I was making you a surprise,' he whispered confidentially. 'It's for Christmas.' With that, he became embarrassed and dashed from the room. He didn't stay after school any more after that.

Finally came the last school day before Christmas. Matthew crept slowly into the room late that afternoon with his hands concealing something behind his back. 'I have your present,' he said timidly when I looked up. 'I hope you like it.' He held out his hands, and there lying in his small palms was a tiny wooden box.

'It's beautiful, Matthew. Is there something in it?' I asked opening the top to look inside. 'Oh you can't see what's in it,' he replied, 'and you can't touch it, or taste it or feel it, but mother always said it makes you feel good all the time, warm on cold nights and safe when you're all alone.' I gazed into the empty box. 'What is it, Matthew' I asked gently, 'that will make me feel so good?'

'It's love,' he whispered softly, 'and mother always said it's best when you give it away.' He turned and quietly left the room. So now I keep a small box crudely made of scraps of wood on the piano in my living room and only smile when inquiring friends raise quizzical eyebrows when I explain to them there is love in it.

Yes, Christmas is for gaiety, mirth, song, and for good and wondrous gifts. But mostly, Christmas is for love.

THOUGHT

"The personal nature of the Lord's ministry as the Master Shepherd should be the pattern for all who shepherd the flocks of Israel. The depth of His love, His willingness to give freely of Himself, His undeviating loyalty and devotion to the cause shared so completely with His Father, and His constant attention to the needs of the one stand as hallmarks of the true shepherd's calling."

Elder John R. Lasater

SONG

"The First Noel"

#213

The first Noel the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields
as they lay, In fields where they lay
keeping their sheep On a cold winter's night
that was so deep. Noel, Noel, Noel,
Noel, Noel, Noel! Born is the King
of Israel

ACTIVITY

Bring dinner to your neighbor via caroling

December 18

THE WISE MEN AND THE STAR

"I Have a Question" Questions of general gospel interest answered for guidance, not as official statements of Church policy. LDS.org

Many are the myths surrounding the first Christmas. Most of them are designed to explain details lacking in the biblical account, but many are certainly incorrect or unsubstantiated.

We know, for example, that the wise men didn't go to a stable but to a house (see Matt. 2:11), but we are not so sure when they arrived. It probably was close to two years after the birth of Christ. Based on their information, Herod ordered the destruction of all children two years old and under in Bethlehem, the implication being that the child he was seeking was near two years old. On the other hand, Herod could have sought a margin of security and added a year or so in his death request. (See Matt. 2:7, 16.) We don't know if the wise men rode camels. We don't even know for sure how many there were. While some traditions indicate there were twelve of them, three is the most popular number because of the three expensive gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (See Matt. 2:11.)

We are also uncertain about what they were and where they were from. It is possible that they were Jewish, for at that time there still lived in Babylonia and Persia a very large Jewish community—perhaps more numerous than the Jews under Herod's rule. Some traditions use Old Testament passages to support the idea that they were kings. (See Isa. 49:7; Isa. 60:3–7.) Others cite Psalm 72:10, 15, [Ps. 72:10, 15] as evidence that the alleged three kings were from Tarshish, Sheba, and Seba, identified in medieval times with Spain, Ethiopia, and Arabia. Other scholars believe the wise men were from Persia because the Greek word behind the King James Version translation of *wise men* (in Matt. 2:1, 7, 16) is *Magoi*, a Persian word sometimes rendered in English texts as *Magi*. This word, the origin of our English word *magic*, refers to priests in the Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia. Early Christian tradition associates the coming of the Magi with a prophecy attributed to Zoroaster, whom ancient Persians accepted as a prophet. (See 1 Infancy Gospel 3:1, in *The Lost Books of the Bible*, New York: The World Publishing Co., 1926, p. 40.)

Marco Polo's account supports the Persia theory. He reported that three Magi had set out from Saba in Persia, where their tombs were still shown in his day. Local tradition named three kings: Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. (See *The Travels of Marco Polo*, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, n.d., p. 33.) The same names are used in Christian tradition today for non-Persian wise men. The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy, chapter eleven, names the Magi as Melkon, King of Persia; Gaspar of India; and Balthazar of Arabia. (See *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. Montague Rhodes James, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, p. 83.) The names appear to be Akkadian, however, common at Babylon from whence they spread through other parts of the Persian Empire from the fifth century B.C.

