

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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### Heart Trouble

Someone was dictating near me. I couldn't see anything, but I could hear the voice. It was a Doctor's voice. The voice was describing some kind of test on someone's heart and what was wrong. I wondered why he was dictating this information in my room.

As I became aware of the aching in my body, I realized the answer. I was still on the operating table. The voice I heard was talking about my body, my heart. He was describing the test results on my heart. As I opened my eyes, all I could see were the faces along each side of the operating table. Both sides of the table were lined with doctors and nurses.

I glanced at the clock and noticed it was 4:30. At 9:00 the doctor had told me the surgery would be over by about 9:30. "I could go home after lunch, if nothing went wrong." Apparently something had gone wrong. Suddenly, I was aware that I couldn't breathe. A tube in my throat kept me from talking. I mouthed the words, "can't breathe" to the doctor. The anesthesiologist told me to breathe with the machine. I didn't know what that meant. I couldn't feel any air going in or out. A machine was making rhythmic sounds. I tried breathing in time with the sound. The gurgling sound in my lungs told me I was getting more air in, but it also told me something was wrong with my lungs. "Suction"! Someone yelled.

The top was opened on the tube in my throat and another tube was inserted; a tube that sucked bloody colored fluid out of my lungs. (It is better not to be awake when this procedure is being done to you.)

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## TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

### The Lord Speaks Again

The December observance of the Lord's Supper was graced with much beautiful music consonant with the Christmas season. Hymns sung by the congregation and special violin music offered by Julie Smith were accompanied by Nathan Smith at the piano. The emblems were served early in the service, as the scriptures advise, and the Spirit of God moved among us touching our speaker before it was time for him to speak.

With deep emotion, Elder Norman Nelson announced, "I need to make a change in what I was planning." He then read, "When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, saying, Father, it is finished, thy will is done, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and the bodies of the saints which slept, arose, who were many, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." (Matthew 27:54-57). "You need to know that those saints are with us," he declared earnestly. "Even though you don't see them, you need to know they are here and that they minister to you if you will let them." It was the same message delivered to us the previous week as High Priest Sherman Phipps also spoke for the Lord.

After Julie and Nathan Smith played a beautiful arrangement of "Away in a Manger", Norman resumed reading. This time from Exodus 20:5-8: "For I the Lord, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." Then from Psalms 118:23-24: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." And Psalm 117: "Oh praise ye the Lord, all ye nations; praise him all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord."

Our speaker continued reading Matthew 5:10,11, and 8, in that order: "Blessed are all the pure in heart; for they shall see God. Blessed are all the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children

of God. Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.' Do we really hunger and thirst after righteousness?" he questioned. "Do we come together hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Did we, this morning, as we came together, expect the Spirit to be here? Did you know that the spirits are here and will minister to you as you desire it. If you have no desire, they can't do anything for you. But if you desire and do ask, and you listen and believe, there are many spirits around you all of the time, and you listen to the ones you want to listen to.

"You know, we think about John and the Three Nephites, and truly they are ministering spirits, but did you know there are thousands that were resurrected at the time of Jesus' resurrection that are also ministering spirits, and they are among you. They are ministering daily, and all you have to do is to recognize their presence and accept their ministry and seek to bring about the cause of Zion.

"We frequently sing this little song from Romans, don't we? 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.' 'The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' You know, we have a lot of words that we use, and those words have meaning to each individual in their own language; but they only have the meaning that God intended them to give if you are listening to that Spirit of God that tells you. Remember, in many places the Lord has said, 'Don't write. Don't write these things.' And the reason is no one can understand except they have the same spirit that the person who is seeing those things happen has. So, as you study, as you read, as you listen to someone else, you must, if you are to understand, pray for, be conscious of and listen for that spirit. Remember when Mormon was writing about what the Lord was doing here in this continent, the people heard, they saw and felt. It wasn't just the hearing, and it can't be just a hearing if you are to really understand. It has to be all of your senses coming together to know what the Lord really has in mind for you.

"Frequently I have tried to tell you that every day as I try to work, I recognize the fact that there is somebody with me. And you need to know the same thing. There are spirits with you. You need to recognize their presence, tell them 'Thank you' and listen to what they have to tell you. The Lord is always blessing you and with you. His presence is there. Recognize it. Do as the Patriarchs have told us. Every day do your study. Do your praying, and write down what the Lord has done for you today, so that you will remember it. This is what is required of us. If we are going to have Zion, we are going to be of one heart and one mind. Now those who have risen from the grave already and those four (John the Beloved and the Three Nephites) who are with us are entirely in tune to God. We need to use their presence along with our prayers to make ourselves in tune with that God who loves us.

"We can't just keep on making Sunday a day of feasting and revelry. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy - a day of worship, a day of fasting, and a day of prayer. Section 59:2f to 5b says: 'And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day; for verily this is a day appointed unto thee to rest from thy labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High; nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days, and at all times; but remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations, and thy sacraments, unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.'" At this point in the reading, our speaker paused to explain. "If

somebody tells you about your sins, you may be offended. If you confess your sins and the rest of us pray for you, there is no offense. You receive forgiveness, and the whole body is edified." He continued reading from section 59: 'And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart, that thy fasting may be perfect; or in other words, that thy joy may be full. Verily this is fasting and prayer; or, in other words, rejoicing and prayer.

'And inasmuch as ye do these things, with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts, and countenances; not with much laughter, for this is sin, but with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance; verily I say, that inasmuch as ye do this the fullness of the earth is yours.'" Again he paused to repeat, "The fullness of the earth is yours if you do it that way." He then proceeded, reading from Section 59:4d: "yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye, and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body, and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made, to be used with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion: and in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.'" "

"If you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you will receive the Holy Ghost! If you keep the Sabbath, the fulness of the earth is yours. There's a blessing with every commandment." Brother Nelson declared in closing.

We sang with sincere elation, "Joy To the World, The Lord is come! Let Earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing!" and were dismissed with a prayer that asked first that God would continue to bless and help us to keep the covenant which we had made so that we might always remember Him and keep His commandments that we might have His Spirit to be with us. "Help us to take Your Name in every part of our lives," the prayer continued, "not just when we come together to this service but tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. Until we meet again, we pray that Your blessing might be on each family. Father, for those who have little children, we pray that You will bless them during this holiday season that they may be able to help teach the true meaning of Christmas, even with all of the other things that bombard and would distract us. I pray that in our families we will not be overly stressed but that we will take the time to be holy and to look to You for our strength and our guidance. I pray for those who have loved ones who are ill that they might be blessed as well - that Your Spirit would strengthen and uplift them. And I pray that we may look forward to Your coming with great anticipation. In Jesus' name, Amen!"

## Starvation In A World of Plenty

High Priest Robert Rolfe passed out a graphic picture titled, "Putting a Human face on the Famine", then read from 1 Kings 17 the story of Elijah who hid beside the brook Cherith during the famine until the brook dried up. The Lord instructed the prophet to go to Zarephath where God had commanded a widow woman to "sustain" him. "So he arose and went to Zarephath; And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there

gathering sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruise; and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou has said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son.”

