

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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Awaiting Christmas

We are in the season again where we look forward to Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Christ.

I can remember when I was young and the time seemed to inch by until Christmas would come. There was a good deal of anticipation for its arrival and it seemed like it took forever to get here.

I'm not sure when time sped up so much, but now it seems like we just celebrated last Christmas and when Thanksgiving comes around it will just be a couple of days and Christmas will be here too.

I'm not sure what that says about me.

It may mean that I have lost some of the innocent joy of looking forward to celebrating Christ's birth with the wonder of the Christmas story. It may mean that I looked forward to opening Christmas presents more than I do now. It may mean that I have more to do than I did then.

Now I look forward to that one event each year that finally touches me in a way that I remember what the season is all about. It may be some music I hear or sing. It may be finding just the right present for someone. It may be a taste or a smell. Or it may be hearing the Christmas story over again and finding something new in it. I'm amazed how that can happen. Either it's something new, or something I have just forgotten. In either case, it becomes a moment of excitement to realize the richness of the story of Christ's birth.

It may also mean that I can understand what it will be like when we come into the presence of God and time doesn't have any meaning any more. If everything is as a day with God and he can see the tableau of time in an instant, maybe it's like time getting shorter and shorter between Christmases. Only better.

TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

Remembering Jesus

Elder Michael Jordison read the Communion prayer as recorded by Moroni in the Book of Mormon, Moroni 4:4 "O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God the eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen."

Ron and Di Smith followed singing the hymn, "Count Your Blessings", Brother Jordison commented, "I don't think I can count that high!" He then said he sometimes felt that he was among those of whom Jesus said He would spew them out of His mouth because they were neither cold nor hot, just luke warm; but he assured us that if we always remember Jesus, as we covenant to do when we partake of the bread and wine, we can no longer be just luke warm. So we are going to take time this morning to remember Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the first time Jesus is mentioned in our scriptures?

Right at the very beginning. Genesis 1:2 tells us that the heavens and the earth and everything in them were created by the power of Jesus Christ. Do you remember that you and I, and all mankind were created in Christ's image? (Gen. 1:27-29) Everything about our appearance, from our toenails to the freckle on our nose - from the working of our heart to the fact that we have two ears, everything bears witness of Jesus Christ.

Remember the next time that Jesus is mentioned? It is in prophecy. After our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden, they were cursed, along with the serpent. And the Lord God prophesied and said, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman; between thy seed and her seed; and he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen 3:21) In the same act, both Christ and Satan struck, the heel of His foot coming down with crushing power upon the head of the serpent, as the serpent sought to kill with its bite.

Do you remember that it pleased the Father to "bruise" Jesus "for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:10-11)? Remember, as Paul wrote to the Romans, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen". (Romans 16:20). Paul was saying that the day would come when "...The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rev.

11:15).

Jesus' Ministry Prophesied

Remember the time when the Lord commanded Adam and his family to "offer up their firstlings of their flocks for an offering unto [Him]"? It says that after many days an angel came to Adam and asked why he was sacrificing these animals, and Adam responded. "I don't know, except God commanded me to do it". (Gen. 4:5-6) Do you remember what the angel told him? "And then the angel spake, saying, 'This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth; Wherefore thou shalt do all that thou doest, in the name of the Son...'" (Gen. 4:7-8).

Remember the story of Enoch. Enoch, being called of God, preached in righteousness and built a city of holiness called, Zion. And in talking with the Lord, he was given a vision of the future. He saw that his city was taken into heaven and that those who remained on earth lived in wickedness, under a heavy chain held by Satan. Remember, that the Lord began to weep for those who were captive? And Enoch, moved with compassion began to weep, until "the Lord said unto Enoch, 'Lift up your heart and be glad and look.'" And Enoch beheld all the families of the earth from Noah to the end of the world and asked, "When shall the day of the Lord come? When shall the blood of the righteous be shed, that all they that mourn may be sanctified, and have eternal life? And the Lord said, 'It shall be in the meridian of time; in the days of wickedness and vengeance.' And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying, 'The Righteous is lifted up; and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world;...'" (Gen. 7:52-54).

Do you remember that Enoch looked again, "...and beheld the Son of Man lifted up on the cross, after the manner of men. And he heard a loud voice, and the heavens were veiled; and all the creations of God mourned, and the earth groaned; and the rocks were rent; and the saints arose, and were crowned at the right hand of the Son of Man, with crowns of glory." (Gen. 7:62-63)

Creating in God's Image

Do you remember when the brother of Jared went to the Mount Shelem in search of light for the barges that they were commanded to build? It was there that he molten sixteen small stones out of the rock and asked the Lord to touch them, having faith that the Lord's touch would cause them to shine. It was Jesus Christ that stretched forth His finger to touch the stones. Do you remember what happened next? How the brother of Jared fell backwards in fear not knowing that the Lord had flesh and blood. "And the Lord said unto him, Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so, ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this? And he answered, Nay, Lord, shew thyself unto me. And the Lord said unto him, Believest thou the words which I shall speak? And he answered, Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie. And when he had said these words, behold the Lord shewed himself unto him, and said, Because thou knowest these things, ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I shew myself unto you.

"Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. And never have I shewed

myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast.

"Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning, after mine own image. Behold this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit, will I appear unto my people in the flesh." (Ether 1:72-81).

Do you remember when Jesus appeared to Moses in the burning bush? Remember how the bush was on fire, but it says that it wasn't consumed (burned up)? When Moses asked who he should say sent him, do you remember what the Lord said? "... I AM THAT I AM; and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you; this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." It was Jesus that set his hand to deliver the Israelites who were in bondage to the Egyptians.

Born To A Virgin

Do you remember the life of Jesus Christ? Remember that the angel came to the virgin Mary, who was engaged to Joseph, of the house of David, and said, "...Hail, thou virgin, who art highly favored of the Lord. The Lord is with thee, for thou art chosen and blessed among women.

"And when she saw the angel, she was troubled at his saying, and pondered in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:28-33).

Do you remember the day and the night and the next day in the New World that marked Jesus' birth? Remember how he came as a little baby and was placed in a manger because there was no room for his family at the inn?

An angel of the Lord appeared unto shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. "... And the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. But the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the way you shall find the babe, he is wrapped in swaddling clothes, and is lying in a manger.

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 to men.

And it came to pass, when the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go, even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. All they who heard it, wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds;" (Luke 2-9-18).

Do you remember the wise men who came to little Jesus bearing great gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, which would finance His family's escape to Egypt when Joseph was warned by

the angel that Herod wanted Jesus dead? (Matt. 3:1-13)

Do you remember Jesus when He was twelve? He had come to Jerusalem with his family to observe the Passover feast. When Passover was over, they left but did not notice that Jesus was not with them. When they returned to the city, they found Him three days later at the temple answering questions from the doctors, who marveled at his understandings. Do you remember the young lad's reply when his mother asked why he tarried? "And He said unto them, why is it that ye sought me? Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

Recognized as the Messiah

Jesus, cousin, John the Baptist, was one of the first to recognize Jesus for who He was. Do you remember his words when Jesus came to the bank of the Jordan? "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world! And John bare record of him unto the people, saying, This is he of whom I said; After me cometh a man who is preferred before me; for he was before me, and I knew him, and that he should be made manifest to Israel; therefore am I come baptizing with water.