Marco Polo also reported that the three Persians who went away to worship the newborn prophet took gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Marco Polo, p. 34.) Christian tradition refers to these gifts as symbolic, respectively, of Jesus' kingship, divinity, and passion (myrrh being used for perfuming the dead before burial, as seen in John 19:39–40). The star is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the story, because the wise men are generally depicted as following the moving celestial body from their homeland (or a central meeting point) to Jerusalem, and then to Bethlehem. Our modern knowledge of astronomy makes it difficult to accept such a view. And since the new star was also seen by inhabitants of the American continent (see Hel. 14:5; 3 Ne. 1:21), it obviously couldn't have hovered over the wise men. Their report to Herod that they had "seen his star in the east" (Matt. 2:2) may have meant that they themselves were in the east at the time, not that the star was in the east and moved westward. An alternate translation sometimes given to the Greek text is not "in the east" but "at its rising."

If the wise men weren't following the star from their homeland, how were they able to pinpoint the country where the new king would be born? We must attribute their knowledge to some tradition or prophecy in their homeland. They knew enough to come to Judea, but did not go directly to Bethlehem. Instead, they went to the palace in Jerusalem—a place where one would expect the birth of a king. When they appeared in Herod's court, they asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:2.) Quite obviously, they knew they were looking for a Jew. While there is no hint in the Matthew account that the star "led" the wise men to the west from their homeland, there was some sort of directional indication when they went from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. (See Matt. 2:9–10.) Since Herod's people had instructed them that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (see Matt. 2:4–6), there was no need for the star to show the way there. But it would have been helpful in pinpointing the spot where they could find Jesus. (See Matt. 2:9.) We do not know exactly how it did this. It may have been a phenomenon other than the star seen two years previous, since the Nephite record makes no mention of a second appearance of the star. Interestingly, one source indicates that it was an angel in the guise of a star. (See 1 Infancy Gospel 3:3.)

The Book of Mormon indicates that the new star was accompanied by a tremendous brightness in the heavens which made the night appear as day. (See Hel. 14:2–6; 3 Ne. 1:15–21.) This phenomenon is not mentioned in the New Testament account. However, it is confirmed in early Christian tradition. In a letter from Ignatius to the Ephesians, written about A.D. 100, we read: "How then was our Saviour manifested to the world? A star shone in heaven beyond all the other stars, and its light was inexpressible, and its novelty struck terror into men's minds. All the rest of the stars, together with the sun and moon, were the chorus to this star; but that sent out its light exceedingly above them all. 'And men began to be troubled to think whence this new star came so unlike to all the others.'" (Ignatius to the Ephesians 4:11–12, *The Lost Books of the Bible*.)

But why did God send the wise men to Bethlehem? It is true that Herod began his search for the young Messiah as a result of their visit. But news from the tale of the shepherds was bound to find its way to the court ultimately anyway. (See Luke 2:17–18.) Sooner or later, he would come searching for the child to destroy him. Joseph and Mary were poor and would not have had the means to travel out of Herod's reach. Their poverty may, in fact, have been the reason they remained in Bethlehem rather than returning to Nazareth. But with the precious gifts brought by the wise men, they could escape into Egypt. Thus, it is likely that the arrival of the wise men was part of God's plan for fulfilling prophecy and for preserving the family from danger. Another purpose may have been served by the wise men. We cannot know with whom they shared their experiences, but it is possible that they spread the knowledge of the Messiah's birth to the Jewish community throughout Babylonia and Persia.

THOUGHT

"I ask anew the question offered by Pilate two thousand years ago, 'What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?'" (Matt. 27:22.) Indeed, we need continually to ask ourselves, What shall we do with Jesus who is called Christ? What shall we do with his teachings, and how can we make them an inseparable part of our lives? In light of these questions, at this season we ask another: What does Christmas really mean?"

President Hinckley

SONG

"With Wondering Awe" #210

With wond'ring awe the wise men saw
The star in heaven springing, And with delight, in peaceful night,
They heard the angels singing: Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to his name!

ACTIVITY

Choose one of your prayers to be a gratitude only prayer.

December 19

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS OF THE 70

How can we celebrate Christmas so it is meaningful to each member of the family? How can we keep the Savior at the center of Christmas? What traditions can help us remember Him and His birth?