Suddenly we heard, from the rear of the room, the voice of an old woman announcing that she was Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias, and Diane Anderson walked slowly to the front of the room, leaning on a staff and carrying a basket. She paused on a bench that was prepared for her and told of the birth of John the Baptist, of the coming of her cousin Mary to tell her that she was with child of the holy Ghost, how John leapt in her womb at the sound of Mary’s voice, of the birth of Jesus. Then she burst into song as she exited the room, singing, “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel will come to you to you, O Israel.” It was such a moving experience that it took a while for Brother Rolfe to clear his eyes and his voice to continue his sermon.

We often say, “I’m starving!”, but, we were asked, “Have you ever been really hungry? Have you actually suffered the severe, racking pains of hunger of real starvation? Some of you have been in the three day fast and maybe have felt a little bit of that, although I don’t think for three days you experience the kind of racking pains of hunger about which I am talking. These pains don’t last, thank goodness, however. In few days, if you are going to get enough energy to walk around or to search for food or to even beg, you now have to rely on your reserves of body fat. Depending on how much fat you had before you ran out of food, which in my case would be quite awhile, those reserves may last a week or two or three, but in the end, they are going to be exhausted. The only option for your body now is to use the energy reserves in your muscles. That leaves you pretty much listless, depressed and too tired to do anything. And around you, if there are people suffering from the same thing, especially children who are starting to die, and as your body weight falls and your limbs become shrunken and emaciated, your personality may undergo some changes. Do you ever get grouchy and say, ‘Well, I’m just hungry’?”

“Starving is a most unpleasant way to die, but you may not die. You may be lucky. You may only become blind or develop physical deformities or have brain damage. And for 800,000,000 people in the world today, going hungry is a daily event. In fact, 15-20 million die each year from hunger related causes, and 75% of these are children. In fact, since we have started this service, we have had about 600 children die, for there are about 20 to 30 children dying every minute from starvation. Yet the world, according to all of the scholars who calculate these things, has enough food to provide 4.3 pounds of food per person per day for every one! I don’t know about you, but that’s enough to make most people fat. So, why are they starving?”

### **Why Are People Starving?**

“There’s a fellow named Peter Rossett, and if you want to find him, he’s the director for food and development policy. He wrote a book called World Hunger, 12 Myths. You may not agree with his conclusions, but some of them are pretty much true. You can just pretty much look at the facts, and you have to say, ‘Yeah! This is right’. Here are some of the myths. Do you agree with these? (1) Hunger is due to scarcity of food. (2) Hunger is due to natural

catastrophe. (3) Hunger is caused by overpopulation. (4) Hunger is caused by tariffs and the lack of free markets. (5) Hunger could be cured by foreign aid. He says all of these are not true, and many more besides.

“He says the truth is that hunger is caused by poverty for the most part. It is due to a food market that responds to money rather than need. Food is available, but, according to their statistics, 78% of all malnourished children live in countries that export food. Why do they export the food? Because they would rather have the money for the food than to have it distributed to people who don’t have the money to pay for it. So when a country’s own citizens are too poor to buy the food, if you have the food, what are you going to do? You export it to another country where they will buy it. Just using foreign aid does not work because, who are the primary beneficiaries of the foreign aid for food? The food companies. Our government buys their food. They make the money. That still doesn’t mean it’s going to get to the hungry people. Did you ever hear of Mahatma Ghandi? He says, and this is a quote from him, ‘The world has enough for man’s need but not for man’s greed.’ And the scriptures say, ‘There is enough and to spare!’

“Why should we talk about poor and starving people at Christmas time? That wouldn’t be a happy thought; and I think if you look at the picture I showed you, that wouldn’t be a very happy scene to count on, but I would just like to suggest that you look around you. Each one of you here, every person in this branch is rich by comparison with these millions who are starving. You know that Jesus has been criticized for His lack of concern for the poor. Many of us are like Jesus’ disciples when it comes to poor people. You know when they came upon the blind man, as recorded in the book of John, John 9, what did they ask Him? ‘Whose sin was it that caused this guy to be blind? Was it his parents sin or was it his sin?’ And so, if you are poor and starving, we say, ‘What are you doing wrong, because you are poor and starving?’ The poor are poor because it’s their own fault. Is that true? For the most part, No! It’s not true.

“The Bible says, ‘For the poor shall never cease out of the land.’ That’s what Moses said. Jesus said, ‘For the poor always ye have with you.’ Did Moses and Jesus intend that we always have poor people that might all be starving? Couldn’t God feed them Himself? You know when Moses led the Children of Israel coming out of Egypt, he fed them manna, right? And when Jesus had the thousands on the hill side, He took a few loaves and fishes and fed thousands. In fact, some people have said that shows that God is not a loving God because He allows people to starve to death. No loving God would do that. And the answer to that question gets into the greater question of why am I or why are we here. If you believe that God is in control of this world, if you believe that God has a great plan which has been unfolded in time, and if you believe that God has a purpose for mankind, for each of us as individuals, then your answers to those questions may very well be different. But the fact is, Jesus didn’t spend very much time feeding the poor, did He? Not in the sense of food. In fact, what did He tell us about worrying about whether we are going to starve to death? I think I have said that to my parents.

“My Dad was always a great one for not wanting to stop as we went down the road. I think it was when I was with him, he thought if he could stretch out the time, he might get by with one meal rather than two. I can remember stopping at a restaurant with him once when I said, ‘Can I order what I want?’ He had waited until about ten thirty or eleven for breakfast, and I usually had already had two

meals by then. He said, 'Sure. Order whatever you want. So I told the waitress what I wanted for breakfast and the cook came out and said, 'Is this a joke?' As I think about that in terms of the picture that I showed you, a very small part of what I had would have sustained them for a whole day, and I consumed that in a single meal!

### **Starving, And Don't Know It?**

"Jesus told His disciples not to fear those who could kill the body, but to fear Him who could kill the body and the soul. In another place He said to fear Him that had the power to cast your soul into hell. That's the one you need to worry about. Who is that? God, Christ. That's who you need to be worried about, if you haven't figured that out. Well, look around you. Are we rich? Are we well fed? Don't we look good? You might look at that picture again. How does that picture look to you? There are millions of people just like that. In some places they don't even clean up the bodies. They just lay there and gradually decay.

"The thing I want to talk about to you is that there are millions of people out there that are starving spiritually, but you can't see that in a picture. In fact, as Americans, we are much more careful about what we eat than what goes into our heads. We are more concerned that our bathroom is clean than that our minds and our souls are clean. That's part of why the world is starving for spiritual food; and Jesus is most concerned about our spiritual food. Most of us have an idea of what our church is like. This is what Jesus said to one of the churches - this is Revelation 3:17-22, 'Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.'

"Do you think the Spirit may be saying that to our church? I hope not for there are some pretty serious condemnations. You know what? Jesus wants us to be fed. In fact, He's really concerned about us being fed, but He's most concerned that our spirits will be fed with food that is eternal rather than with just temporary food. And He gives us an open invitation. (John 6:47- 55) 'He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven. ... If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews, therefore, strove among themselves saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up in the resurrection of the just in the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.' "Do you believe this? Do you believe that when you come to the Lord's Supper that you are eating and drinking something of eternal value? Or is this just a ritual act that you do once a month? Are you eating and drinking eternal life or are you drinking damnation to your soul?

