



Church of Jesus Christ

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch



NEWSLETTER

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Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore it is the most desirable above all things.



News & Notes



New Years Eve Party

Many gathered at the Winkler home to usher in 2012. Delicious snacks and desserts were shared along with some rousing board games and fellowship. Thank you Gordon and Linda for sharing your home.

Sharing Service Scheduled

January 29th will be a sharing service, shared with the baby blessing. Please come prepared to minister and share with us.

Baby Blessing

On January 29th, Aaron and Melissa Ballantyne will present their son, Joshua, to be blessed. The congregation is invited to a potluck following the service.

Priesthood Meeting

There will be a Priesthood meeting January 22nd at 5:00 PM, just before the evening fellowship.



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Pastoral Considerations

by Sherman Phipps

As we begin a new year I hope we will take time to consider what we might anticipate another year will accomplish, if anything, for the work of God's Kingdom.

I have always been inspired by the story of Jared and his brother and their families and friends (Ether). After the Lord had spared them and lead them out from the Great Tower (Ether 1:7-27) promising them a land choice above all other lands (Ether 1:29-32), they arrived at a place on the seashore where they dwelt for four years. (Ether 1:36-37) It must have been a nice and comfortable place because they seemed content to stay there. Or, maybe they just got weary and quit moving.

As I read this story, I always have to think of how there seem to be so many lessons in their experiences from which we can and should learn. I wonder how many of us, having been so blessed, having been spared from destruction time after time and having had the privilege of God's direction in our lives, become satisfied or weary and quit moving towards the goal(s) God has set before us. Surely we believe in Zion. If so, it should be clear to us that we have not finished our journey. We have more yet to do (if God will permit us to participate).

After four years along the seashore, the brother of Jared was again visited by the Lord. The Lord spent three hours chastising him (Ether 1:38-39) for failing to remember to continue calling upon the Lord.

Do we sometimes arrive at points in our lives where we decide we have gone as far as we can, or at least as far as we are willing to go – and then just stop there without diligently seeking out the Lord to inquire of Him what He wants for us? I believe we do. We build our houses, raise our families, work hard at becoming successful in our professions, whatever it takes to reach a level of existence that we are comfortable and familiar with and then just stay there.

Well, what if the Lord has something yet for us to do; a whole “yet unexplored” way of life? It would be a shame for us to stay where we are. How many generations will be denied “the land of Promise” in a spiritual sense if we choose to remain where we are without sincerely calling upon the name of the Lord – and listening when He answers?

(Continued on back page)

MARY'S HEART



High Priest Alan Smith

Mt. Ayr, Iowa

December 4, 2011

Today I would like to have us look at the story of Mary the mother of Jesus. We'll look at her life story, how she responded to the call in her life, and how the Lord prepared her for things that would happen to her son through the years. Along the way I hope we may learn a lesson or two from her. We know the Christmas story is just the beginning, so we will try to talk about all of Mary's story as we have it recorded in the scriptures -- and the things she pondered in her heart, as the scriptures say. Like so many other stories, I would love to have more detail than the few incidents the scripture record about the mother of Jesus. But this morning I would like us to learn from her response of God's call in her life as we look at our own lives.

We first hear of Mary when the angel Gabriel visits her in Nazareth. (The exception is in prophecy in the Book of Mormon where she is called by name before all this takes place). In the sixth month (August) the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth to Mary, espoused to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

And the angel came in unto her 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. (Luke 1: 28-29)

This was the first of many ponderings of her heart that Mary would do. (Ponder means to confer or encounter). “Why is the angel appearing to me and why is he talking to me this way? Maybe he has the wrong person” I can hear Mary thinking.

It is interesting that she was troubled about the saying, though apparently not afraid of the angels like the shepherds would be later. So she pondered in her mind what was going on.

The angel said:

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.

Then said Mary unto the angel; How can this be?

And the angel answered and said unto her; Of the Holy Ghost, and the power of the Highest. Therefore also, that holy child that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:30-35)

Along with the message the angel gave Mary a sign that she would know what he had said was true.

And behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son, in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who is called barren.

For with God nothing can be impossible. (vs 36-37)

Then the angel told her something that I’m sure Mary remembered many times in her life. “For with God nothing can be impossible.” He told her of one miracle already taking place and the one that she would be a part of as well.

And Mary said, Behold the handmade of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. (vs. 38)

Mary said, “I’m your servant .” It wasn’t an idle promise as she pondered the message in her own mind. I wonder if she pondered the possibility of losing the love of Joseph or even, under the laws of her time, risking death.

So Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country to the city of Juda. From the scriptures it doesn’t say that she even told Elizabeth why she was coming, but Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Ghost and her child John leaps within her and she says to Mary,

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And why is it, that this blessing is upon me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed art thou who believed, for those things which were told thee by the angel of the Lord, shall be fulfilled. (vs 42-44)

So if Mary had any doubt about the visitation from the angel Gabriel, she goes to visit Elizabeth and Elizabeth confirms it by the power of the Holy Spirit. What was Mary’s response?