And John bare record, saying; When he was baptized of me, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him; for he who sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me; Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-33).

Do you remember how Andrew went to find his brother, Peter, telling him, "... We have found the Messiah..." (John 1:41) and the two left everything and followed Jesus. Then Jesus found Philip, who ran to Nathanael, exclaiming, "... We have found him of who Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45). Do you remember Jesus calling James and John, the sons of Zebedee, from their fishing boat, who left their father and followed after Jesus? (Matt. 4:20) And the calling of the other Disciples, who one by one left what they were doing and followed after Him?

Do you remember Simon Peter, who called out to Christ from the ship, "... Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship, came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." (Matt. 14:24-28).

Do you remember how word was sent to Jesus that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was sick? Jesus tarried before going, and Lazarus was already dead for four days before he got there. Remember that Jesus comforted Martha telling her that her bother would rise again. She thought he spoke of the last day when all would rise. But, "Jesus said unto her, I AM the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26)

But Mary when she saw Him, "fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Do you remember that, "Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should

not have died?"

Remember how Jesus went to the grave, groaning at their unbelief and said, "Take ye away the stone." But Martha, said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

"Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them. Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." (John 11:32-45).

Rejected By His Chosen People

Do you remember the days before Passover, when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey - how the people took their outer garments and palm leaves and laid them on the road before Him, all the while shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:7)? They believed that their King had come to reign on the Throne of David.

And the night of the Passover in the upper room, where Jesus ate the last supper with His disciples. Do you remember how he washed each of their feet, commanding that they were to be the servants of all? And do you remember how Jesus protected Judas Iscariot from a certain lynching by the others, as he leaned over to him saying, "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27)?

Do you remember the new commandment that He gave them, "That ye love one another; As I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34-35)?

Do you remember the pain and anguish that He felt in the Garden of Gethsemane - the night that not even one of His disciples could stay up with Him while He prayed? Do you remember that He trembled "because of pain" (D&C 18:2i) and the "great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44) that he sweat from every pore of His body, knowing that he was going to take upon Him all the sin of the world?

Do you remember how he was taken before Caiaphas and condemned for blasphemy? And his answer to Pilate's question, "Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done?"

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?"

"And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover; will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Do you remember that the same crowd who days earlier had lain palm leaves out underneath Him cried out, "... Not this man, but Barabbas..." (John 18:33-40)?

Do you remember how Jesus was spit upon and mocked by the

crowd - how He was scourged by the soldiers? Do you remember the crown of thorns placed upon his head and the purple robe they placed over his back, mocking Him as “king of the Jews”?

Do you remember that “Simon, a Cyrenian”, was pulled from the thronging crowd and made to help Jesus carry his cross along the lonely way to Golgotha? (Luke 23:26). Do you remember the nails that were driven through His hands and His feet as He was lifted up with the cross for all to see? Do you remember the brazen serpent that Moses lifted high upon the pole for all to see, that those who had been bitten by the deadly fiery serpents, if they looked upon it would live, but those who refused to look would die?

Do you remember that Pilate posted a sign upon the cross: “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS”? And when questioned about the wording replied, “What I have written, I have written.” (John 19:19,22).

Do you remember that as He hung upon the cross, dying with every breath and knowing what was coming by the withdrawal of His Father’s Spirit, how He took time to reach out to the repentant thief crucified next to him to say, “Verily I say unto thee; Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:44)?

Do you remember as He looked down at the soldiers responsible for doing the work of the Sanhedrin, those who had beat him, nailed him to the tree, and raised Him up, and He cried, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:35)?

Do you remember how Jesus took the vinegar and gall offered to Him and said, “. . . It is finished; and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.” (John 29:30)?

Do you remember the three days of darkness in the New world, and the earthquakes and tempests when Jesus died? And that the graves of the Saints were opened?

Every Prophecy Fulfilled

Do you remember how Jesus fulfilled every prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, including the one, “. . . A bone of him shall not be broken.” and “. . . They shall look on Him whom they pierced.” (John 19:36-37)? When it came near the time that He should be taken down from the cross, instead of breaking his legs, as was the custom, they found that He was already dead. But to make sure that He was dead, the soldier took his spear and pierced Him in His side and blood and water flowed out from the wound.

Do you remember that they laid Him in an empty tomb where never had any man lain before? Do you remember the morning three days later when Peter and John rushed to the tomb upon Mary Magdalene’s word that the stone had been rolled away and Jesus was gone? (John 20:1-2). They found the tomb empty, except for the linen and went away sorrowful to “their own homes”. (John 20:3-10).

And then came the day when the disciples were locked in a house together fearing that the Jews would come after them demanding to know what happened to the body of Jesus. And into the locked room “came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, he showed them His hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” (John 20:19-20).

But Thomas was not there and refused to believe until he had seen for himself. And eight days later, again in a locked room, Jesus appeared and said unto Thomas, “. . . Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, ‘My Lord and my God’. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:27-29).

Ministers Again On the Earth

Do you remember when Jesus appeared unto the people in the Land Bountiful in the Book of Mormon - how He came and let the people – one by one – feel the nail prints and the wound in His side

- how he called and ordained twelve disciples there to administer his ordinances and sacraments? Remember that He laid down His doctrine and commanded that they should put down all contentions and disputations.

Remember how He healed the lame and the sick; and how He took their little children – one by one – and blessed and prayed for them when the fire came down from heaven and encircled them?

Do you remember how he served them bread and wine, when there was none to be found?

Do you remember that Stephen saw Jesus, when he was taken and questioned by the council of high priests? Do you remember how he answered their questions and accused them of betraying the Messiah? And the council, “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen; and he, calling upon God, said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:54-60).

Do you remember that same Saul, who saw Stephen stoned and was a member of the Jewish council, who went about persecuting the Saints of the church? “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” (Acts 9:3-5).

And do you remember Jesus when Joseph Smith, Jr. and Oliver Cowdery saw Him in the Kirtland Temple? (April 3, 1836). They recorded: "The vail was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened. We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit before us, and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold in color like amber. His eyes were as a flame of fire, the hair of his head was white like the pure snow, his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun, and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: " I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth; I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father. Behold your sins are forgiven you, you are clean before me; therefore, lift up your heads and rejoice, and let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name, for behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here, and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house; yea, I will appear unto my servants, and speak unto them with mine own voice, if my people will keep my commandments, and do not pollute this holy house; yea, the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out, and the endowment with which my servants have been endowed in this house; and the fame of this house shall be spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people. Even so. Amen.”

Do you remember this morning that you are a part of that blessing - that you are a member of His church, and by taking upon you the name of Christ and remembering Him you have His promise: That if you’ll also keep His commandments you will always have His Spirit to be with you?”

Time To Make Our Master Glad

Priest Rodney Bastow selected Luke 15:1-10 for his opening scripture. It reads: “

Then drew near unto him, many of the publicans, and sinners, to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the wilderness after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, and saith unto them, Rejoice with me; for I found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.