Members of the Seventy from various countries and cultures share ways they have answered these questions for themselves and their loved ones. Here they share some meaningful Christmas memories, testimonies, and traditions. (Their native countries are listed in parentheses.)

Elder Marcos A. Aidukaitis (Brazil): Christmas is a very special opportunity for my family and me to talk about some sacred things that we don't address in perhaps the same formal and specific way during other times of the year. It is an opportunity to show love to others and gratitude for things that have happened in our lives.

Elder David S. Baxter (Scotland): When our children were young, we would go carol singing on Christmas Eve, delivering gifts of Yule logs to less-active families in our ward. We would light candles on Christmas Eve, read the Christmas story, have a special family meal, and then enjoy Christmas together.

Elder Gérald Caussé (France): In our family we have decided that Christmas is not just about having fun together, but it is also about focusing on Christ and serving others. About 10 years ago we formed a choir of family members. We went to hospitals and retirement homes and sang Christmas songs. At first it was a small group. We had babies in our arms and in strollers. But now these babies have grown up, and they are seasoned choristers. We have a 44-person choir sharing not only traditional French carols but also Church hymns, and we find great success. After singing, the children go and distribute to the sick or elderly little presents we have prepared as a family. We try to have time with each person, talking about the true meaning of Christmas and also listening to him or her. Everyone always has a lot to share.

Our visits are special occasions to remember what we know about being a Christian and bearing the name of Christ. Christmas is a good reminder of how we need to behave during the whole year.

Elder Eduardo Gavarret (Uruguay): Christmas is a special time in our lives. We are always filled with a warm feeling during that time. When the month of December arrives, we find that Christmas is a time of peace and being together with family. We have the tradition of writing letters to our friends, but we especially enjoy writing letters to the Savior and putting them on the Christmas tree as a gift we want to give Him.

Elder Carlos A. Godoy (Brazil): As a family we write our testimonies in copies of the Book of Mormon and send them to friends and relatives as Christmas gifts. Because it's Christmas, gifts are always welcome. And it's a nice way to share the gospel and to remember that Christ is the most important part of the day.

Elder Christoffel Golden Jr. (South Africa): On Christmas Eve we enjoy a sit-down dinner, after which we read Luke's account of the Savior's birth. On Christmas morning, dressed in our Sunday best, we attend a short Christmas meeting. At this meeting we also have a number of nonmembers and less-active members attend. Later we visit with friends and other family members at family gatherings and there strengthen our family ties in the true spirit of Christmas.

Elder Paul V. Johnson (USA): One of our traditions is that every year we attend a sing-in of Handel's Messiah as a family. We love that. We each have a score of the music, and it gives us a chance to sing the beautiful words, put to music by Handel, and recall the Savior's ministry.

THOUGHT

"The commandment given by the Savior was to love others and yourself. Am I secure enough in my love of myself to laugh at myself, to admit mistakes, to graciously accept a compliment? Am I secure in my love of others to smile and say hello to a perfect stranger?"

James E. Faust

SONG

"Once Within a Lowly Stable"
Children's Song-
book #41

Once Within a
Lowly Stable,
Where the
sheep and oxen
lay
A loving mother
laid her baby, in
a manger filled
with hay.
Mary was the
mother there,
and the Christ
that baby fair.

ACTIVITY

Gather up unused books,
clothing, or
food and donate it to the
library or charities

December 20

Remembering Christ at Christmas

"Remembering Christ at Christmas," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 26

Responding to an invitation from the *Liahona*, Latter-day Saints from around the world shared traditions they have developed in their families, wards, and branches that have brought them closer together and helped them focus their celebration of Christmas on the Savior.

Christmas Doves *Georgina Crisman, "Christmas Doves," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 27*

When our children were little and we lived in San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina, we started the tradition of making Christmas doves. Previously we had been sending so many Christmas cards to friends and family that it started to become a strain on our budget. So, instead of purchasing expensive, preprinted cards, we decided to make our own in the shape of doves, spreading a message of peace at Christmastime. In the beginning, our doves were simple and made of white cardboard, but over the years they have been adorned with a variety of colors, Christmas messages, and scriptures about the birth of Christ. The children enjoyed making them. Although our children are all grown now, the tradition continues on.