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit rejoiceth in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he who is mighty hath done to me great things; and I will magnify his holy name, For his mercy on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their high seats; and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; but the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath helped his servant Israel in remembrance of mercy, As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever. (vs 45-54)

Mary has had two experiences confirming to her that what was happening was the Lord’s doing. Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then she returned to her own house.

The next time we hear about Mary, she must have talked with Joseph and shared her experience. We don’t have any record of Joseph having ever seen an angel before, but here comes Mary and she tells about the experience where she has seen an angel and her cousin Elizabeth has had an experience that supports that. The scriptures say they Joseph was thinking about putting her away privately, not

marrying her or going through with their betrothal. He didn’t want to hurt Mary, didn’t want to do it publicly, but she was going to have a child and it wasn’t his.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a vision, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now this took place, that all things might be fulfilled, which were spoken of the Lord, by the prophets, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, (which, being interpreted, is, God with us.)

Then Joseph, awaking out of his vision, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; And knew her not until she had brought forth her first-born son; and they called his name Jesus. (Matthew 2:3-8)

Mary must have added this blessing to the things in her heart as she recognized that what was going to happen was something extraordinary and that she had agreed to be a part of this great plan of salvation that was about to come to pass.

We pick up the story in the spring when the couple travels to Bethlehem for the census and the baby is born.

And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was none to give room for them in the inns. (Luke 2:6-7)

The shepherds have their experience with the angels that tell them of Christ’s birth and give them directions to the place where they will find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The shepherds hurry to see what the angels have promised them.

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; But Mary kept all these things and



pondered them in her heart. (vs 16-19)

Mary has more to ponder in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things which they had heard and seen, as they were manifested unto them. (vs 20)

Mary gains more knowledge of what the mission of her son will be when Jesus is taken to be circumcised and to be offered to the Lord.

And behold, there was a man at Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child, even Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

And Joseph, and Mary, marveled at those things which were spoken of the child. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (vs 25-34)

And then he gave Mary a prophecy:

Yea, a spear shall pierce through him to the wounding of thine own soul also; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. (35)

Simeon may have been referring to Isaiah 53: 4-5 *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*

The definition for wounded in the Old Testament in this scripture is pierced -- he will be pierced for our transgressions.

Or he may also be referring to the

prophecy in Psalm 22, which graphically details what the crucifixion will be like physically for Jesus, but notes that this is just a step toward the blessing of God to man.

In any case, Mary will see the culmination of the prophecy and her own soul will be wounded in the process, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him, to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:36-40)

It's not long until Mary had another testimony. Wise men show up at the home of Joseph and Mary to find Jesus a young child. They had been to Jerusalem to visit with King Herod for word of where Christ was being born, for they had seen his star in the east and had come to worship him.

"...Mary will see the culmination of the prophecy and her own soul will be wounded in the process, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

When Herod the king had heard of the child, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests, and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, saying, Where is the place that is written of by the prophets, in which Christ should be born? For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets.

And they said unto him, It is written by the prophets, that he should be born in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus have they said, The word of the Lord came unto us, saying, And thou Bethlehem, which lieth in the land of Judea, in thee shall be born a prince, which art not the least among the princes of Judea; for out of thee shall come the Messiah, who shall save my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had called the wise men privily, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child;

and when ye have found the child, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. (Matthew 3:3-9)

This probably was Nazareth instead of Bethlehem. I wonder if there was special meaning besides the fact that the Bethlehem stable was in sight of one of King Herod's major palaces -- a contrast between the rich and the poor. You would be expecting a King to be born up in the palace.

King Herod would surely have had his feelers out in Bethlehem for any news of the child. Instead Jesus was born there when the city was crowded with many people and a birth in a stable wasn't a tip off for what King Herod was seeking.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (vs 10-11)

I believe they they shared much more than gifts with Mary and Joseph. Gold to provide them a way to escape into Egypt. Incense and myrrh -- foretelling Christ's death -- something more for Mary to ponder in her heart. But if the prophet Samuel was one of the wisemen, he would share his experiences with them about who Jesus was and what his mission was. These were more testimonies for Mary of the great part of history she was playing a part in.

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord, appeared to Joseph in a vision, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and tarry thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. And then he arose, and took the young child, and the child's mother, by night, and departed into Egypt; And was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord, by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth; and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and all



the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Ramah there was a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachael weeping for the loss of her children, and would not be comforted because they were not. (vs 13-18)

The Lord had made provision again for Mary and Joseph and Jesus but their hearts must have made their heart heavy to hear the news from back home about what King Herod had done.