“Either, what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repenteth.”

Kathleen Myers sang the beloved hymn, “Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to serve Him in all that we do.” After thanking Kathy, Rodney spoke.

Earlier this fall, as you know, Debbie’s father passed away, and I got chosen to speak at his funeral. It went well. I got a lot of compliments and I think Frank would have been pleased. A couple of weeks ago, we were at Debbie’s sisters’ and watched the CD of the funeral. After we had watched it, Dianne turned to me and asked if it was hard to do that. You know, I have always had an aversion to funerals. It wasn’t just my kind of place, but I told Dianne, it wasn’t hard because I felt like I was blessed. I said, “I believe God gave me the words to say, and I believe He helped me to be able to say them.” I am not sure what Dianne thought of that. I don’t know if she could even understand what I was saying.

Today I am hoping to be blessed again, and I hope you will, too. I hope I will be blessed with the words that I say that they might be the words that God would want me to share with you and that He will bless me as I try to deliver those words. I would also ask that if we do feel that we have been blessed here today that we might praise our Heavenly Father for this blessing.

A Familiar Story

I remember a story that I heard once that I would like to share with you this morning. You might be familiar with it. There was a man who had two sons. This man was apparently fairly well off because he had land and he had servants. He must have been a farmer, which kind of contradicts having the money, but that is what the story says.

These two sons were both fairly well grown, and apparently one day the younger son had gotten tired of farm life, or the life there with his father and mother, and he asked his father for his inheritance. And his father said, OK, and gave him that which was his. His son took the money and went off to a far place and lived a life that was not quite the way he had been raised. In a short time he had squandered the money that he had received. And after his money was gone, his friends were gone, too, and he didn’t even have food to eat. He found a job, somehow, feeding hogs, and things got so bad that he even started eating with the hogs.

Finally it dawned on him, and he decided, “If I would go back to my father and tell him that I am sorry - tell him how really sorry

I am for what I have done, maybe he would let me be a servant of his; for even his servants have decent food to eat.”

So he decided to do this. As he got close to where his father lived, his father saw him coming; and his father was so excited - he was so glad to see him that he ran to meet his son; and when he reached him, he hugged him and kissed him. His son told him how sorry he was and that he had been wrong, and that he wasn’t worthy to be his son any more.

But his father was just so very glad to see him. He said that his son was dead and now was alive, was lost and now he was found! He ordered new shoes. He ordered new clothes for his son, and he gave him a ring; and he ordered them to have a feast of his finest prime beef! And so they started celebrating.

Now the older son had been out working. When he returned home and saw that his brother was there and he saw the big celebration, he became very angry. In fact, he wouldn’t even go in to join in on the festivities that were going on inside. So his father went out and asked him to come in and join in in the celebration, but the older son replied, “Father, I have been with you this long time. I have worked for you. I have never disobeyed you, and you have never had a celebration for me!”

His father replied, “Son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours! It is good that we celebrate the return of your brother, because he was dead and is alive again - was lost and he is found!”

Does the Story Apply to Us?

Remember that story? Is that story appropriate for us today? Could it be written in a modern version here? As I think about that story, I think I can identify with all three characters. Can you? Like the father, as parents we are charged with raising our children to know the Lord and to know His ways. You hope that if you do a good job, if you teach your children well, and if you set good examples for them, they will remember the teachings of their youth, and they will grow up and go out on their own.

But it doesn’t always happen that way. And as in the story, children raised the same way sometimes turn out differently. Sometimes that is hard to understand. Can you understand how the father must have felt when the younger son chose not to follow the teachings of his youth. Can you understand the heartache he must have felt when he saw his son suffering because he chose not to follow his ways? Imagine how our Heavenly Father must feel when we choose not to follow Him and not to follow His teachings, the teachings of our youth. The father in the story welcomed his son back with love. He accepted him the way he was. He completely forgave him. Sometimes that is hard for us to do, but God does it.

George loaned Jowett a book entitled Power and Praise. Jowett hasn’t gotten to see it yet, George, but I have enjoyed it immensely. I don’t know if I agree with everything in the book, but it has been an inspiration to me, and there is a part of it that kind of explains the book that I would like to read to you:

“To praise God is to express our acceptance for something that God is permitting to happen. So to praise God for difficult situations as sickness or disaster means literally that we accept the happenings as a part of God’s plan to reveal His perfect love for us. We can’t really praise God without being thankful for the thing we are praising Him for, and we can’t really be thankful unless we believe that an omnipotent loving Father is working for our good. Praising Him involves both gratitude and joy that God is keeping His word to work good through everything if we love Him. The very fact that we praise God and not some unknown face means that we are accepting the fact that God is responsible for what is happening and will always make it work for our good. Otherwise, it would make no sense to thank Him for it. Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens. Always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.”

You know that applies to a lot of things - not just raising

children. We can see it in our own church, and for me it is really hard to do.

I have a new principal this fall, and it seems to be his mission to get everyone to dislike him; and he has been very successful at that. It has been very hard for me to thank God for this man. I think of the example that I am setting for my children when I am not able to get along with this person, and I tell them that they have to get along with their bosses. I need to be thankful for the situations that happen to me. I need to be thankful when something happens with my children that causes me sorrow, and I need to have the faith that God will work it for their good. As a parent, I need to remember that God is in control and that He has a purpose for all things. I can also relate to the older brother in the story. It's easy for us to criticize those who we don't think are following Christ's teachings. It is easy for us to hold ourselves above them. But that is not God's way.

It sounds like, from the conference that was one of the things that seemed to be emphasized - that we are to accept all people. We might not agree with them, but we need to agree to accept them. 1 John 2:10-11 says this: "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

Debbie's family right now is going through some decisions on settling her father's estate. There are six kids in the family and they have always been a willing type, close knit group. They have always had a lot of love for each other. There is a lot of concern now as they divide their Dad's possessions that this unity might be broken up - that there might be some tensions among them, and they might not be able to continue to love each other as they have. It's a difficult situation, and it's hard for us to know what the answers are. But if they will think of what is best for each other, and if they will think of the love that they have for each other and the love that they had for their father, I think they will be able to do this and still be able to get along.

Mostly in that story, I remind myself of the prodigal son. I know the love that God has for me. I know His teachings, but sometimes, I just want to go my own way. I want to do my thing! Sometimes I choose what I want rather than what God wants. Sometimes I think about things rather than the blessings that God has given me. Sometimes I think about myself rather than thinking about others. Sometimes I think I am headed home. I think I am going to make it there - think I am going to say "I'm sorry for all the many times I haven't done what my Father wanted me to do!" I'm not there yet - not completely lost. I just haven't been found yet. The Lord is waiting for me. He is waiting for us. He is waiting to embrace us in His arms. He won't scold us. He won't say anything about the past. That is just forgiven. Isn't it time that we make our Master glad and return His love?