"Getting back to Jesus' saying, when He said, 'Except ye eat

the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you'; many of the disciples at the time said, 'This is a hard saying; who can hear it?' And from that time forth, many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him - these who had been given the free meal! They gave it up. These people recognized that the meal was free, but that didn't mean it didn't have a cost to it. It has always been difficult for some people to accept this invitation of Jesus. The invitation has been present from the beginning, but they can't believe the invitation as it's given.

### **Free But With a Cost**

"One of my favorite passages in terms of an invitation is in the book of Isaiah, chapter 55. It says, 'Ho!' I like that. I don't know whether it's supposed to be 'ho, ho' like you laugh, or if that's just to get your attention, but it starts out 'Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.' Then He says, 'Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline you ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.' And John, in Revelation 22:17, repeats that invitation. It's a present invitation that says, 'Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Is it really that simple? Yes it is. No money is needed. No price is needed. It is given freely by our Lord. There is a cost, but that cost is exceeded by a thousand times what it's going to cost you.

"Why is it so hard to accept? Why did so many disciples in Jesus' day quit following when they heard that saying? I can tell you this, it has been my experience that I quit following Christ over a lot less than that. It has been my experience that many people carry tremendous bitterness within over far less than that. It has been my experience that people separate themselves from one another over far less than this.

"This is an account given by a nurse. There is a dying patient, and this conversation was over what's called, 'The Berry spoon.' The patient says, 'I'll never forgive him!' Remember she's dying. 'I told him I would never forgive him!' The attractive elderly lady spoke softly but with resolve as I attended to her nightly care. Her expression was troubled as she turned away, focused her eyes on the drapes closing in her nursing home bed. Our conversation had traveled from the temporal to the eternal, and now a deep hurt had surfaced. She told us how her brother had approached her hospital bed accusing her of taking more than her share of family heirlooms following their mother's death. He spoke of various items ending with, 'The berry spoon.' He said, 'I want the berry spoon!' For the forty years since the parents' death, he had hidden his feelings, but now they erupted. She was both hurt and angered by his accusation and vowed never to forgive him. 'It's my spoon! It was given to me!' she defended herself. 'He's wrong, and I won't forgive him!'

"Standing at her bedside, I felt my spirit soften and grieve. A spoon! A berry spoon! In the bed before me lay a woman given two months to live - sixty days, and she would face her Lord and never see her brother again in this life! Her mind and spirit were in anguish, and her only remaining family tie was broken over a berry spoon!

"As I returned to my nurses' station, I was drawn deep into thought. How many berry spoons were there in my life? How many things as insignificant as a spoon in the light of eternity, separate me

from full communion with God? How much lack of forgiveness keeps me from fellowship with others? I could only ask God to search my heart. How many berry spoons were there in my life?"

"You know, I have talked about this before. So much of what Jesus taught us involves eating and drinking. That's good, because I like to eat and drink. That speaks to me and maybe to you, too. That's why our pot lucks are so good. We like to eat and drink - right? And I know what it's like to be thirsty. I was so thirsty once that I drank out of a river where I had to wipe the bugs and stuff away from the water because I didn't want to be drinking them as I was drinking the water. It tasted awful - kind of like old motor oil and other decaying things, but it was still wet. I don't know whether that was a good idea. I have been told you can get a lot of bad things out of drinking river water, but as you can see, that happened a lot of years ago, and apparently, whatever it was in there, it didn't get me! But I think that the one reason that Jesus taught us about things about eating and drinking was because they are such a compelling force in our life. You know the picture you have in front of you is what happens to you if a person doesn't eat. Unfortunately, we can't get a good photograph of what we look like to God when we don't get spiritual nourishment.

### **Hungering And Thirsting for God's Purposes**

"Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.' And so many times the invitation in His present kingdom is couched in terms of eating and drinking. I'd like to read from Luke 14:15-24. 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto them, A certain man made a great supper and bade many; and sent his servants at supper time, to say to them who were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all, with one consent, began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them. I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, therefore, I cannot come. So that servant came and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servants, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring hither the poor, and the maimed, the halt and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. The Lord said unto his servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel men to come in, that my house may be filled; for I say unto you, That none of those men who were bidden, shall taste of my supper.'

"You know it's interesting that after this parable, Jesus made this statement, (Verses 27-28) 'And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. Wherefore, settle this in your hearts that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.' And then, he talked about the parable of the tower and the parable of the king that is going to go out and attack another kingdom, as to whether he can beat him with 10,000 or not. So, brethren, what should we do? Well, we talk about 'seek ye first the kingdom of God' and then, you know, first things first. Jacob 2:23-24 tells us that if we do seek the kingdom first, we are going to seek riches. Isn't that interesting? It's almost the opposite of what we think. And it says, why are you going to do that? Because of all the people you are going to be able to help if you have them - not because you are trying to fill up your blue silo with cash like Scrooge McDuck and take money baths and go swimming as they do in the comic strips. Jesus told us over and over that He wants to feed us - that He's the bread of life - that He is the living water.

"You know, two thousand years ago, as Diane so aptly described for us this morning, a poor family arrived in a packed city and despite the woman being ready to deliver a child, they ended up in a stable. There wasn't any fast food, no TV, no private room, no shower, no courtesy help. (My kids, if there is no swimming pool, that's roughing it!) She gave birth to a child, according to the scripture, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. That very act, like so many others surrounding Jesus, was prophetic. Do you know what that symbolized when she laid that baby in that manger? That He was going to be eaten. It sounds kind of gruesome, doesn't it? But that's what manger means. It is a French word that means to be fed. Very symbolic in the sense of why he came and why He was born that way. Jesus came to be fed. Are you being fed spiritually? Are you being fed by Jesus, or are you, as John says in Revelation, are you miserable, poor, blind, naked and wretched - in short spiritually starved. My prayer for all of us this holiday season is that we will be spiritually fed enough to claim the promise that is found in Doctrine and Covenants 45, and I just ran across it. I know I have read it before, but it kind of jumped out at me because of what's been going on. This is D&C 45:6d - just one line - 'And the remnant shall be gathered unto this place.' Now we all have heard about that, but then it says, 'And then they shall look for me, and behold, I will come.'

"Are you looking for your Lord to come? Many of you have been gathered. Are you looking, because it says, 'They shall look for me, and behold, I will come.' What a promise to carry with us at Christmas time - is the Lord's promise that He will come. May God bless each of you in this holiday season!"

We sang 'Away in a Manger' with new understanding and were dismissed with a prayer of thanksgiving and a petition that we would all catch the importance of this season, would continue to worship God and be aware of and help care for those in physical or spiritual need.

## **The Intent of Christmas**

The intent of the birth of Jesus and the signs that foretold His coming were the focus of Elder Michael Jordison's sermon Sunday, December 21. He first told of a person at prayer who heard God's still small voice speak to his heart saying, "I have something special to give you." His mind raced wondering what the gift could be - a new ministry, a blessing for his business? When his heart quieted in expectation, God spoke to him again. "The thing I am going to give you is more of Myself."

Next Michael read from Helaman 5:55-61 the story of Samuel the Lamanite appearing in Zarahemla to warn the Nephite people to repent and prepare for the coming of the Son of God. "And behold, he said unto them, Behold I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name. And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of His coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in the heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh, there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day; therefore there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day, and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun, and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born. And behold

there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this shall be a sign unto you. And behold, this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in the heaven. And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth.”