Another angel brings a message when it is time to come home, fulfilling another prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a vision to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead who sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the stead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; but notwithstanding, being warned of God in a vision, he went into the eastern part of Galilee; And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father; and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. (vs 19-25)

The next time we hear of Mary is when Jesus was left behind in Jerusalem.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom, to the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind, in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not that he tarried; But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among his kindred and acquaintance, And when they found him

not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. (Luke 2:41-45)

We may wonder why, if they were just taking care of Jesus, why his parents wouldn't have kept an eye on him. But by this time Mary and Joseph could easily have had four or five other children. We know from the scriptures that Jesus had brothers and sisters. At this time as his parents, they may have been focused on the younger children and figure the almost teenager is taking care of himself. They figured that he was with one of the other people traveling with him. They had traveled a day's journey when they found he wasn't with anyone else. They checked with all their kindreds and friends and he's with no one, so they go back to Jerusalem looking for him. It took them three days to find him. Can you imagine what that would be like? We'd have an amber alert going on these days. It would be all over the news.

And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, and they were hearing him, and asking him questions. And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding, and answers. And when his parents saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

And he said unto them, Why is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. And his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (vs 46-52)

At first they didn't understand what Jesus was saying. But with all the other experiences that they had had, they must have begun to recognize what was happening. Mary had another saying to keep in her heart.

We don't hear of Mary again until Jesus has begun his ministry and is called with his disciples to a marriage feast in Cana where Mary and his brothers and sisters are. We don't know if Joseph had passed away by this time, but he is not mentioned.

And on the third day of the week, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, his mother said unto him, They have no wine. Jesus said unto her, Woman, what wilt thou have me to do for thee? that will I do; for mine hour is not yet come. (John 2:1-4)

Jesus was saying, "As your son, I am still subject to you."

His mother said unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, see that ye do it.

There were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus said unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he said, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare unto him.

When the governor of the feast had tasted the water which was made wine, (he knew not whence it was, but the servants who drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And said unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk; then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and the faith of his disciples was strengthened in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples; and they continued there not many days. (vs 5-12)

And he goes up to Jerusalem for the passover feast with them -- just as he did when he was twelve years old. This time, instead of visiting with the people in the temple, he cleanses it of money changers.

Jesus' miracle with the wine strengthened the faith of his disciples and was another testimony to Mary to add to those she carried in her heart.

The next time we encounter Mary is when Jesus has been away from his family ministering for some time. During that time he emphasized that people should honor their father and mother several times: to the rich man who was seeking eternal life and to the Pharisees and scribes he thought were making a mockery of the



commandment.

At the same time he said:

He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he who taketh not his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

There is no one who left father and mother for my sake and the gospel's who shall not receive a hundredfold in eternal life. He emphasized that the gospel was most important.

Mary enters the picture when she and some family members are standing outside where Jesus is teaching, wanting to speak to him. Jesus answers the messenger:

"Who is my mother and who is my brethren. And he stretched forth his hands toward his disciples and said : Behold my mother and brethren. And he gave them charge concerning her saying:

I go my way, for my Father has sent me. And whosoever shall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my brother and my sister and my mother."

Jesus was emphasizing that in his kingdom, kinship ties go well beyond family lines, that his family was all those who would believe and respond.

I wonder if Mary and his brothers weren't asking for him to come back home and minister, something Jesus was not prepared to do at the moment. A few verses later, however, Jesus does go back to his hometown to share with the people there.

You remember how that went:

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples followed him. And when the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue; and many hearing, were astonished at his words, saying, From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this that is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Judah and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could do no mighty work there, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and they were healed. And he marveled because of their unbelief. (Mark 6:1-8)

Mary too may have been wounded in

her soul when she sees the response of the folk in Nazareth to Jesus' visit home. I'm sure she pondered this in her heart as well.

The next time we have record of Jesus seeing Mary, Jesus is on the cross.

Mary is there while Jesus is suffering on the cross. She sees the literal fulfillment of Psalm 22 transpire before.

She sees his suffering and hears him remind his disciples that the Psalm is taking place in front of them when he quotes "My God, why has thou forsaken me?"

She sees that his bones are out of joint, stretched with his weight on the cross, that his strength is dried up, that his tongue cleaves to his jaws, that his hands and feet have been pierced, that lots are cast for his garments. (I wonder if Mary was the one who made his seamless robe that caused the soldiers to cast lots for it instead of tearing it up.) All of these things are prophesied in Psalm 22.

It is there that Jesus makes special provision for Mary with John.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was a vessel full of vinegar; mingled with gall, and they filled a sponge with it, and put upon hyssop, and put to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs;

But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of

him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. (John 19:26-37)

Mary must have remembered Simeon's prophecy as well, that the spear would pierce Jesus side and wound her own soul as well.

As God made provision for Mary even in this hour by giving her all the testimonies to treasure up in her heart over the years, he makes provision for us as well.

Just as the oldest son who had the responsibility of providing for Mary in her old age, when Jesus gave that responsibility to John as one of his larger family in his kingdom, he offers that kinship of being sons and daughter of God and brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we remember him in the manger and on the cross this morning, as we are called to do at the Lord's Supper, we have given that same promise. If we will keep his commandments, take upon us his name, serve him and allow his gift on the cross to provide forgiveness and influence in our lives, we can have this same promise.