I like this scripture from Romans. This came from the book, too - not all of it, but this is where I got the idea. Romans 8:31-39: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can prevail against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor

principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Thanksgiving

Seventy Ronald Smith read two scriptures, Ephesians 5:18-20 - "Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" And from John 15:8-12 - "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. this is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you." Michael Jordison sang of the joys shared with our Lord as we walk and talk with him in close association. He invited the congregation to join with him in that expression of joy.

"Who can tell me when the first Thanksgiving was?" Young Eric Vaughn responded 1621. Ron exclaimed, "Very good. Eric is an astute student!"

That is when the Pilgrims had their first Thanksgiving, and we look to that as the first Thanksgiving. As it turns out, there was a Thanksgiving service in America a long time before 1621, and most people don't know about this one because it is recorded in the book of Ether, the third chapter, verses 13 and 14, and a lot of people haven't read the book of Ether. This part tells about when the Jaredites came to America. They had been in their boats for 344 days, and they finally came to the shores of their Promised Land. What do you think they did when they got to the shore? They rejoiced! It says in verse 14, "When they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land, they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land and did humble themselves before the Lord and did shed tears of joy before the Lord because of the multitude of His tender mercies unto them." That kind of sounded like a Thanksgiving to me, so I thought I would just let you guys in on that little secret.

As I was preparing for what I might say this morning, because it is Thanksgiving, I thought I might start off with a little bit of the scriptural injunction to give thanks. We read that from Ephesians where Paul tells us that we are supposed to be speaking to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord - giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is saying this is the way that we ought to be if we want to be filled with the Spirit of God - that we shouldn't be thinking about all the things that are bad and negative, but we should be giving thanks for all things unto God.

A Bit of History

The Thanksgiving story, as I looked it up, you are finding more and more people are saying, what happened in 1621 wasn't really the first Thanksgiving. Di mentioned that some people said that the white people stole Thanksgiving from the Indians. She wondered what that meant. I looked up a thing on the internet called "The True Thanksgiving Story" by Dennis Rupert. There he lists at least five previous thanksgiving services that were held. He said that the Wampanoid Indians held six Thanksgiving feasts that first year. The Wampanoid Indians were the ones who met the Pilgrims. Squanto was a Wampanobe Indian. He was the one who spoke English. It was he who came into the village and said, "Welcome Englishmen!" they were very surprised, of course that a native American,

whom generally we understand they regarded as savages was able to speak English. That first Thanksgiving, they had gone through a very difficult year. The Pilgrims got here in 1620. There were 102 people on the Mayflower, and by the end of the year, 46 of them had died! A child's voice was heard from the audience and Ron responded, "That's nearly half of the 102, that's correct, Eric". Almost half of the people had died. If it had not been for the help that Squanto gave to them in learning how to plant the crops, how to adapt to the environment, how to build their houses, how to stay warm and how to use the fish for fertilizer, and all of those things. They probably would have suffered the same fate as some of the other colonies that had come and had not survived past that first year. But because of Squanto's help their harvest was a good one, and so in 1621 they had a feast, and they invited some of the Indians to come there, and there were 90 Indians who came. That was more than there were white settlers, and they had a feast for several days. And Dennis Rupert points out that of that "first Thanksgiving" that we talk about, really the only historical record is one letter that mentions it from Edward Winslow sent a letter and said they had given thanks for the goodness of God and celebrated the feast so they might, after this special manner rejoice together. that is all that is in the historical record except for one other thing by the governor, William Bradford who just mentioned it and said they sent people out to get wild game and they brought back wild geese, ducks and turkeys. Those are the two historical things and all the rest is conjecture and made up, but certainly we find in those two the elements of feasting and of giving thanks to the Lord for his many, many blessings that he had given to those people and which we give today.

There were other Thanksgiving celebrations had in America before. As I mentioned, the Wampanohue indians held several feasts that year, but as far as Christian ones, Dennis Rupert says that in Texas in May 23 of 1531, almost a hundred years earlier, Coronado had declared a day of feasting and thanksgiving when he and his group had found food and pasture in the Texas Panhandle areas. (For those of you who have walked across or have been across the Texas Panhandle, there is a lot of area with nothing there. You can imagine how thankful they would have been for that. that was one.

On June 30, 1564, close to what is now Jacksonville, Florida, the French Huguenots declared a day of solemn praise and Thanksgiving. It didn't have a feast associated with it, but it was a church service in which they praised the Lord and gave thanks.

August 9, 1607, in Maine at the Kennebec River, Captain George Poppin, with a group of people in a little tiny settlement there joined with the Indians in a Thanksgiving type of feast. We don't hear about that one because they were wiped out by disease and such within a year and so that didn't last.

Another group were at the Berkley Plantation in Charles City, Virginia on December 4, 1619. They actually declared a yearly Thanksgiving feast and said that it would be a day to observe thanksgiving to God. They probably did that for the next three years, but in 1622 that little colony was wiped out, so their's didn't last like the Pilgrims whose colony lasted. And so we celebrate that thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving was declared by George Washington, a day of thanks, a day to be humble and to thank the Lord for the many blessings that He had given. It was followed by Adams. When Jefferson got there, he didn't think that that we should mix church and State that way, so he didn't do it; but other Presidents did. It was President Lincoln, finally, who declared the day of Thanksgiving as the national holiday that we use these days.

So it had gone through quite a history, and I don't want to spend a lot of time on the history, but I think it is important to note that throughout our history, people have gotten together to thank God

for all of the many, many blessings that He has given, and especially in this land! We have been blessed by the promises that God has made to us and by His many blessings; and so it is fitting that we come together and that we feast and we give thanks to God for those blessings.

Part of what Dennis Rupert says, besides chronicling the Thanksgiving feasts and things that people held, is that people are trying to rewrite the history and secularize Thanksgiving. He points out that Thanksgiving is the one Christian holiday that hasn't been taken over by Hall Mark, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and all of the other kinds of things. Thanksgiving is the day when we give thanks to God! It is Rupert's point of view that it's about the only one that we have left, and people are trying to rewrite the history to say it wasn't really Thanksgiving feast. But I think we would agree that true Thanksgiving is thanking the Lord for all that He has done.

Jesus, Chief of Our Thanksgiving Blessings

We have a lot to be thankful for! Among other things, and chief among them, is the difference that Jesus Christ makes in our life. I would like to tell you a little bit about Nixon Opino because Nixon Opino knows what it's like - what it means to have been born again. Nixon Opino lives on the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania. He lives in a very small hut. It has mud walls and is a typical African hut. He was a teacher. He moved to town and had a school - really a preschool. But Nixon had a problem with drinking. Nixon began to drink so much that he would be drunk every day and he was having difficulty holding his job. Actually, he couldn't hold his job and he was in great difficulty.

One of Nixon's acquaintances was a distant cousin of Eric Odida. Many of you know Eric because he was here. Eric talked with his cousin, whose name is Paul. We would call him Paul but they pronounce it Pa-ul. Many of you have heard part of Pa-ul's story. Eric had talked with him about the Lord, about being baptized and about the things that he needed to do with his life. Pa-ul was convinced that he should follow the Lord, and so he was baptized. The Lord told Eric that he had a call to the Priesthood, and Pa-ul wasn't sure that was the way that he should follow the Lord. So Pa-ul began to ask the Lord about it.