Sue Beck sang the carol, “Angels we have heard on High”, a song of the angel message which part of the Christmas story Michael noted was a favorite of his. Then he spoke of an unexpected occurrence in his life this past week. A friend called and spoke for a long time of a dream he had respecting a man who went all over the place. He was a man like Jesus. Everywhere he went people followed him. Some were angry with him. Others seemed to defend him. Finally the man seemed to tire of the commotion they made. He stopped and began to perform miracles and signs that would let the people know who he was. He really was Jesus. All of the people saw the signs and miracles. Some believed, and began to follow Him. Others, although they saw the same signs, refused to believe and continued to revile Him. Mike’s friend said what was most interesting to him was that this Jesus was just like you and me. He wasn’t like the Jesus portrayed in drama and films. Instead of being the quiet, calm person in a white robe with measured gait that we see portrayed, he moved and acted like a regular person. His dress and speech were such that he would have blended in with us today. This friend began to see how Jesus could be anywhere and everywhere. He could be all around us. He could fit into any time or place in any culture and seem as natural as the people of that era.

“My friend who is a non-practicing Catholic, not familiar with the scriptures, has relied on his own intellect and personal experiences to understand the Divine. Now, due to the prayers of many on his behalf and the benevolence of his Creator, God gave him this special gift - a timeless, two- fold revelation. First, in the act of revealing this to him in a dream, the Lord has indicated His desire for a personal, intimate relationship with him as with each of us. It was a personal communication one on one without an intermediary. Secondly, the content of the dream reveals the timelessness of Christ. Christ reveals Himself to mankind in ways in which man can understand at a moment of revelation. And, like in the dream, after all that He can do to reveal himself, He cannot force a person to believe or even want to believe. One must choose to follow Him!” Michael declared, “God works with all His children and seeks to reveal Himself to us all!”

Michael’s friend went on to tell of a very rich uncle who suddenly lost all his wealth. His wealthy friends thought he must be crazy for instead of bemoaning the loss of the wealth, he began to understand and communicate the real values of life. Possessions would slip away. Family and relationships were real. It seemed silly nonsense to many; but now the friend began to understand that his uncle had found an eternal truth which he had passed along to his nephew, but the idea had lain dormant for many years. Now, the seed that had been planted, nourished by the Spirit of God, was sprouting and looking for light which would cause it to grow further. He has realized that the things in life that we perceive as bad, may not be so bad after all. Along with the good things that happen, they help us be better people if we let them.

“Although he was not aware of it, that idea comes right out of the written word of God,” our speaker pointed out. Romans 8:28 says, ‘And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.’ The same Spirit who dwelt with the ancient authors was continuing to reveal the same truths today.” The friend spoke almost question-

ingly of what should really matter most to him - his wife, his children, relationships with others - not his cars and his collections.

### **The Gospel is a Love Story**

Michael’s response was to bear witness that “The gospel is really a love story. You know how much you love your children and want to protect them. Now you can see a little of how much God loves His children - and we’re all His children. You don’t want your children to do things that would harm them. Since they cannot perceive the long time results of many of their actions, you give them commands - directions to help them avoid making poor choices. But many times they must learn by making mistakes and trying again. You don’t love them any less because they fail at times, because that is often the only way they can learn. And God does that with us. His commands are to keep us out of harm’s way, yet at the same time to allow us to make mistakes - not because it pleases Him, but because that is often the only way that we will learn.

“But you don’t just love your children in this love story. You want them to love you back, not in some superficial obligatory way, but in an honest, engaging way. God wants, no needs, our love - so much so that He gave His only Begotten Son as a sacrifice for us. There is an old proverb that says, ‘If you have something, let it go free. If it comes back to you, it is yours. If it doesn’t come back, it never was yours.’ That proverb, I believe, is based on the Gospel. God freely let go of His love through the person of Jesus Christ, and He is looking for that love to come back to Him in the form of the image of Christ in our countenances.

“Perhaps these things may not be new and profound to many of you, but they are profound to one who is just beginning to grasp things of God. God is eternal. His church is built upon eternal, unchanging revelation. For my friend, personal experience was melding with heavenly revelation at a time when most of the Western world is celebrating the birth of the greatest revelation. And so it is that ‘The Greatest Story Ever Told’ is a love story. It’s a story of God’s great Love that is set free and given to the world to do with as it seemed good. That love was foretold, adored, worshiped, revered, blessed, kissed, rebuked, scourged and crucified; and not to be forgotten, resurrected!”

### **Samuel the Lamanite**

Our speaker returned to the story of Samuel the Lamanite whose preaching on the walls of Zarahemla was not acceptable to many of the Nephites. God protected him from their arrows and stones. They could not hit him. He delivered his prophecy of the sign that would signify the birth of the Son of God and the intent for which it was given. Helaman 5:62-66 gives Samuel’s declaration of the reason for his message and he says, “For this intent I have come up upon the walls of this city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye might know the conditions of repentance; And also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven, and of earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.”

“God was foretelling the sign that He was going to give and making sure everyone would be able to see it; not just that He wanted them all to know that He was born then, but that they might Believe On His Name. That was the intent for the sign, according to Samuel. And he continued, ‘And if ye believe on his name, ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits.’

### **What Has this to do with Christmas?**

Our speaker declared that he does not believe we are really different today from those of two thousand years ago. Circumstances change but human nature stays the same. So he wondered aloud how we would have responded to the news of Christ's birth. Would we have been one of the repentant ones asking for baptism by Nephi or one of those shooting arrows at Samuel? Would we have responded to the angel Gabriel as did Mary, 'Be it unto me according to thy word'? Or would we have, like Joseph, taken the pregnant woman to wife?

"Would you have been like a shepherd watching over your flocks by night, noising abroad the news the the angel had declared unto you? Would you have been like the wise men, bringing gifts to lay at the feet of the Christ Child? Would you have been like King Herod or one of his priests, seeking to destroy the child? Or would you have been like many, waiting for another sign to come?"

"At Samuel's prophecy, there were a few who believed and repented, but the majority did not. And so the time the sign should be given came near. 3 Nephi 1:4-15 records the story. "And it came to pass that in the commencement of the ninety and second year, behold the prophecies of the prophets began to be fulfilled more fully; for there began to be greater signs and greater miracles wrought among the people. But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite. And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying, Behold, the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been vain. And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed, began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken, might not come to pass. But behold, they did watch steadfastly for that day, and that night, and that day, which should be as one day, as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain.

"Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death, except the sign should come to pass which had been given by Samuel the prophet. Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceeding sorrowful. And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God, in behalf of his people; yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers. And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord, all that day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, Lift up your head and be of good cheer, for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, And on the morrow come I into the world, to shew unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfill all things which I have made known unto the children of men, from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father, and of the Son of the Father, because of me, and of the Son, because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

"And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken: For behold at the going down of the sun, there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished, because there was no darkness when the night came. And there were many who had not believed the words of the prophets, fell to the earth, and became as if they were dead, for they

knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets, had been frustrated, for the sign which had been given was already at hand; and they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear; Yea, in fine, all the people upon the face of the whole earth, from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so exceedingly astonished, that they fell to the earth; For they knew that the prophets had testified of these things for many years, and that the sign which had been given, was already at hand; and they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief.