Georgina Crisman,

Black Creek (Spanish) Ward, Mississauga Ontario Stake

A Monthlong Celebration

Carlos Pedrosa dos Santos, "A Monthlong Celebration," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 27

After joining the Church, we decided to create Christmas traditions for our family that would focus less on materialism and more on Heavenly Father's love for His children, embodied in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Aside from the tradition of decorating our home with a tree and garlands, each year our family holds a series of family home evenings to help us remember the Savior. For these meetings, we have compiled a book of our favorite Christmas songs and various drawings for the children. On the first Monday of December, we talk about the origin of Christmas, its symbols, and the ways people celebrate Jesus Christ's birth around the world. We also read a favorite Christmas message from the *Liahona* of December 1986, the year my wife, Vani, and I were married. On the second Monday, we read from a favorite book about Christmas. On the third Monday, we read and discuss the First Presidency Message from the current *Liahona*.

The most special day of the month for us is 24 December. We invite friends and our extended family to our home for dinner and a Christmas program. In the program, the children present a musical number, we read the story of Christ's birth, and I give a Christmas message I have prepared. We then enjoy a wonderful dinner my wife has prepared.

In these and many other ways, we have created family traditions to help us celebrate Christmas as the birth of Jesus Christ.

Antonio Carlos Pedrosa dos Santos,

Visconde de Araújo First Branch, Macaé Brazil District

Good Tidings of Christmas Cheer

and Aiko Ishikawa, "Good Tidings of Christmas Cheer," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 27

Although we had both been members of the Church since our teens, because of our Buddhist background, we didn't have any Christmas traditions for our young family. Then, when the Tabernacle Choir performed in Japan in 1979, we became friends with choir member Mary K. Zackrison. That December and every December since, we have received copies of her family Christmas letter, the "Zackrison Gazette," complete with Christmas messages, updates on her family, and information about important events in the Zackrisons' lives.

The Zackrisons inspired us to develop a tradition of our own. The next year, we decided to take a picture of our children arranged in a Nativity scene to send out to friends and family. Starting the year after that, we began cutting out photographs of the children, which we arranged in various Christmas-related settings, and then taking another photograph of the whole scene to make into a card.

In the years since then, we have created cards of the shepherds hearing the angels' tidings, of the Nativity, of the visit of the Wise Men, and so on. Our children have surprised us with their enthusiasm and creativity for these projects. We send cards each year to many family members, friends, and coworkers. Many of the recipients say they look forward to our cards every year.

Creating Christ-centered family traditions can be challenging, but it can also be a lot of fun. Last year we exchanged our 19th annual Christmas card with the 41st annual "Zackrison Gazette."

Ken-ichi and Aiko Ishikawa,

Kasugai Ward, Nagoya Japan Stake

Antonio

Ken-ichi

THOUGHT

Mosiah 15:17

SONG

**"It Came Upon the
Midnight Clear"**
#207

It came upon the
midnight clear,
That glorious song
of old, From an-
gels bending near
the earth To touch
their harps of
gold:"Peace on the
earth, good will to
men From heav'n's
all-gracious King."
The world in sol-
emn stillness lay
To hear the angels
sing.

ACTIVITY

Watch the
film "Nora's
Christmas
Gift"



December 21

Remembering CHRIST at Christmas continued

Christmas Programs *Christmas Programs," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 28"*

The *Liahona* received descriptions of Christmas programs from many families, wards, and branches from all over the world. Most programs included choir numbers or congregational singing of Christmas carols. Many reenacted scenes from the story of Christ's birth as related in the New Testament or from His visit to the Americas as recorded in 3 Nephi.

The Rosas family of Zapopán, Mexico, reenacted the account of the Savior's birth in the Book of Mormon for family and neighbors, including some nonmembers. For their Homemaking meeting, the Relief Society of the Engenho de Dentro Ward, Rio de Janeiro Brazil Stake, followed up their Christmas program by sending the sisters out to contact all the less-active sisters and give them a Christmas greeting. And members of the Taahueia Branch of the Tubuai Australes [French Polynesia] District made sure to invite nonmember friends to their Christmas program and party.