There was an Evangelist from Ethiopia who was going to be in their town. Pa-ul believed that this man could speak for the Lord and so he prayed that God would have this Evangelist talk to him. the Evangelist as going to be in his town for three days. He said, "Lord, I am going to go and I am going to listen to him. I will listen to everything he says, and if you want me to accept this call to the Priesthood, I want this man to tell me." Now this man was not a member of our church. He was a Christian Evangelist and Pa-ul felt like he had the Spirit of God with him.

Pa-ul went and listened to him for three days. He said the first day, he didn't hear anything that he could interpret as being from the Lord. the second day, he didn't hear anything that he could interpret as being from the Lord. On the third day, the man began to preach about when some person was born, the Lord had this in mind for them. He talked about when Bill Clinton was born, a President of the United States was born. It wasn't just that somebody came into the world, but there was a president of the United States. (I don't know anything about your politics and that's not a political statement. That's what the guy said.) He said when Ghandi was born, was the day when political independence of India was born because of the things that Ghandi did. And he began to speak about several, and Pa-ul said, "Well, maybe the day I was born was the day that the ministry was born in my country. Maybe that is the Lord speaking to me.

Then the minister began to talk about the donkey that was loosed at the time that the Bible tells that Jesus, at the Passover, sent his Disciples to go get a donkey. He says, "Go into the town and

when you come to this house, you will find a donkey outside and when you loose him, if a guy comes out and asks you why you are loosing him, tell him the Master has need of him. (I have always gotten a kick out of that story because I can just see them going to a strangers house and untying the donkey and the guy comes out and asks, "What are you doing?" And they say, "The Master has need of him." and the man says, "OK!" There must have been more to the story than we know!) He was saying, "Some of you need to be loosed so that you can do what the Lord is telling you to do." (And some of you today may need to be loosed in that same way so that you can do what the Lord is telling you to do.) As Pa-ul was listening to that, he began to say, "Maybe the Lord is telling me that I need to be loosed to do the things that He wants me to do."

And finally the minister - this Evangelist - began to prophesy. He said, "I see three people in this room who are going to be ministers for the Lord. I see two women and one man," and he said, "I see hands being laid upon this young man." He didn't understand that at all, but he said, "That's what I see." And Pa-ul said, "That was the Lord speaking to me!" Because Pa-ul knew that he had been called and that if he accepted the call of the Lord, hands would be laid on his head.

So Pa-ul accepted the call, and he was ordained to the Priesthood. Because Nixon was his friend, he began to share with Nixon about the Restored Gospel. As I said, Nixon was a total drunk at this time of his life, but Nixon decided to be baptized. He shared with me that on the day of his baptism, he had three beers that morning, so he was in bad shape. But he said, "When I was baptized, I lost all of my desire for alcohol." Nixon became a new creature! Nixon had the joy that the scriptures talk about when they talk about becoming a new creature - being made new and having new life. For Nixon it was a whole new life! I had the privilege of baptizing Nixon and his wife, Happy, with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nixon took me to his home where I met his mother and his brothers and sisters and we had a chance to talk for a day.

Nixon is not the only one, of course, for there are many, many; and even in this room, I know that there are some of you who have felt the joy and the peace, and the new life that comes from Jesus Christ. That's one of the things that we have to be thankful for.

The scripture that I read from John the fifteenth chapter, starts off, and I didn't read this part, Jesus said, "I AM the true vine, and my Father is he husbandman. every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine. Ye are the branches. He that abide in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and he is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love.

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things I have spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:1-12.)

In this passage Jesus is talking about the fact that He is the vine and we are just the branches. A lot of times we get it mixed up. We think that we are the important ones - that we are the vine - that we are the people who are keeping the church going - that we are the people that are supposed to do all the work. But Jesus says, "I am the vine,

and my Father is the husbandman." The husbandman is the person who goes out and if the branches aren't good, he chops them off and burns them. And the husbandman purges, prunes the good growth so there will be new fruit. And our job is to bear fruit.

That's a really interesting analogy. He is talking about grapes here, and I really like grapes. And the reason I like grapes is because (Noting a restless child, Brother Smith injects her name into the discourse.) Isabel likes grapes. Right? The reason I like grapes is because they are juicy. Is that why you like grapes? They have all that good juice in side of them. And what does the grape juice stand for? It's a symbol that we use all of the time. What is it? That's the Communion wine that we take, and it represents the blood of Jesus Christ. And He says that we are supposed to be the branches that bring forth the fruit. And everybody that is filled with the blood of Jesus Christ, with the atoning blood of Jesus Christ - they will be a new fruit. They will be a new creature.

Now, at the last conference, I preached a sermon on this and suggested - unfortunately a lot of times we think that we are supposed to be the husbandman and do the pruning; and everybody who doesn't agree with us, we can't have anything to do with them because they might taint our fruit or something. Joseph Smith made a good observation. He said, "The Lord didn't call us to be the pruners. He called us to be the fruit inspectors." He says. "You know. By their fruits ye shall know them." We are supposed to inspect the fruit. We are supposed to bring forth the fruit and let Jesus be the vine. We are supposed to be the connection that brings people together - that brings them to Jesus.

I hope that everyone here feels that you are welcome and that you should be here and that you are a part of it. Tiffany, I hope that you feel like you are welcome. We are sure glad to see you today. Cody left, I saw, but we are glad to see Cody, too. And this Cody we are glad to see also, I saw Cody wake up here. Eric, we are glad to have you, too. We have such a good spirit of love, I think, in this group. We are very blessed. We have a lot to be thankful for. And it is not because of anything special that we have done. The scriptures put it this way, When we are in touch with the Lord, He can fill us with His Spirit. And that's what brings righteousness and peace and joy into our lives.

In my class this morning I talked about the fact that so many people in the world want the fruit of the SPIRIT of God. They want righteousness and peace and joy in their lives. They are suffering at home. They are suffering at their work place. They are suffering in their world and they want righteousness and peace and joy; but the problem is that people go to the wrong tree to find it. They don't go to the Spirit, which is where the fruit of the Spirit comes from. They go to other things. They go to drugs. They go to money. They go to fast cars. They go to other people. They go to sexual things. They go to entertainment. They go to all kinds of things looking for the righteousness, peace and joy that comes only as they become part of the Kingdom of God.

And so we have much to be thankful for, not the least of which is the fact that we have the opportunity to share the good news of the Kingdom - to share that people can be reborn - that they can walk in newness of life; and this is the thing that I am most thankful for today. I hope as you go through this Thanksgiving season you will remember the many, many blessings that God has given and that you will help to bring forth fruit. I hope that you will remember that our job is to bring people to Jesus Christ so that they can be blessed - so that they can find His love and find new life in Christ.

Joy, a Gift from God

Elder Michael Jordison read Philippians 4:11, "Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." His sister Barbra and five of her nieces sang a beautiful prayer that repeated the affirmation, "I will praise Him, I will Praise Him. Glorify your name, O Lord." After commenting on the beautiful music, Michael said, "We'll see what the Lord has for us this morning." (Brother Robert Rolfe was the one scheduled to preach but his illness required a substitute, and Brother Jordison was the last minute replacement.)