"And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was midday. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given. And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets. And it came to pass also, that a new star did appear, according to the word.'

"And it came to pass that from this time forth, there began to be lyings sent forth among the people by Satan, to harden their hearts, to the intent that they might not believe in those signs and wonders which they had seen; But notwithstanding those lyings and deceivings, the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord.'

"When the sign finally came," Mike explained, "all the people were astonished and fell to the earth, just as Samuel had prophesied. There was no doubt whether the sign had been given, and 'the more part of the people did believe, and were converted unto the Lord'. Because of the sign, the people began to believe on His name, which was the intent of the sign! 'And it came to pass that Nephi went forth among the people, and also many others, baptizing unto repentance, in the which, there were a great remission of sins.'

### **The Intent of Christmas**

"The intent of Christmas is that we might believe on His name. To believe on His name is to repent of All of our sins and to be baptized for the remission of those sins that by God's grace we may walk the remainder of our days with his image engraved on our countenances." Brother Jordison declared.

"A woman and her shopping companion had spent all day among a barrage of Christmas shoppers, each scurrying to find the latest and best sales of the season. Near the close of the day, exhausted by all their efforts they found themselves waiting in line for the next elevator with an equally haggard crowd. When the doors finally opened, each shopper struggled to secure for themselves a space on the crowded elevator. At last they were on with each passenger pressing up against another like sardines. Exasperated at the situation, the woman commented to her companion over the bustle of common complaints, 'Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be strung up and shot.' All of a sudden there was a voice from the crowd that shot back, 'They already crucified him! What more do you want?' They rode in silence down to the first floor!

"How are we celebrating Christmas? Are we joining in the fray and hysteria of the shopping season? Are we spending our tithes and offerings on things which moth and rust can corrupt? Perhaps we can take some moments to celebrate Christ's birth and the salvation he offers us. But are we remembering the intent for which Christ came? Are we believing on His name and repenting of all our sins? Christmas should be more that a time of retrospection. It should be a time of introspection. We need to turn our attention to the quality

within.

“I have been studying the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament and thought about talking of the Babylonian influence on our culture and how nearly everything around us has roots in ancient Babylon. Last week I only half joked to Rob that I was going to speak on the evils of the Christmas Tree (Jeremiah 10). I’ll save that sermon for another day. But like my friend and my brother Paul said, ‘All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose.’ (Romans 8:28). That which is pagan in origin can be made into something good when made with the intent to cause us to believe on Christ’s name.

“The prophet Daniel writes of a dream that the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar has after he has taken captive the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In this dream there is a great statue with the head made of gold, the arms and chest of silver, the stomach and thighs of bronze and the legs and feet of iron mixed with clay. Daniel interprets the dream as four kingdoms, the first Babylon represented by the gold, and the successive kingdoms by the other materials. Daniel later has a vision in which he beholds these same four kingdoms; but in his vision, instead of statues made of fine metals, four ferocious beasts represent the kingdoms. The interpretation of both experiences is the same, but the perspective is different. King Nebuchadnezzar sees these kingdoms through the eyes of men, glorious and desirable wealth and strength. Daniel sees them through the eyes of God, wild and ferocious beasts which seek to destroy all that which is in their paths.

“We need to be mindful that in our celebrations of Christmas we aren’t looking at this season through the eyes of men, intent upon the riches and pleasures of this earth while God views them as ferocious beasts tearing down the kingdom and His church. Many times we are instructed in the scriptures to come out of Babylon, to be in the world but not of it. Spiritual Babylon is defined as wickedness. I hope this year in your celebrations, you will take the time to recognize that this is the season to remember the intent of Christ’s birth, that we might believe on His name, repenting of ALL of our sins, removing ourselves further from the clutches this world has upon us.

“It’s interesting to note that two of the Gospel writers, Mark and John, did not include the story of Christ’s birth, preferring instead to start their messages with the doctrine of repentance. Hopefully we are not so much immersed in our culture that we will be like many who claim to be Christians but who won’t heed the words of the prophets when they call us to repentance and withdrawal from the vices of the world. For these it will be too late when the last sign is given and Christ comes in His glory through the sky with His angels to claim His own.

“If the Lord’s gift to us is to give more of Himself, what should our gift to Him be if not more of ourselves, with His image burned upon our countenances? By expressing the love of Christ back to Him, there will be more people with one heart and one mind.”

## The After Christmas Story

Seventy Ronald Smith chose 3 Nephi 1 beginning about the middle of verse 12 as the setting for this after Christmas story. He read, ‘Lift up your head and be of good cheer, for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, And on the

tomorrow come I into the world, to shew unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfill all things which I have made known unto the children of men, from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father, and of the Son of the Father, because of me, and of the Son, because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.”

“I would like to spend some time this morning with the after Christmas story. Sometimes we read the Christmas story in the Bible from Matthew and Luke, but we stop and don’t get past the time when Jesus was born. This past week, most of us have been involved with our families and overeating and wrapping and getting and giving presents, and if you have watched any television, you have seen lots of Christmas stories. In our family we sat down and watched ‘Miracle on 34th Street.’ I wanted to watch ‘It’s a Wonderful Life,’ but only saw about three minutes of it one night. Last night we watched ‘A Christmas Carol’. I always cry during all these stories when the miracles occur. Everyone of these stories has some kind of miracle in it. Those miracles touch the heart and are fine stories, but we all know that they are not true. Somehow, we need to come together with our children and find out those stories which are true - what are the stories that we really believe in at Christmas time.

“For many people, the many stories that have been given of Christmas have kind of blurred the lines between what’s true and what’s make believe to the point where there are people in the world today who say that the stories in the Bible were just made up. They say that, just like ‘Miracle on 34th Street’, it’s a nice story, but it was just made up. They believe it doesn’t mean any more than the miracle on 34th Street or Santa Claus or all of those other things. This morning, I would like you to know that I do believe that the stories written in the Bible were actually true. I’ll agree that in telling and retelling a story--even when I tell some stories about some things that I have done--details can get mixed up. But that doesn’t take away from the fact that the stories are about events that actually occurred. I believe there is a Creator; and that the Creator of the Universe loved you and me so much that He came to earth as a baby and grew up; and that He came to take on Him our sins, our afflictions, our sicknesses, and even our death, that we might stand whole before Him one day.

### It Takes Both Luke and Matthew to Tell The Story Luke’s Part

“We find two Christmas stories in the Bible. We find one in Luke the second chapter. I’m not going to read the whole thing, but I will read pieces of it and just remind you of the things that happened. You recall that Luke tells the story about how there were shepherds that were abiding in the fields by night and there was an angel that came and said, “I am giving you good tidings of great joy, for unto you this day is born in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” And after that angel came and told them that, there was a multitude of the heavenly hosts singing praises to God. The shepherds decided to go into Bethlehem and find the babe. And they went and they found the babe in a stable, lying in a manger just as the angel had told them. The shepherds told everybody who would listen; and ‘all they who heard it wondered at those things that were told them by the shepherds, but Mary kept all of these things and pondered it in her heart.’ I’ve always found that an interesting statement. Mary knew for certain whether or not there was a virgin birth. She was told by the angel that she was going to have this baby,



and then she did. Then the shepherds came and said, 'You know, the angels came and told us that this baby was going to be born,' and she kept that and pondered it in her heart. I always wonder what else she was thinking about when she pondered that in her heart.