Gifts for the Savior *Scott and Angelle Anderson, "Gifts for the Savior," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 29*

One December we gathered together for a family meeting. We began by asking our 11-year-old son how he would feel if on his birthday we gave presents to everyone but him. He didn't like that idea at all. We went on to ask if there is a holiday when we give gifts to others but not to the person whose birthday we are celebrating. It didn't take the children long to realize we were talking about Christmas. We decided to start making Christmas more meaningful by giving gifts to Jesus Christ, whose birthday we are celebrating.

Our children wondered what they could give the Savior. We talked about what He desires of us. We discussed His Atonement and His desire for us to give up our sins and be obedient. We talked about how He wants us to give of ourselves by serving and sharing our talents.

That year, we had each family member write on slips of paper the gifts they planned to give the Savior and place the slips in a box. On Christmas morning, before we opened the other gifts, we had family prayer and shared with each other the gifts we were giving the Savior for the coming year.

As the years have come and gone, the tradition of giving gifts to Jesus Christ has helped our family focus on the real meaning of Christmas and on our love and gratitude for Him.

*Scott and Angelle Anderson,
Bluffdale Second Ward, Bluffdale Utah Stake*

Following His Example *Fajardo Romero Family, "Following His Example," Liahona, Dec. 1999, 29*

We have created a tradition for our family of six children that they like very much. Each year at Christmastime, we prepare carols, bake cookies, make rag dolls, and gather some of the children's own toys and clothing in preparation for our activity. Then, with one of the children dressed as Santa Claus and the others as his helpers, we visit the old and sick in our ward, people in a nearby hospital, and less fortunate people in the streets. This activity has helped us feel the true meaning of Christmas and learn to be more like Jesus Christ.

*Fajardo Romero Family,
Casas Grandes Ward, Colonia Juárez Mexico Stake*

THOUGHT

Alma 46:12

SONG

**"Oh, Come, All Ye
Faithful" #202**

Oh, come, all ye
faithful, Joyful and
triumphant! Oh,
come ye, oh, come
ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold
him, Born the King
of angels; Oh,
come, let us adore
him; Oh, come let
us adore him; Oh,
come, let us adore
him, Christ, the
Lord.

ACTIVITY

Drop a gift se-
cretly to a
friend



December 22

JOSEPH SMITH'S LAST CHRISTMAS

Excerpted from Larry C. Porter's BYU Studies article

"Remembering Christmas Past: Presidents of the Church Celebrate the Birth of the Son of Man and Remember His Servant Joseph Smith."



Perhaps no Christmas was more pleasant in the span of the Prophet's lifetime than his last earthly celebration on December 25, 1843, in Nauvoo. All the ingredients of what might be regarded as a traditional observance of that day were present. Joseph and Emma had just occupied the hospitable quarters of the newly constructed Mansion House. In the early morning hours, the household was awakened to harmonious strains of beautiful music. The Prophet recorded:

This morning, about one o'clock, I was aroused by an English sister, Lettice Rushton, widow of Richard Rushton, Senior, (who ten years ago, lost her sight,) accompanied by three of her sons, with their wives, and her two daughters, with their husbands, and several of her neighbors, singing, "Mortals, awake! with angels join," &c., which caused a thrill of pleasure to run through my soul. All of my family and boarders arose to hear the serenade, and I felt to thank my Heavenly Father for their visit, and blessed them in the name of the Lord. They also visited my brother Hyrum, who was awakened from his sleep. He arose and went out of doors. He shook hands with and blessed each one of them in the name of the Lord, and said that he thought at first that a cohort of angels had come to visit him, it was such heavenly music to him . . .

At two o'clock [p.m.], about fifty couples sat down at my table to dine. . . .

A large party supped at my house, and spent the evening in music, dancing, &c., in a most cheerful and friendly manner. During the festivities, a man with his hair long and falling over his shoulders, and apparently drunk, came in and acted like a Missourian. I requested the captain of the police to put him out of doors. A scuffle ensued, and I had the opportunity to look him full in the face, when, to my great surprise and joy untold, I discovered it was my long-tried, warm, but cruelly persecuted friend, Orrin Porter Rockwell, just arrived from nearly a year's imprisonment, without conviction, in Missouri. (History of the Church 6:134-35)

This rare, yet unexpected gift closed the activities of a beautiful Christmas Day. The Prophet must have felt all the warmth engendered by a lasting friendship between the two, which had spanned the years from the earliest days of the Restoration in New York. Joseph wrote the following day, December 26, "I rejoiced that Rockwell had returned from the clutches of Missouri, and that God had delivered him out of their hands." (6:143)

THOUGHT

D&C 6:34, 36

SONG

"Praise to the Man" #27

Praise to the man
who communed
with Jeho-
vah! Jesus anoint-
ed that Prophet
and Seer. Blessed
to open the last
dispensation,
Kings shall extol
him, and nations
revere. Hail to the
Prophet, ascended
to heaven! Trai-
tors and tyrants
now fight him in
vain. Mingling with
Gods, he can plan
for his brethren;
Death cannot con-
quer the hero
again.