The Christmas story doesn't stop with a child in the manger. If it did, we would just have a nice story to remember. It is only the beginning of a glorious story that continues today.

We can learn from Mary

-- Be willing to respond readily to the call of God in our lives to do his will, no matter how our heart is pierced in the process.

-- Treasure up the word of God and the experiences we have with him in our hearts and ponder it.

-- Recognize that each of us are called to be sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers to each other. Be part of the family of God that we celebrate with others when come to take the emblems of his call to new life each month.

But what of Mary?

Do we leave her at the cross in sorrow?

No, there is one more report of her in the scriptures.

After 40 days of ministry following his resurrection to the people in Israel, to the people in America, and to other sheep, Jesus is received into heaven again in an experience shared by the disciples.



The disciples then return from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, about a Sabbath day's journey, and meet in an upper room. The scriptures record that with them there in one accord, with prayer and supplication, there are other people there, including Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers and sisters, a total of about 120 people. Matthis is chosen to replace Judas as an apostle, and the next thing we hear is that the day of Pentacost has come with the promised blessing of the Holy Spirit which will lead the disciples as they move out in faith to make a difference in the world.

Mary must have had a lot of pondering to do in her heart over the years, but seeing all the prophecies and testimonies of her life become reality must have been an amazing experience for her.

Just as we are called to amazement at the purposes God has in each of us and is working out in these days when we believe that Mary's son will again be ministering among us in power and great glory.

Gloria, gloria, in excelsis deo, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace good will to men, is a message not just to shepherds centuries ago but to each of us today in this Christmas season.



God

By Betty Cottrill

I was regretting the past and fearing the future.

Suddenly my Lord was speaking.
My name is – I AM.

He paused and I waited. He continued.
When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard.

I am not there.

My name is not – I was.

When you live in the future with its problems and fears, it is hard.

I am not there.

My name is not – I will be.

When you live in this moment, it is not hard.

I am here.

My name is – I AM.

THE TREE OF LIFE



Patriarch Milo Burnette

Woodbine, Iowa

December 11, 2011

Brother Alan Smith read 3 Nephi 1:12-15 as a Call to Worship. . . . *Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, And on the morrow come I into the world, to shew unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfill all things which I have made known unto the children of men, from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father, and of the Son of the Father; because of me, and of the Son, because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.*

Good morning, brothers and sisters. The Call to Worship was from the Book of Nephi. There was a sign given at the time of Jesus Christ's birth that was alluded to. Does everybody know what those signs were? There were two straight days with the sun shining. Solid sun day and night and the next day were signs of Christ's birth. It was prophesied that this would take place and when it did the people, even though they knew there were going to be signs, were in awe of what they saw. It would have been an experience that they

would never forget and they would pass that knowledge down through time to their offspring. Their offspring eventually were prepared for when Jesus Christ did come to visit them and were expecting Him. I am not going to dwell particularly on that today but it's a beautiful piece of writing that describes the experience of these people expecting Christ to come. They knew pretty close to almost the year and the day when He was to come and they were ready for Him. When Jesus did come they dropped to the ground, probably flat on the ground, out of reverence for Christ appearing to them. Before they saw Christ they heard God's voice.

Lehi Dreams of A Tree

I'd like to speak to you today about an experience that five different people had. You can count them up as we go. The experience has to do with Lehi's vision where he saw a tree. I'm going to start my scripture reading in the 1st Book of Nephi chapter 2 verse 41. *And it came to pass that while my father tarried in the wilderness he spake unto us, saying, Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or in other words, I have seen a vision. And behold, because of the thing which I have seen, I have reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi, and also of Sam; for I have reason to suppose that they, and also many of their seed, will be saved. But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you; for behold, methought I saw in my dream a dark and dreary wilderness. 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. [41-48]*

I want to talk to you about this tree of life that Lehi saw in his vision. I'll read just a little bit of it. I'm starting on verse 49 in 1 Nephi chapter 2. *And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. [49]* (Now when I eat an apple it doesn't necessarily make me happy but it's good and I know it's good for me. The same thing when I



eat a banana. I can't tell you that it makes me happy to eat it but the fruit of this tree of life that Lehi saw made him happy. There was something special about this tree compared to all the other trees that were on land.) *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; [50-52]* (There's quite a bit of difference between the concept of happiness and joy. Joy is a mountaintop experience so do I get joy from eating an apple or banana? No, I don't but this fruit was special, very, very special and this is his experience with that fruit.)

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. [54-57] 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; [59-63]

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. [65-69]

That's one man having an experience in a vision with an angel by his side taking him to this tree, the tree of life. The rod that led to this was the rod of iron which was the word of God. The word of God leads people to the tree of life. The tree of life is yet for us to partake of. It is in our future. That tree of life will be at the wedding feast where we will partake of the fruit of that tree during that wedding feast when Christ returns and comes to the earth a second time to gather from amongst the people living on the earth the righteous and take them up into the clouds with him to participate in this experience.