"But after eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named by the angel before He was conceived. In those days, under the Law of Moses, when a woman had a man child, they would wait for eight days. She was considered unclean during that time because of the blood that had passed from her. After eight days they would circumcise the child and he would receive his name.

"Luke's story continues, 'And when the days of her purification, according to the Law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.' If you look at Leviticus 12, you will find that in the Law of Moses, after the seven days were over and the child was circumcised on the eighth day, there were thirty three more days that the woman would have to continue in her purification. At the end of that time, she would go to the temple and offer a two sacrifices, one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering. Together, these offerings would bring about the atonement. The law in Leviticus 12 specified exactly what kind of animals should be offered. The burnt offering was to be a male lamb. It could be either a goat or a sheep, but a lamb was what they were supposed to offer for a burnt offering. Then they are supposed to offer a dove. The law continues-- and this has some significance to the after Christmas story--that if they were too poor to offer a lamb, they could offer two turtle doves instead. So they could substitute a bird for the lamb. Luke goes on to say, 'As it is written in the Law of the Lord, every male which openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is written in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons'. So, Mary and Joseph, at the end of forty days, went to the temple, and they offered the poor man's offering. Jesus came as a poor child - not as a rich one who could offer a lamb, but as a poor child who could only offer the two turtle doves.

"When they got up to the temple, there was a man there whose name was Simeon. Simeon 'was a just and devout man who was waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Ghost was upon him and it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child, even Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the Law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God and said, Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace according to thy word; for mine eyes hath seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.' So Simeon was an old man who had looked for and longed for the time of the coming of the Christ - the time of the fulfilling of the prophecies, and when he saw Jesus, the Lord let him know - The Spirit of God let him know that this was the one who was coming for the salvation of His people. Simeon said Jesus was a 'light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.' And, of course, Jesus was that light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. 'And Joseph and Mary marveled at those things which were spoken of the child.' They thought, Wow! What a child! And they marveled at that.

"And Simeon blessed them and said unto Mary, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; Yea, a spear shall pierce through him to the wounding of thine own soul also; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.' And I think that Mary,

having treasured that in her heart, probably came back to that many times after Jesus was killed and the sword pierced his side, and she remembered that it had been prophesied that that also would happen.

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was of great age, and had lived with a husband only seven years, whom she had married in her youth. And she lived a widow about four score and four years.' That's 84 years as a widow. That's a long time to be a widow. 'Who departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise to the Lord, and spake of him, to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned unto Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.' So the parents went back to Nazareth.

### Matthew's Part

"Now, that's the after Christmas story as it's told in Luke. You notice that Luke didn't tell anything about the Wise Men visiting Mary and Joseph. According to Luke, Mary and Joseph were poor. One would think that if they had been visited by Wise Men and given gold and frankincense and myrrh, they would be at least rich enough to offer a sacrifice that was called for in the law for somebody that had those assets. But Luke doesn't say anything about the Wise Men. He doesn't say anything about the star. Because of that, some people believe that Luke made up his story and Matthew made up his story and they are different stories.

"But I would like to testify to you that if you the stories carefully, both the one in Luke and the one in Matthew, that they can be reconciled, and that they can both be true.

"It is only in Matthew, the third chapter, where we read about the coming of the Wise Men. We have had this story before here, so I won't repeat it except to see what happened afterwards so we can get the rest of the story. When the Wise Men had come to King Herod, they asked where the young child was to be born. King Herod asked his wise men where the scriptures say that he was to be born. They looked it up in Micah, and found that Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem. So King Herod sent them to Bethlehem to see where the young child was. 'And when they had departed, lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold and frankincense and myrrh.' I had always wondered about that passage that says they rejoiced exceedingly. If they had been following the star as the popular story goes, why did they stop in Jerusalem? Why didn't they just follow the star? Why did they go to Herod? Why was it that they rejoiced exceedingly when they saw the star again if they had been following it for two weeks like the popular stories say? Maybe we need to read the story a little more carefully.

"According to this story, the Wise Men were warned of God in a dream that they should go home a different way and not go back to Herod. When Herod found out that they had gone back a different way, he was really mad. He had told them that he wanted to worship the child, but he was a very paranoid, manic, jealous king, and what he really wanted to do was get rid of any threat to his throne. So he sent his soldiers and had all the children killed from two years old

and under, 'according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men when the star had appeared' is what the scripture says here. Why would he have killed two year old children if Jesus had just been born?

"According to the time he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men, it had been two years since they had first seen the star, and this was two years after the time of Jesus' birth, approximately, when the Wise Men got there. Maybe they said it was a year before, and Herod went one year on each side just to make sure, but it was some time after the birth of Christ when the Wise Men got there. Note that the Bible doesn't say that the Wise Men went to Bethlehem. It says they followed the star. Herod sent them to Bethlehem because he said that was where the child was going to be born, but Matthew doesn't say that they went there. He says they followed the star to the house where the young child was - not to the stable where the baby was, but to the house where the young child was, and that's where they gave them gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And that night, according to Matthew's story, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take his wife and his baby and go to Egypt. And so he did. They went to Egypt until the time when King Herod was dead.

"Now, how does a poor carpenter finance a trip to a foreign land and live in a foreign land for an unspecified amount of time? I believe that the gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh were there for a purpose; and the purpose was to finance them, to take care of the baby and make sure that He was out of reach of King Herod. Now Luke told us that Mary and Joseph waited for forty days after the child's birth before going to the temple and making the required offering to the Lord. Matthew says that they went to Egypt the night after the Wise Men visited. I believe that both of those things happened. It's just that the Wise Men came nearly two years later. The two stories fit together perfectly. They fit especially well when combined with the story in the Book of Mormon where we are told that two years before the birth of Christ angels came to visit Wise Men and told them that Jesus was to be born. Having been sent by angels, they shared their gifts with the child for the purpose known to God. How neatly the stories fit together!

#### **How Do they Fit, And Who Cares?**

"So what we have here are the stories of after Christmas that really, I do think, have some interesting things in them. We have the poor man's sacrifice and the wait for forty days in Luke. Then they went home and after that, I believe about two years after that, the Wise Men came and offered their gifts, and that was the time when they went to Egypt and waited for the death of Herod. And when they came back, they came to Nazareth which was their home, and so Jesus was called a Nazarene.

"Well, who cares? What difference does it make? The difference that it makes, I think, has to do with the way that we can understand the scriptures, because I believe that the scriptures have truth in them - that they have prophecies of what is going to come to pass, and those prophecies that are coming to pass. We are in the midst of that time. All through the scriptures, we can read the unmistakable prophecies of the coming forth of Israel in this time. Jesus talked about the coming forth of Israel when He talked about a fig tree. Just before His death He talked about a fig tree, and the fig tree represented Israel. There are many, many parables in the Old Testament in which the fig tree and the figs represent Israel, and His disciples knew Jesus was talking about Israel.