ACTIVITY

Celebrate Joseph Smith's birth by reading the account of, or watching the movie of, the 'First Vision'

December 23

MORE THAN LIGHTS AND BRIGHT COLORS

Patricia Merlos, "More Than Lights and Bright Colors," *Ensign*, Dec. 2002, 14

One year my husband and I felt a deep desire to celebrate Christmas in a different way than we had ever done before. We wanted to teach our two small children a deeper meaning of Christmas, that it means more than lights and bright colors, more than parties and celebrations, more than wrapping paper and ribbons, more than decorating a tree, more than hugs and best wishes.

As Christmas Eve drew near, we weren't sure what we were going to do that night, but I felt free of the stress that normally overwhelms me at Christmastime. We decided we would not go out with friends that night or make any other social commitments. Instead, we would spend the night in simple celebration as a family. Our thoughts would center around our Savior.

On Christmas Eve, I prepared a delicious meal. After dinner, my husband taught us about the birth of Jesus Christ as described in the second chapter of Luke. When he read verses 13 and 14—"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 2:13-14]—we silently joined with the heavenly hosts in thanking our Eternal Father for sending His Son to atone for our sins. Then our young daughter, Ileana, read to us the meaning of Christmas symbols. We opened a few simple gifts and took photographs.

Our evening together was filled with reverence, love, and gratitude for Jesus Christ. We experienced a sweet joy we had never felt before on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas morning we decided to continue our celebration the way we had started it. We prepared food as if for a picnic, and at about 11:00 A.M., we headed for Opal's house. Opal is 80 years old and not a member of the Church. She has an inner beauty that makes people want to be close to her. Even though Opal doesn't speak our native language and isn't from our Spanish culture, our children have accepted her as their grandmother. Ileana could spend hours talking with Opal. And despite his shyness, our son, Kevin, doesn't hesitate for a minute to hug her. I am grateful for Opal's love, especially since our children's grandparents live very far away from our home in Texas.

We wanted to share our Christmas with this lovely widow who lives alone and has no children. Her eyes sparkled when we arrived. She was emotional as we served dinner—it was probably the first Christmas in many years she had spent with anyone.

After we ate, Opal opened some gifts we had brought her. But our visit was more of a gift to us than to Opal. Her joy warmed our hearts.

Next we went to the hospital to visit Sister Schroeder, a member of our ward. From the time our children were very young, Sister Schroeder had taken notice of them and had made them feel important and loved. Every time she greeted us, her first smile was for the children. Now she was in intensive care and was close to leaving this world. I didn't think the children would be allowed into her room. But their sincere pleading softened the heart of the nurse, and they were admitted inside.

Since Sister Schroeder was unconscious, I didn't know if she would hear anything we said to her. We wanted to tell her that she was important to us and that we loved her. With all the tenderness in my heart, I caressed Sister Schroeder's arm as I sent a prayer to our Heavenly Father in her behalf. It was the first Christmas gift I have ever given with such a sincere desire; it was wrapped in compassion and tied with the ribbon of my tears.

Then Ileana approached her bedside and said in an angelic voice, "Sister Schroeder, it's Ileana. I'm here to wish you a Merry Christmas." Her words were brief but sincere.

Our unplanned Christmas taught us much. We came to understand that Christmas celebrations need not be competitions to see who can give or receive the most expensive present. Our most valuable gift is our love—love for the Christ child, who was born 2,000 years ago in a humble manger; love for our families and our neighbors; love for the beautiful world Heavenly Father has given us. Another valuable gift is our compassion—the feeling that causes us "to mourn with those that mourn" (Mosiah 18:9), to lift the weak, to visit the lonely, to dry the tears of those who are sad. And another gift is our gratitude—gratitude for our Savior, who taught us how to live and who lovingly and willingly bore our sins, our griefs, and our weaknesses as His Father had commissioned Him to do.