He reread the Philippians scripture with a comment, "I wish that I could be like the Apostle Paul here because, in his letters he comes off as very confident in overcoming things. I am reminded of the scripture where he says, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; ...'" It goes on, but such confidence in that statement; and I have to think, 'Can I actually say that I have been crucified with Christ to the point where I no longer do the things that I want to do - that I just do the things that Christ wants me to do? Or, can I say it like he says here, 'I am, therefore, content with whatever state that I am in right now.'" Honestly, I cannot say that, and I suppose that tells you a little bit of where I am in my spiritual walk. I wish that I could speak like Paul and say I have overcome all these vices, but I can't this morning. So, this morning I want to share a little bit about one of my struggles - one of the problems that I face almost daily. It's a problem of being happy or joyful and then a feeling of being sorrowful or in despair. I would suspect that many of the priests and the teachers and the prophets struggled with the same thing. We don't have those struggles that they had in our scriptures, for the most part. Only in brief encounters do you find those.

What I am going to read from now is actually what I had originally intended my scripture to be. From the Second Book of Nephi, chapter 1:111

"And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created, must have remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained for ever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.; ..."

There is a scripture, (Alma 19:74) "Wickedness never was happiness." And I know Ron and Di like to lead us in a song, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord." I would like to read to you the definition of happiness from the 1828 Webster's Dictionary. It goes, "The agreeable sensations which spring from the enjoyment of good; that state of being in which his desires are gratified, by the enjoyment of pleasures without pain; ;, . To a person distressed with pain, relief from that pain affords happiness; in other cases we give the name happiness to positive pleasure or an excitement of agreeable sensations. Happiness therefore admits of indefinite degrees of increase in enjoyment, or gratification of desires. Perfect happiness, or pleasure unalloyed with pain, is not attainable in this life." The question I would ask you this morning is, "Are you happy?"

I heard a radio minister just the other day talking about this word, happy. The man was, I think, from Great Britain. He said that when he was young they used to say, "May the haps be with you!" His explanation of the word happiness had to do with the fact that may your fortune or may your circumstances go well for you so you may be happy.

Circumstances Dictate Happiness - Not Joy

I would turn that around this morning and say, "Are you joyful or are you happy?" I think when we look at joy, we will find a little

bit of a difference. I have taken this definition also from the dictionary - the same one: "The passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good; that excitement of pleasurable feelings which is caused by success, good fortune, the gratification of desire or some good possessed, or by a rational prospect of possessing what we love or desire; gladness; exultation; exhilaration of spirits. Joy is a delight of the mind, from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of a good." On the surface these two things seem very similar. You might be wondering why I would even make a big deal of it. But what I would like for us to consider this morning is that happiness is dependent upon our circumstances. What happens to us determines if we are happy; and that's what I struggle with because so often I am happy one moment and the next I am unhappy. I allow my circumstances to dictate my mood rather than my joy.

I did a quick Goggle search - putting a word and a search engine in and the computer goes through all the web sites throughout the world and it comes in with the top listings of that particular word. I Googled Joy this morning and this is what I came up with - the top ten sites for joy: The first one was called the joy of technology. I didn't really look close at that one. The second one was a gay radio station - JOY. The third one was the web site of the joy mining company. Number four was, "The joy of PI". Next was an article on a man named Bill Joy. The sixth one was a radio program by Elizabeth Elliott called "Gateway to Joy". Number seven was, The Japanese Open Yellow Pages (JOY). Eighth was an online book of anatomy and physiology of your eye. I don't know how joy fits into that! The ninth one was a web site of a band called JOY. Number ten was "The Joy of Baking." I could certainly identify with the joy of baking because I have the joy of eating. That's kind of man's - Googles' opinion of what joy is, but I would like for us to consider a little bit this morning what God's definition of joy is.

From the same scripture, two more verses, we find, "Men are that they might have joy." Now if anybody ever asks you the question, "What is the meaning of life or what is the purpose of life, here

Most of you recall that Lehi, in the Book of Mormon, had a vision. I am going to recount part of that vision. (1 Nephi 2: 44-53). "And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me. And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him. And it came to pass that as I followed him, I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste. And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness I began to pray unto the Lord, that he would have mercy on me according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

"And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord, I beheld a large and spacious field. And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof, it filled my soul with exceeding great joy; Wherefore I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit."

Lehi said that that fruit filled his soul with exceeding great joy, and his first thoughts were for his own family to know - to taste that same joy. (We talked about that in class this morning, Titus, didn't we? Once the Apostles had a testimony of Jesus - of His death and of His resurrection, and they had that gift of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus Christ, their response was to go to tell others about that great gift - to share!)

(1 Nephi 2:54-79). "And as I cast my eyes round about, that perhaps I might discover my family also, I beheld a river of water; and it ran along, and it was near the tree of which I was partaking the fruit. And I looked to behold from whence it came; and I saw the

head thereof a little way off; And at the head thereof I beheld your mother Sariah, and Sam, and Nephi; and they stood as if they knew not whither they should go. And it came to pass that I beckoned unto them; and I also did say unto them with a loud voice that they should come unto me and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit. And it came to pass that they did come unto me, and partake of the fruit also.

“And it came to pass that I was desirous that Laman and Lemuel should come and partake of the fruit also; Wherefore, I cast mine eyes towards the head of the river, that perhaps I might see them. And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me, and partake of the fruit.

“And I beheld a rod of iron; and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. And I also beheld a straight and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood; And it also led by the head of the fountain unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world; And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood. And it came to pass that they did come forth and commence in the path which led to the tree. And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceeding great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

“And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; And they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree. And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.” (Our speaker digressed just long enough to say that he had never noticed before that they grabbed hold of the end of the rod of iron, not the middle. They had to start from the beginning! He noted that called for more study!)

“And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld on the other side of the river of water a great and spacious building; And it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth; And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; And their manner of dress was exceeding fine; And they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at, and were partaking of the fruit. And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

“And now I, Nephi, do not speak all the words of my father. But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until the came forth and fell down and partok of the fruit of the tree.”

(They fell down! There’s something new there, too.) You see, it wasn’t easy for the people to come and partake of the fruit. As soon as they saw it, they desired it because they knew it would make them happy, but as they went forth along the path, it says the mists of darkness came up and if they didn’t grab hold of that rod, they wandered off and were lost! The price of that fruit - the fruit cost them something! It cost them holding onto that rod and following that strait and that narrow path.

Later Nephi is told that that tree represents the love of God. And I would like for us to consider this morning that that tree also represents the Kingdom of God, and the fruit of that tree - the fruit of the kingdom. There’s another song that Ron and Di love to sing called, “The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost!” The fruit of that tree - righteousness, peace and joy. That joy comes with a price, and the difficulties of paying that price were planned from the very begin-

ning. From the second Book of Nephi, we find Lehi talking to his sons in his old age and explaining things to them. Here we find him speaking to his son Jacob.(2 Nephi 1:94-125):

“And now, my son, I speak unto you these things, for your profit and learning: For there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them is; Both things to act, and things to be acted upon; And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; Even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter; Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man, that he should act for himself.