Nephi Encounters the Tree

His son Nephi wanted to have the same experience his father did and he prayed that he might have the experience his father did. He likewise was taken up into a vision by an angel. In 1 Nephi 3 starting with verse 23 it says, *And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father concerning the things which he saw in a vision; And also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost; which power he received by faith on the Son of God; And the Son of God was the Messiah who should come; I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men; For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. [23-27]*

Before I go on when I was first ordained a priest at the age of 17 back in 1957, I was preparing myself to give

cottage meetings using the scriptures. I never used the Go Ye and Teach, I did it from the scriptures. The book of Malachi says that Jesus Christ and God are the same yesterday, today and forever. As I was preparing myself with all the scriptures that one really stuck with me. It's profound.

I was a science teacher for 35 years in the high school setting. Science is part of God's creation. God allowed men to understand scientific knowledge when it was time for them to know it. It was given to them by the Holy Spirit. I marveled as a science teacher at the consistency in the biological and physical world and in the universe and the study of astronomy the consistency on how stars come and go. Stars live and die and the matter from which a star was once made up of is drawn by intense gravity into a black hole and that is fusion. When that nuclear fusion reaches a certain temperature it explodes and it throws matter out into space and that matter becomes new solar systems and new planets and additional stars. This is just a repetitive cycle that takes place in outer space.

It's interesting to me to have sat and listened to astronomers talk about what they see when they look out there with their very powerful radio telescopes which have a parabolic dish that is bigger than this building. They listen to radio waves and computers change those radio waves into images that form pictures so that they know what they are seeing. The consistence is evidence of the unchangeability of the Creator. God authorized Jesus Christ to create all we know. He is the Creator of this earth and the universe and He is the mediator between God and man. That's why when we pray to God we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, for it is Jesus Christ who is our Creator and created all that is known in the world.

In the Book of Genesis in the Inspired Version Moses was given to understand this. Moses was one of several prophets that had what is known as a panoramic vision. Panoramic photography spreads the image out over a long area and when you have the print made it's about this long

And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me, Look! and I looked and beheld a tree; and it was like unto the tree which my father had seen; and the beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow. And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit, I beheld thou hast shewn unto me the tree which is precious above all. ~ 1 Ne. 3:46-47



(2-3 feet). So a panoramic vision is a vision seeing everything from the beginning of time to eternity. Moses was given the opportunity to see that. There are other prophets that saw it too. Isaiah saw it. Jeremiah saw it. The brother of Jared and Nephi saw it. In more recent times Joseph Smith Jr. saw the vision from the beginning of time to the end of time. There wasn't much of it that they could write about particularly in the future because they didn't know how to put it in words. That is the same reason why when Moses saw today how could he possibly put into words that the Hebrews would understand what he was seeing in that vision when he saw the times in which we live.

Nephi had the experience of seeing the same tree with the beautiful fruit that was white, whiter than anything he had ever seen as his father had seen. It was sweet beyond his ability to describe and there was the same setting as in his father's vision. There was a river. There was a rod of iron and there was a spacious building. In this spacious building Nephi saw people and those people were dressed in party-like dress clothing. They were boisterous and they were loud in their laughing. They were looking out the windows and poking their fingers toward Nephi and making fun of him, making fun of what they were seeing take place. In the interpretation of the setting the angel told Nephi that the rod of iron was the word of God. Everything was leading to the tree of life. The tree of life represents Jesus Christ and the river had to do with satan, the separation between good and evil. The spacious building had people that would make fun of those who believed in Jesus Christ throughout time. Now that's two persons who had seen the tree of life.

Father Joseph and the Tree

In the year 1811 Joseph Smith Sr. had a vision. Joseph Smith Jr. was only six years old. In this vision during the night an angel took him into a setting. As they came over a hill and looked at the bottom he said he saw a tree that looked like a beech nut tree which was popular in New York by the way but this beech nut tree was totally different than what he had seen before. He said it glistened and was white and had fruit on it. The angel urged him to go down and take hold of this fruit and pick some of it and eat it. He said it was so good he got down on his knees and was

grabbing the fruit by the hands full and pushing it into his mouth. He couldn't get enough of it. The angel encouraged him to call his family down so he turned around and called his wife Lucy and his seven children to come. They came and partook of the tree. The angel said to Joseph Smith Sr. that he didn't have all of his children there. Joseph replied that all seven of his children were there. The angel told him to turn around and look and Joseph Smith Sr. turned around and looked up on the hill behind him where he saw two little children. They were unborn children who would later on be born and would be known as Catherine and Don Carlos. So he invited these two children to come down to the tree and to share in this beautiful fruit and have this experience with their father.