We celebrate Christmas best when we live the Savior's teachings—not just at Christmas but every day of the year.

THOUGHT

"Of all the traditions we should cultivate within ourselves and our families, a "tradition of righteousness" should be preeminent. Hallmarks of this tradition are an unwavering love for God and His Only Begotten Son, respect for prophets and priesthood power, a constant seeking of the Holy Spirit, and the discipline of discipleship which transforms believing into doing. A tradition of righteousness sets a pattern for living which draws children closer to parents, and both closer to God, and elevates obedience from a burden to a blessing."

Elder Donald L. Hallstrom

SONG

"Once In Royal David's City" #205

Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

ACTIVITY

Each family tells what their favorite Christmas tradition is.

December 24

grandma's missionary Christmas

By Jana Jones Steed December 1994 Friend

Carrie felt the same tingly, happy feeling that came every year at Christmastime, but she also felt a little empty. Grandma and Grandpa were thousands of miles away on a mission in Paraguay. There were presents under the tree from them, but Mom had purchased them and printed "From Grandma and Grandpa" on the tags. It wasn't the same. Carrie was happy that Grandma and Grandpa were serving Heavenly Father, but that didn't take away the empty feeling.

Several weeks later, while Carrie was helping Mom pack away the last of the Christmas decorations, the mailman brought a letter. It was addressed to Carrie, and it was from Paraguay! In a second she had it open, and she and Mom snuggled on the sofa to read it:

Dear Little Carrie,

I thought about you a lot on Christmas Day. I imagined you and your mom and dad around the Christmas tree, opening presents and later eating turkey and pumpkin pie. Our Christmas in Paraguay was very different, and I thought you might like to hear about it.

We had decided to visit the Ugarte family for Christmas. They live 80 kilometers (50 miles) through the jungle, in a little village called Itakyry. There is a small chapel there, where we could spend the night. In the Ugarte family are a grandmother, a mother and father, and eleven children. Their house has only two rooms and two beds, so we couldn't stay with them. We packed some small gifts in the back of the car and left early in the morning of the day before Christmas. Two young elders went with us.

In Itakyry, Sister Ugarte was very sad. It was the day before Christmas, and she had no presents to give her children. It took all their money and time just to provide the essential things that such a large family needed. Nothing was left for gifts or even a special treat for Christmas dinner.

All that morning she worked. She washed clothes in the stream and spread them on the bushes to dry. She tended the garden and cooked black beans and rice for their midday meal. After they ate, she rocked the baby and mended clothes. As she worked, she prayed, "Heavenly Father, please send our good friends, the missionaries, here for Christmas. I know it is a long way for them to come, but it would make this day special. Please, Heavenly Father."

We didn't know that she wanted us to come. The Spirit just told us that it would be good if we did. A bridge was washed away, so we had to walk the last few miles through the jungle. My goodness, how happy the Ugarte family was when they saw us coming through the trees!

That night we had a very special family home evening in the little wood chapel. The beautiful story of the birth of Christ was told, and testimonies were shared. Then for a long time we sat, watching the silent tropical stars and singing the sacred hymns of Christmas.

The Ugarte children didn't understand when Grandpa tried to act like Santa Claus the next morning. They did enjoy the simple gifts we passed out, though. There was a small doll for each little girl, sweet-smelling soap for the older girls, and windup toys for the boys. Grandpa had to show the boys how to wind them up, because they had never seen toys like that before.

We missed our own dear grandchildren, but this Christmas in Paraguay was a very special one for us. The best gifts that we can give or receive at Christmastime are love and service.

I'm looking forward to hearing about your Christmas, Carrie. I hope that it was also filled with that special Christmas feeling and that you didn't miss us too much.

Love,

Grandma and Grandpa

Carrie felt again the happy, tingly Christmas feeling—and all the emptiness was gone.

THOUGHT

Luke 2 and
3 Nephi 1

SONG

"Silent Night" #204

Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright Round yon virgin mother and Child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace; Sleep in heavenly peace. Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight! Glories stream from heaven afar; Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia! Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born! Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love's pure light Radiant beams from thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth; Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

ACTIVITY

Read the account, or watch the film, of the account of Christ's birth (Joy to the World movie)