“Wherefore, man could not act for himself, save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other. And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; Wherefore he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God. And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable for ever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said, unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies; wherefore he said, Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

“And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth. And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth. And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; Wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; For he shewed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

“And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created, must have remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained for ever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.

“But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell, that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free for ever, knowing good from evil; To act for themselves, and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the Lord, at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

“Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil: For he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

“And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; And be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit, And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, Which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.”

This is something that has kind of been in my study a little bit

here. This scripture says, "And they would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell, that men might be;" So it was because of the fall that children came, and from the book of Genesis 4:9, we find the account of Adam and Eve: "And in that day, the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying, I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever; that, as thou hast fallen, thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will. And in that day Adam blessed God, and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth; saying, Blessed be the name of God, for, because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again, in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying, Were it not for our transgression, we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient."

"Were it not for our transgression, we never should have had seed, ... Now, men are that they might have joy, .. ok, and Adam fell that men might be. So we are going back to right after Adam and Eve were created

Genesis 1:29-30 "And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them. And I, God, blessed them and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," So if men couldn't be until they had fallen, and God said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," it appears to me that God was telling them that they should transgress. Now that doesn't quite sound right. "But, behold, all things are done in the wisdom of Him who knoweth all things."

In the book of John, chapter 12:24-26. So here we have the Lord apparently telling us to transgress, and we have Jesus here, talking to His disciples. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my Father honor."

Joy Comes From Knowing Our Savior

The gospel is all tied up into one thing, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And just like if you take a piece of corn, in order for that corn to produce more fruit, it has to be buried in the ground. It has to die and be watered and nurtured and then it grows up and multiplies. Jesus was likening this to Himself. He was going to die and the fruit of that death was going to bring all souls unto Him. It was going to multiply. And we find that same story - that parallel in the very beginning when God created mankind. When they were separated from God, it was a death. In order for them to have fruit - children - in order for them to have redemption and joy, they had to know death and separation from God. In order for us to experience joy in this life, we must understand and accept the fact that there are going to be times which we will find very, perhaps, displeasing - very difficult for us to go through whether emotionally or physically - or spiritually. Remember, the purpose for our creation was for us to have joy. Joy doesn't come out of our circumstances. Joy comes out of knowing our Savior. And that joy should dictate our needs - dictate how we relate to others - how we go through the trials and the tribulations in our life.

I was reminded of the Israelites when Moses went to deliver them. The Lord sent him, and Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "The Lord, God says to let my people go! Let us go into the wilderness for three days and have a feast." Pharaoh's response

was to withhold the straw for making bricks from the Israelites. And the Israelites groaned because of their circumstances, even though just before that they knew that God had sent Moses and Aaron to deliver them. They were excited about that, but as soon as their circumstances changed, their mood changed. After they were led out and were led to the banks of the Red Sea, here they had the sea in front of them and the Pharaoh's army camped behind them and about ready to fall on them to kill them all, and again their mood changed. "Why did we ever let you drag us out here, Moses. we are going to die". Then God miraculously causes the east wind to come and makes the waters go up. It says there was a wall of water on the left and a wall on the right. They pass through on dry land, and the pillar of fire was behind them to protect them from the Egyptians. They went safely through and Pharaoh's army was destroyed.

They get across and they are thirsty. There is nothing for them to drink, and so their mood changes and then the Lord provides water for them. And then their circumstances change again. They are hungry, so the Lord provides food for them. Then they are supposed to go up to meet Him, and they decide, "We don't want to meet Him! Moses, you go do it! You take care of it!" So they get the law. And they get to the time where they are ready to enter the promised land and they send the spies out, and the spies come back with their report. Ten of them say, "Oh, there are giants in the land! There is no way that we can overcome them." Joshua and Caleb came back and say "Oh, the land is beautiful! rich - flowing with milk and honey. We can do it!" And the people chose to believe the ten others. Their mood had changed. God wasn't able to help them - to deliver them. They had no vision, and we know the outcome of that story.

So we find ourselves in that same situation. So often our circumstances dictate how we feel, and that in turn dictates how we relate to others - what we do.

I have a story I would like to share with you this morning. Horatio G. Spafford was born in 1828. He lived in Chicago. He and his wife and their children were very well known. He was a very successful lawyer and had and had various enterprises in land and real-estate. They were supporters and friends of the famous minister, Dr. Dwight Moody. However in 1870 things started to go wrong with them. Their only son caught scarlet fever and died at age four. Later that year, many of you probably recall the song about the great fire that swept through Chicago. It went through and decimated all of Spafford's real estate. All of his holdings were wiped out. As you can guess, he was very depressed, sad. Because Dr. Moody had gone to England and was evangelizing over there, he thought perhaps it would do his family good to go to England and visit. So he booked tickets for the whole family to go, but at the last minute some business came up that required him to stay behind. So he sent the family on and said he would join them in a couple of weeks. Nine days later Horatio received a telegram from his wife that read, "Saved alone!" On November second of that year the ship, called the Ville de Havre, one of the best of the French luxury liners, collided with an English vessel and sank in 12 minutes killing 226 people. Horatio's wife, Anna, stood on the deck with her four daughters, and her last memory was of her baby being torn violently from her arms by the force of the water.

Anna was saved by a wooden plank which was floating beneath her unconscious body. On it she was dragged toward the saving vessel.

When the survivors of the wreck were rescued, Mrs. Spafford's first reaction was one of complete and utter despair. Then she heard a voice speak to her saying, "You were spared for a purpose." She immediately recalled the words of a friend, "It's easy to be grateful and good when you have so much, but take care that you are not a fair weather friend to God."

Hereto boarded the next ship to join his wife. The captain called

Horatio to the bridge and said, "A careful reckoning has been made, and I believe we are now passing the place where the de Havre went down. Horatio, moved by the waters of the boat, went own to his cabin. He thought about his life, where he was and what had transpired. He pulled out his pen and began to write: "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrow like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

"My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

"And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back like a scroll; the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul!"

I hope that in whatever circumstances you may find yourselves now or in the future, that we can learn to be content in whatever those circumstances might be, trusting that God will give us that fruit of His Kingdom - that fruit of the love of God that speaks peace, righteousness and joy which comes by His Spirit.

News and Notes

Restoration Youth Achieve

Jared Beck has received commendation for achievements in a Chemistry test and on a paper assigned in Humanities class.

Tim Carr of the Decatur Restoration branch has just returned from a trip to Washington D.C. where he represented Lamoni in receiving an award as one of the top 100 places for youth to live in the country.

Restoration Branches Confer

Mount Ayr Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ sent four delegates to the first Conference of Restoration Branches held in the historic Stone Church in Independence, Missouri November 10 -13, 2005.