Can you imagine the feeling of looking and seeing your unborn children in that kind of an experience? I doubt if Joseph Smith Sr. rationalized that at the time because he was involved in this experience. When you are in those kinds of experiences you don't think about what's taking place. It is just happening. He was told that there were people in the building that he saw that were going to

“Can you imagine the feeling of looking and seeing your unborn children in that kind of an experience?”

scorn his family and were going to make fun of his children. They were going to always be a thorn in their side because they were going to be people his family would encounter in their lifetime.

Joseph Smith Sr. had two different visions. He had another vision where he was walking along a country road and saw along the edge of the road a chest which looked like a box but like a treasure chest. He was encouraged by the angel to lift the box lid up. Inside were the most precious jewels and gold pieces that you could imagine. When he asked what the meaning of this was, the angel told him that those bright jewels and pieces of gold represented the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel would become to his family like what he saw in the box. He would be an instrument in the hands of his family to bring good on this earth.

Now why would Joseph Smith Sr. have visions like this even long before Joseph Smith Jr. had his experience in the

grove? In my opinion it was to prepare him for what Joseph Smith Jr. was going to go through. You remember when Joseph Smith Jr. had his experience in the grove, he went right to his father and found him working in the field. He told his father what had taken place in the sacred grove where God and Jesus Christ came and stood in front of him and Jesus Christ spoke to him. God first said, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.” Then Jesus spoke to Joseph and told him things that He was going to have him do.

One of the reasons that Joseph prayed was he didn't know what church to join. When he asked that question Jesus Christ told him not to join any of them. That was discussed in the church school class this morning. He was not to join any of them. They were an abomination in His sight. They said that they were the church of Christ but their hearts were far from Him. He was to join no church that was at that time present in the United States along the Eastern seaboard. His mother was Methodist and his dad was Presbyterian. There were lots of different denominations to choose from but none of them fit the bill for being Christ's church and a church that He would have Joseph attend.

As we well know Joseph was given instruction that in the days ahead he would be given the ability to form a church, to restore the Church of Jesus Christ that was formed in Jerusalem near the end of Christ's ministry. Christ half-brother James was the president of that church that was headquartered in Jerusalem. Christ built a church before He left the earth and His apostles were then in charge of stabilizing and keeping the structure of that church going for as long as they could. Joseph Smith Jr. was being asked to restore that same church in all the things that His church included.

In the class this morning we talked about several of those. That church would include priesthood, all the different offices of priesthood. It would include the six principles of the doctrine of Christ. It would include the fullness of the gospel. Out of the three standard books only one of them contains the fullness of the gospel – the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is also a new covenant that God made with those people who wrote the book. Much of what was written was written about the people that would be living during the time we know, here upon the earth, as the Gentiles.



The Two in the Garden and the Tree

There was a tree similar to the tree of life. I think it was basically the same tree that was in the Garden of Eden. It had very desirable fruit on it. It was very appealing but this tree was being used as a test of obedience. Adam and Eve were forbidden by God to eat of the fruit of this tree. We all know the story that they yielded to temptation. The temptation was from satan who told them that it was okay to eat the fruit of that tree and it wouldn't harm them. They did and when God discovered what they had done they were cast out of the Garden of Eden to have to live on the earth and to work with their hands, to raise their own food and to make their own way. They had to develop their own shelter, create their own clothing and mankind ever since has lived on this earth pretty much the same way. Although some of the new inventions have changed that.

So Adam and Eve saw the tree of life and so that's two people there. Lehi did, Nephi did and also Joseph Smith Sr. They are the ones we know have seen the tree of life. I am sure there are others that may have had that experience but I don't know who they are because I have never read about it. The tree of life will be at the wedding feast. Of course that tree of life is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who will be called to go to the wedding feast are known as the "elect." The "elect" are the believers who have been baptized by authoritative priesthood in the waters of baptism by immersion and by the laying on of hands for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, the two baptisms. They will qualify if they keep all of the commandments they possibly can keep during their lifetime.

The ability to keep all of the commandments is not easy. I know we all fail at some point in a month of doing those things. We subscribe and allow ourselves to be tempted by satan from month to month particularly when we lose our temper or get angry at people or we get despondent. Satan is the author of all these things that take place in our lives that lead us away from God. Jesus Christ provides an opportunity once a month for us to come back before Him, that is the sacrament of the Lord's supper. That is one of the most important sacraments we have in our church which allows us to come to the communion table which is symbolic of Jesus Christ, to lay our sins at His feet and to partake of the emblems

which represent His spilled blood and His torn flesh. We believe in the crucifixion and in the resurrection but the resurrection is the most important part of that experience.

The olive tree was pretty much similar to the tree of life in the fact that the base of the House of Israel was an olive tree. Some of its branches ran over a wall which represents the remnant of the House of Israel which was led by God to the Americas. I would like to share why the olive tree was used in the symbolism.