"Jesus came by a fig tree. He went to get some fruit, and it didn't have any fruit. The Bible says He cursed the fig tree, and the fig tree

died. That night, they were coming back that way, and the fig tree was dead, the disciples marveled at it. They said, 'What's going on here? He cursed it this morning, and now it's dead! What does that mean?' They understood that He was talking of Israel and the fact that Israel would die as a nation; and they couldn't understand how that could be. They were a strong nation. They were alive. They had a rich, long history. How could it be that our nation could be gone - that it would be done away? But Jesus told them that it would happen, and He said it would happen within a generation. And it did happen within a hundred years of the time that Jesus was there. By 130 AD, the nation of Israel was gone. It was illegal for any Jew to even be in Palestine. That decree stayed in effect from about 130 AD until 1948.

"But Jesus told His disciples also in the 24th chapter of Matthew, 'When you see the fig tree begin to shoot forth its branches then you will know that summer is nigh. Then you will know that the things we are talking about in the end times are going to occur. We are living in the days of the fulfilling of those prophecies - when Jesus said He was going to come back. And if we would understand that, we need to separate the true stories from the made-up stories, and we need to understand that the things that are in the scriptures really are the true stories - the true miracles that have occurred.

"Look around you. What do you see? If I look out the window, I see cars. If I look up here, I see a piano. If I look around I see the walls of this building. Everything I see testifies that somebody intelligent created it. You wouldn't--at least I don't think you would--believe that the piano was just an accident - that it was already here and we built the church around it - that we had a piano and we built this church around it and the piano was just there without anybody creating it. No! That would be stupid. You wouldn't believe that the car was something that just accidentally came into being - you know, some lightning struck a pile of earth that had iron ore in it and somehow a car appeared out of that accident. You wouldn't believe that anything that was made just came here by accident. For anything that we see that has order to it, we believe there was a creator. And yet, many people believe that all of this was just an accident that was created out of the chaos of nothing, and that somehow, accidentally, everything is.

"Well, You can't prove any different, OK, because we don't have any control group. there's no way to do a scientific experiment that will tell you whether or not it was an accident. But since we don't believe that anything else was an accident, (Chuckle) why do we believe that everything is an accident? It's beyond me! I believe that everything that we look at shows that there was a Creator. Everything that is shows that there was a creator of the Universe. In Psalms 19, the Psalmist says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God!' Everything, the stars, the earth, the air we breathe, the fact that we are breathing, the fact that it keeps us alive, life itself testifies that there is a creator. And the Bible testifies that the Creator loves us so much that He was willing to send His Only Begotten Son to come to the earth and to grow up just like you or I grow up - to be a child - to have the temptations of the earth - to have friends, to know betrayals, to have the sorrows, to have the sicknesses, to have the good times, to have the bad times. And He sent Him here because He was to take on Himself the sins of us all - to make it possible for us once again to live in the presence of God. I wasn't there. I can't say for sure, but I can only testify that I believe; and I believe because I know that it has brought hope and joy - I have felt the Spirit of God. And I know that that Spirit has

testified that these things are true.

### **Believe If Only For the Work's Sake**

“On Thanksgiving night I saw on television Norman Rockwell's famous painting of Thanksgiving. It showed a family with a grandmother and a grandfather and a mother and Dad, a son and daughter and a big turkey and everybody was smiling and happy. The commentator was saying this was the Thanksgiving that never occurred - that Thanksgiving just wasn't like that - there weren't families who were together and happy and enjoying the food that Grandma made and all of that. And they asked the question, ‘When was the last time you had a Thanksgiving like that?’ And I said, ‘Today!’

“Yes, there are stresses and strains at holiday time when you are doing all the work that is involved in getting ready for everyone - making all of the preparations. There are stresses and strains that occur, but there is also love. And I believe that because of the faithfulness of my grandparents and of my mother and father who have gone before, that we have been blessed to the third and fourth generations, as it says in the scriptures. And I believe that if we are faithful, that our children will be blessed as well.

“It is my testimony of the after Christmas story that the prophecies are being fulfilled. They are being fulfilled all around us, and that if we will be faithful, our children may have the joy, the peace that comes from knowing God as well as us. I don't know when Jesus is coming again, but I do believe with all my heart that He is coming and that He reaches out to each one; and everyone is given the opportunity to choose that which is good - to choose that which is right and to believe in the Creator and what He came to do. The Bible says that some of Jesus' disciples were having trouble - Philip in particular - believing in Christ, And Jesus says, ‘Well, OK. Either believe me or believe me for the work's sake.’ You don't have to believe me because maybe it's too far fetched for you to believe that God came down, you know, the Creator of The Universe came down and was born as a baby. But even if you don't want to believe that, at least believe for the work's sake because of the happiness, the peace and the joy that His Spirit can bring. And so that's what we leave you with this Christmas; and I hope that all of you will have the opportunity to share in that peace and joy that comes with knowing Jesus Christ.”

We sang again, “Joy to the World, the Savior Reigns’ after Brother Knotts explained that it is not a Christmas song but a song about when Jesus comes again in the Last Days. “Jesus is coming back!” he declared in testimony.

We were dismissed with the prayer of Elder Alan Smith, declaring that we truly are amazed at the wonders of our Heavenly Father's love and asking that the Spirit of love and peace, of righteousness and joy will truly rest among us in power “that we may grow toward you and your kingdom that we may be prepared and ready when Jesus comes again.”

## **News and Notes**

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### **Tour of Homes Provides Outreach**

Six bus loads of tourists were introduced to the church at Mount Ayr and received ministry there on Saturday, December 6. The first of four bus loads arrived shortly after 3:30 and the last came between 8:30 and 9:00.

Each group was met at the door by Alan Smith as host. As the group entered, Alan described the facility to them and invited them to be seated in the sanctuary. There Alan told a little of the history of our congregation, our relationship to ministries in Nigeria, Kenya, Nepal, Honduras, Australia, and elsewhere, reminding some of our guests that they had met Sam Agwanda and /or Eric Odida at their Easter breakfasts as they had come to minister to us.

Alan explained our manor of celebrating Christmas, suggesting that we use the time as well as we can to get as close to Jesus as we can for as long as we can. In confirmation, he called their attention to the white board across the right side of the sanctuary. Written there was that beautiful expression of our belief in Christ written by Nephi, 2 Nephi 11:48:

We talk of Christ,  
We rejoice in Christ,  
We preach of Christ,  
We prophesy of Christ,  
And we write according to our prophecies,  
That our children may know to what source they may look for a remission if their sins.

Alan introduced the participants in the ministry to be given. Rob Rolfe was introduced as our Pastor, and a member of the quartet preparing to sing. Their song was described as one of the Restoration tradition, written near by at Lamoni by Elbert A. Smith. Robert and Lynda Rolfe, Mike and Barbra Jordison, accompanied by Jan Jordison at the piano, sang:

“Silvery Star, precious star, Shining over Bethlehem.  
Guiding Wise Men from afar. In the still night leading them.”  
The group was then invited to join in the singing of hymns of their choice. In every case they chose familiar Christmas hymns that could be found in our Hymnal.