The conference was called by the Pastors of Zion and twenty eight branches, with a baptized membership of 2,341 members, sent delegates for the event. Additional individual member registrants brought the voting membership to 309. There were also many observers who were not registered at all. Robert Rolfe, Ronald Smith, Michael Jordison and Mildred Smith were to represent Mount Ayr, but Brother Rolfe went to the hospital for heart surgery instead and Gerald Bolingbroke took his place.

The purpose of the event was to try give opportunity for greater unity among the branches and in the services they can render. The agenda of the conference included a period of prayer and testimony each morning under the direction of the Patriarchs. The first day was given to teaching sessions during which the conference was instructed first in the identity of the Church of Jesus Christ by Elder Bob Moore, what we can do as a conference by Elder Gary Medsker, missionary opportunities now being addressed and opening too rapidly to be addressed with present manpower by members of the Seventy, and on parliamentary procedures proposed for this conference by Elder Rudy Leitzinger. The following two days were spent in conferring on the issues presented by the branches.

The Pastors in Zion met October 20 and had put into place temporary personnel to chair and plan the conference, invite participation, obtain credentials for participants and in every necessary way organize the conference. They had provided for a mass meeting of the Elders to nominate a permanent President for the body who would chair the proceedings of this conference and continue to direct the activities of the conference until the next

Conference would be held.

The one nominated by the Elders was then presented to the conference where nominations were open for any High Priest or Seventy in good standing. High Priest Marlin Guin, who was nominated by the Elders, was also the choice of the body to be President of the conference with Seventy Neil Simmons as Vice President.

Preaching services were held each evening with the Seventy speaking. Ronald Smith spoke Thursday night, Neil Simmons Friday and Richard Neil Saturday. The scripture, "I am the vine. Ye are the branches." was used the first night with emphasis on the way the Lord is moving in power to spread His gospel throughout the world and it is His prerogative to do the pruning of His vineyard. It is for us to heed the instruction of Doctrine and Covenants 119. "The Spirit says, "Come"; let not the ministers for Christ prevent their coming." It was a powerful plea from the Lord for the conference not to try to dictate what people believe in order for them to participate in the work of the Lord but to let God unite us by His Spirit. It was a plea that the members of the conference heeded, and even those who called the conference said more was achieved than they had any hope could be accomplished.

The proposal, originally written by Yvonne Galusha and modified by the Mount Ayr branch in two rather lengthy sessions, was adopted by the conference as foundational for other decisions that were taken. Almost immediately after it appeared in print it was moved to the top of the agenda by action of the body and accepted without any objection. That proposal follows:

The Proposal

We affirm that the Church of Jesus Christ consists of all who will repent and come unto Him. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we do not intend to create a test of faith or a creed that must be agreed upon by all members of the church. Nevertheless, we uphold the following points as items of general agreement within the Church of Jesus Christ.

Epitome of Faith and Doctrine

We uphold the articles of faith written by Joseph Smith, Jr. found in "Times and Seasons" Vol. III, page 710, 1842. They are as follows:

We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

We believe that these ordinances are, first, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, repentance; third, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We believe that a man must be called of God by "prophecy, and by laying on of hands" by those who are in authority to preach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church; viz., apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.

We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, etc.

We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes, that Zion will be built upon this continent, that Christ will reign personally upon the earth, and that the earth

will be renewed and receive its paradisaic glory.

We claim privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul, "we believe all things, we hope all things," we have endured many things, and hope to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Priesthood Authority

We uphold priesthood authority as documented in the scriptures, especially in Inspired Version of the Bible (IV Bible) Ephesians 4:11-13, Book of Mormon (BOM) 1 Nephi 3:113-114, Doctrine & Covenants (DC) 26:2-3b, DC 83:5, and DC 104. We do not recognize the office nor ordinances of record of any woman who claims priesthood authority.

Ordinances

We uphold to practice as specified in the scriptures, with the proper authority and procedure, the following ordinances as holy prescribed practices of the church,

Ordination of Priesthood (BOM Alma 9:63-65, 69, 72; Mosiah 9:51, 59; Moroni 3:1-3)

Preaching (DC 42:4; DC 53:2b; DC 50:4, 5a, 6c; DC 65:1b)

Baptism by Water (DC 17:21; BOM 3 Nephi 3:69; BOM 3 Nephi 5:21-26)

Laying on of Hands to Receive the Holy Ghost (DC 53:2b; BOM 3 Nephi 5:37, 46, 49)

Communion (BOM 3 Nephi 8:30-46, 60-61)

Blessing of Children (BOM 3 Nephi 8:12-27)

Administration of the Afflicted (DC 127:2d, IV Bible Matthew 10:1, 7)

Evangelical or Patriarchal Blessing (DC 125:3-6)

Marriage Covenant (DC 49:3a-c; IV Bible Genesis 2:23, 28-30; IV Bible Hebrews 13:4)

Law

We acknowledge the law initially given to this movement to govern the church as documented in DC 42; in essence, preach the gospel, establish a storehouse with a bishop, and abide the basic commandments. We agree to work toward submitting more fully to this law by establishing a storehouse to be used as prescribed in the scriptures.

Committees were established to continue the work of the conference and prepare for a second conference to be held in April of 2006. Full cooperation with the Conference of Restoration Elders was mandated. Since many of those Melchisedec Priesthood chosen on Conference of Branches committees are also active in the Elder's conference, it is believed the two organizations will be able to complement each others' efforts in ministry.

A budget for further work of the committees and for supporting the missionary endeavors affirmed by the conference was accepted. Contributions to that budget may be sent to The Conference of Restoration Branches, % Eldon Anderson, Treasurer, 2025 S.W. Liggett Rd., Blue Springs, MO 64015. At the present moment the Conference has not obtained tax deductible status. If you need or want a tax deduction for your offering, you may want to just inform Brother Anderson of your wish to contribute now and wait until that status is achieved to actually send the money in.

For details of conference action and to hear a few of the many wonderful testimonies shared there, contact one of your delegates. Minutes have been provided for all business sessions. Testimonies must come from the memories and notes of the participants. This reporter has 14 pages of frequently abbreviated, hand written notes on the event.

Hayride at Barbers



An evening of fun and fellowship was held at the Barber farm in October. This included a hayride, a scavenger hunt, a cookout and a campfire with testimony sharing. Come join us for the fun next year.

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

Special Holiday Events

Sunday, Dec. 4 - Sing through the Cantata, "How Great Our Joy", at 2 p.m. - after the Zionics Dinner at the church. Everyone invited to participate.

Saturday, Dec. 10 - Mount Ayr Window walk. We depict the shepherds coming to find the baby Jesus. Our station is in Aunt Jennie's Attic window. We need volunteers to stand in the window and to help set it up.

Sunday, Dec. 18 - Caroling party. Meet at Pat and Gerry Bolingbroke's home at 5 p.m. Bring items to be put on the plates given as we carol and snacks for a meal.

Sunday, Dec. 25 - Special Christmas service at 11 a.m.

Saturday, Dec. 31 - New Year's Worship - Party - watch for announcements.

The branch is also taking offerings to help with the Vacation church schools to be held in Liberia next summer and to help area families.