Olive trees were exceedingly important to people who lived in Palestine and the areas around where Jesus did His ministry. They were important for food. The olives were edible and they produced an oil which was used for many different things. It was used for cooking, for cosmetics for women, for skin care and I'm sure many others things that I don't know about. One other tree that was prominent in that area was equally important and that was the date palm. I don't know if you know it but there are some fruits that are considered complete foods. If you were to live entirely on those and water you would get all the nutrients you would need. The date is one of those. Isn't that interesting that the date palms were in that vicinity and they ate the dates. I don't know if they had them regularly with their meal or not.

Another perfect fruit is the banana. It contains just about everything that you need. You can live on bananas and water. The apes do and they get along fine. I don't mean to compare you to them. That was not the intent, it's just the parallelism between that animal and us and what we can live on.

The scriptures that I've read to you today are teachings that will make us ready when the wedding feast takes place. The parable of the ten virgins is an outstanding parable. It's talking about those people, the five wise virgins, who will be ready when the feast comes and they will go and participate in that wedding feast. The scriptures also refer to them as the elect. The elect are those who are pure in heart. Pure in heart means that there are no sins. You don't commit sins. You're absent of having sins in your life. That takes a lifetime of preparation to try to reach that level. I think it was Walter Weldon who told somebody that on a certain day he thought he was sin free. He got through the entire day without committing any kind

of sin that he could think of which made him happy to know that he finally could do that. It was only one day but he rejoiced in the experience.

The tree of life is what we're heading for, what we are desiring. It's at the end of the rod of iron which is the word of God. We have the word of God in the three standard books. All of the prophecies of all the prophets in those three books provide for us all that we need to know. All of the commandments are in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is a refresher of those commandments. We have the six principles of the doctrine of Christ on which this church is based. They are faith, repentance, baptisms, the laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal life. Of those six probably the last two we have the least amount of information on as far as members are concerned. I encourage people to read the scriptures particularly the Doctrine and Covenants which does a great job of explaining life after death and to find out what you can about what is just before us. I'm looking around the room and I think I'm seeing some people that may be older than I am but those of us in our seventies have a short journey ahead of us. We're in the benedictory part of our life. One of these days we'll have a chance to be in the presence of Christ.

I want to share an experience I had with a vision. My wife and I used to spend our winters in Texas. We went to South Padre Island which is a very desirable place. The island is only six blocks wide and the southern part of the island is ten miles long. The southern part of it is the city of South Padre. While we were down there my oldest sister Elaine Perry who lived in Waterloo passed away. I connected with Chuck Perry, my nephew, who met us at the Kansas City Airport and drove us to Waterloo where his family home was. We attended the funeral and headed back to Texas.

One evening after dark I was walking along the waters' edge of the Gulf of Mexico. It happened to be a clear night. There were no clouds or haze in the sky. I was far enough away from city lights that I had a clear vision of the sky. It was beautiful looking at the stars and the portion of the galaxy that I could see. I said to my sister who was in Paradise, "Elaine, is this as beautiful to you as it is to me?" I had a vision open up and I saw the moment when Elaine passed through the



veil at her death. She saw our family that had already passed away. She saw our parents, her husband Jack, our grandparents on the Burnett side and a grandmother on our mother's side and some of our favorite aunts and uncles. When she saw them she just rushed to them. By the way when she rushed to them I didn't see any leg movement, she just went. When she got there they put their arms around her and hugged her and kissed her and were so glad to see her. I was rejoicing in my heart watching this scene. Then I noticed off to the left and back behind the family was a man with a beard standing there in a white robe waiting and I knew it was Christ. Just about that time Elaine looked over there and saw him. She rushed to him and as she came, Jesus opened his arms wide open. When Elaine got to Him He brought her in tightly to His chest. I knew in that moment that my sister experienced the true love of God. I don't think as humans we can fully comprehend that but I know she did in that experience with Christ.

That reinforced what I've taught people in my classes and when I've preached that the scriptures teach us that we will know our loved ones when we go to the next life and we will see Christ and He will be there to accept us when we arrive. Now I don't know if it's the same thing for an evil man or woman but I know what I saw with my sister. I share that with you as evidence that we will all die unless Christ returns before that happens and we won't have to taste the pain of death. If Christ doesn't arrive before we pass then we're going to experience what I just described to you. We're going to see Jesus Christ. We're going to see family members and you women who have had children that died before birth, you will see them. They will be fully grown and they will know you and you will know them.



**Happy New Year
Saints!**

WHO DO YOU TOUCH EACH DAY?



Elder Steve Cunningham
Boone, Iowa
December 18, 2011

We opened our service, presided over by Robert Rolfe, singing several Christmas songs interspersed with scripture. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.* [Isaiah 9:6] Hymn No. 245 from the hymnal Hymns of the Saints was then sung followed by Isaiah 11:1, 2, 12. *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.* [1, 2] *And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.* [12]

As a scripture reading Steven Cunningham used Luke 6:47-49. *Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock, and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it;*

for it was founded upon a rock. But he who heareth and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

Founded Upon the Rock

What's our foundation like that we are building our lives upon? What have we actually done to build a foundation of what we believe? I know that Jesus Christ came on this earth and died and took our sins upon Him. This I very much appreciate. I know that the promises lie within our scriptures. I know that if you are going to build a house you can't build a foundation for a thousand square foot home and put a ten thousand square foot house on that foundation. It will crumble. My question to you is where is your foundation? What kind of foundation do you have?