As they were dismissed, they were invited to go into any part of the building they wished to explore and to ask questions. A tree ornament, made of green or red tree-shaped paper tied with a matching ribbon, was offered as a memento of their visit. On each was written:

“I think that we shall always see God's gifts upon our Christmas tree. You cannot touch them with your hand, yet they are there at your command.

There is joy and faith and hope renewed. There is laughter for a happy mood.

There is gratitude for each new day; a time to think, a time to pray.

The Christ has come with holy light to shine and make your pathway bright.

All these are yours if you can see God's gifts upon your Christmas Tree.”

Each guest was also offered a copy of “Who Are the Wise Men”, the Christmas quiz that has been so instructive to us all in sorting out tradition from the scripture story. The response was amazing as additional copies had to be run to satisfy the response. The quiz has been specially prepared by Ron Smith to use only the

King James and other modern Bible translations so there would be no confusion because of our use of the Inspired Version. There were three pages of specific answers to the questions that will be the most extensive introduction most of our guests have ever had to the Book of Mormon, and that without having to have the book in their hands. When the fifth and sixth bus loads arrived, the musical offerings were different from the first. Nathan Smith was accompanying his wife, Julie as she played Christmas music on her violin and Ron and Di Smith sang "Secret of the Stars" to guitar accompaniment.

### **Report of Recent Elder's Meeting**

Featured in the morning of December 14 family worship was Norman Nelson's report of the meeting of Restoration Elders that had just transpired the Friday evening before. He reported that the group is continuing to urge all to follow the instructions of the Fellowship of Restoration Patriarchs in preparation for the presence of our Lord in the spring assembly of the Restoration Saints. His statement was, "We don't decide when to go. He (God) has to tell us. We expect Him to be there in April." The instruction is to study, fast, pray, and find someone who needs our help and give it. They also suggest that we keep a record of experiences that occur as a result of our preparation.

Norman also reported that Patriarch Earl Allen experienced an open vision in which he saw the tremendous activity of the Church of the First Born as those heavenly beings work to bring about the gathering of the Saints and their preparation for the return of our Lord.

### **Restoration Gathering at Graceland**

Members of South Iowa Restoration congregations shared a supper and service on Sunday evening, December 14, with Graceland's Restoration Campus Ministries. Candle lit tables were arranged around the open fire and lighted Christmas tree of Graceland's MSC. One long series of tables fairly groaned with an abundance of food. The service featured the record of Christ's birth and ministry as told in scripture and in music. Since the story cannot be fully told without the record of the Americas, the Book of Mormon scriptures were generously and beautifully portrayed.

### **Congregation Offers the Ministry of Caroling**

Twenty four carolers gathered at the home of Pat and Gerry Bolingbroke early Sunday evening, December 21. There they prepared gift plates for those to whom they took their music. Following their caroling the group reassembled at the Bolingbroke home for fellowship, soup and song.

### **Mount Ayr Family Adopted**

Each year the congregation adopts a family from among those designated by the Mount Ayr Family Services and provides gifts according to the needs of the family. Alan and Valle Smith were in charge of the project. The congregation also contributed to efforts in Lamoni to meet the needs of families at Christmas.

### **Sleigh in Mount Ayr Lighted Parade**

Ricky and Bess Leonard brought their horse drawn sleigh from Creston to participate in the Mount Ayr Lighted Christmas Parade.

### **Children Play at Heritage Tea**

Aquila and Jazmyn Galusha gave musical ministry at the Joseph Smith House heritage tea at Lamoni Sunday, December 14.

### **Miracle Baby Introduced to the Congregation**

Seventy George Knotts was in charge of the service the Sunday after Christmas and began the service by introducing his daughter Debbi, her husband Shane and their 10 month old daughter Samantha. He explained that when Samantha was born her heart was beating very slowly. An EKG showed her with a deformed, defective heart and her pediatric examination showed an enlarged liver. Two examining doctors immediately referred her to a Pediatric Cardiac Specialist in Albuquerque; and the Neonatal Intensive Care (NIC) Flight Team flew to Farmington, NM, where Samantha was born, to transfer her by helicopter to Albuquerque.

As the helicopter flew with the child, Shane headed to the Albuquerque hospital by car. He was pulled over by the police driving 110 miles an hour. When he explained that the helicopter flying over was carrying his baby, not yet a day old, the police gave him a warning and sent him on his way.

In the meantime, Beth, who as with Debbi, called George in Lamoni with the disturbing news and asked for prayers. George went to Brother Robert Rolfe's office where they prayed an administration prayer for the child. Then he called members of the family from Lamoni to California, and he asked that the Mount Ayr congregational prayer chain be activated. People from Iowa to California were praying for baby Samantha.

By the time Shane arrived at the hospital, the Pediatric Cardiologist had completed a second round of tests. The specialist told Shane that Samantha was perfect! There was no problem with her heart, her liver or any other part of her anatomy. Shane watched as the Neonatal nurses hovered and cooed around the only healthy looking baby in the whole unit. He asked the Specialist if there had been some mistake - a mix up of the test results, maybe? The specialist told him that there were large differences in the test results at Farmington and at Albuquerque that he could not explain; but he had called Farmington and verified that there could not have been a mistake. Samantha was the only infant given an EKG at that hospital that day.

Shane took Samantha home to her mother in his car that same day, at a slower speed! Later Shane said, "Just think, one day old and she already has a testimony!" Debbi wrote in her baby calendar, "March 2, 2003 - Samantha is born. March 3, 2003 - Samantha's first testimony of the power of prayer. Also, first helicopter ride and first trip to Albuquerque with Dad." George wrote, "Praise the Lord. He does good work!" Many of those of us who had prayed for the child received the good news with tears of joy and thanksgiving!

### **New Years Celebration**

Members of the congregation and friends gathered at the home of Gordon and Linda Winkler to welcome the new year with fellowship, fun, food and worship. Entire families shared the evening. The gathering has become a joyous annual affair for the congregation since the Winklers built their lovely home to share.



**CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST**  
**Mount Ayr Restoration Branch**  
**607 E. Madison**  
**Mount Ayr, IA 50854**

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## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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*Continued from front page*

I remember the Elders coming. They anointed my head and prayed for healing. My life continued with God's blessing for a few years longer. More tests and more tubes followed. A diagnosis was given and a course of treatment followed. Thank you God, for another blessing.

God has blessed us with fine doctors. They are able to diagnose and treat heart trouble and other diseases. These doctors have the skill to remove our heart, work on it, sew it back into our chests and start it beating again. But, doctors can do little for spiritual heart trouble.

Jesus said, "let not your heart be troubled". I don't think he was talking about carditis. He made several pronouncements about our hearts. (a worthwhile study-the word "heart" in the scriptures) "Wherefore is it that ye think evil in your hearts?" Matthew 9:4; "..those things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart..for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,

murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies; these are things that defile a man.." Matthew 15:17-19.

The first commandment, if obeyed, leaves no room in the heart for the impure things. That is why Jesus said, "blest are the pure in heart". Neither does the second commandment, if obeyed, leave room for impure things. If we don't obey the first commandment, however, it is unlikely we will be able to obey the second. We need to sanctify our hearts before God. We need to choose life and not choose death.

"..My friends, I leave these sayings with you, to ponder in your hearts with this commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall call upon me while I am near; draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you; whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you.." DC 85:16