It seems like we are tried on a daily basis. When someone has something for you to do it just seems like life gets in the way. I know everybody faces this. I thought I could come up here and maybe tell you how bad my week has been. I could sit back and whine about the little things. I could sit back and whine about how busy our family is or I could thank God we're so busy with taxidermy that very soon I will be able to retire. I could sit back and whine and tell you that last night I pulled my computer out and my sermon wasn't on it. I don't know where it went. I had a few things written down. Or, I could say thank God for being with me and giving me the ability to stand up in front of this congregation to share some of the testimonies of how God has touched my life. It seems like when I start putting a sermon together things pull me away from Jesus Christ. I think you notice the pulling away a little bit more because you're so intense and focused. I knew I had a lot of things going on this week so I sat down every night and worked a little bit on the sermon. Then the sermon came up missing.

This past week I had the opportunity twice to sit down and talk about the gospel with those I work with. I was able to pull out my Book of Mormon and even though they don't believe in the Book of Mormon I was able to read some things to them from that book. Then I asked them if they could tell me why I was so much different than them, and we had the opportunity to talk. It's amazing the people that you can



touch when you have God and His Spirit within you.

I'd like to read a little out of Luke. I am going to read chapter 8 verses 5 through 16. *A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (We all have ears to hear but do we allow ourselves to hear what God is telling us.) And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this; The seed is the word of God. That which fell by the wayside are they who hear; and the devil cometh and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. That which fell on the rock are they, who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and they have no root, but for a while believe, and in a time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, who, when they have heard, go forth and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that which fell on the good ground are they, who receive the word in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep what they hear, and bring forth fruit with patience. For no man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they who enter in may see the light.*

We are given the seed. It's up to us how we use and nurture that seed. When we build our foundation, it's up to us to decide what kind of foundation we want. I know living in this world once in a while we get so pulled away from Christ. We get so engrossed in what's going on that we allow satan to come into our lives. We allow things to happen that pulls us away from Jesus the Christ but I'm telling you right now that we have to look upon our foundation. We have to look upon Jesus the Christ because without Him we have

nothing. Without Jesus Christ I don't know where I'd be. Are you going to sow good fruit or no fruit?

You're Anan (Smith - Steve's son), right. I met you one other time. I get excited when I see you and I don't even know you. I saw you at Ed Pollard's house one night. The ministry that you bring to people, just your smile brings life to things. You have something to share. Don't throw it away. We don't know what effect we have on people's lives, sometimes just by a smile, a touch or who we talk to.

I was listening to Rick Santorum (Presidential Candidate) who was talking here last week. He was sharing about an experience when he was getting ready to vote on partial birth abortion. He said he got up and shared what he believed about partial birth abortion, how bad it was, how wrong it was. He shared about kids that could have been aborted but weren't. They might have been born handicapped but how beautiful they were, how they brought life to people and the effect they had on other people. He said that once he got done talking he could have gone home. He sat down and really thought about it. His wife and kids were waiting at home for him. He hadn't talked to his kids for a couple of days but yet he struggled with going home because he thought maybe if he stayed and talked a little bit longer he could touch somebody. He picked the phone up and called his wife and told his wife that he was sorry but that he felt like he had a work to do. She understood so he stayed there. What was going on was being televised. He got up just to say one other thing and he ended up talking for another hour explaining the importance of not allowing this bill on partial birth abortion to go through. When he went home he was just exhausted.

He got up the next morning and went in and voted against partial birth abortion. Yet it still passed. He walked out and he was drained. He had done everything he could to get people to understand where he was coming from and how wrong partial birth abortion was, any abortion. It didn't do any good. He said he felt whipped. He felt that he had wasted his time the night before. He could have been home with his family. He just felt like what he had done was a waste of time. Sometime later he got an email or letter from a couple who had been sitting on a couch flipping through the channels and happened to stop

on the partial birth abortion debate. As the guy sat there he looked over at his girlfriend and she was crying. He asked her what was wrong. She told him that she was pregnant and was scheduled to have an abortion that week. Because of what Rick Santorum had said that night in the debate she did not have that abortion and they have that child to raise. He had no idea who he was talking to or what he was saying but he had this feeling that he needed to share which he did and it touched someone's life.

We have no idea the lives that we touch. There are so many people looking for hope and we have the hope. There's so many people out there who just want someone to talk to. If we open our heart and look into the world we'd be surprised what God would put before us.

I remember someone talking and he said that he was really busy. He had a meeting to go to and as he was walking out the door some young lady walked in and wanted to talk to him. He told her he was sorry but he was really busy and had to get out of there to go to a meeting. Then he felt something on his heart and turned around and asked her if there was something that he could help her with. This young lady was getting ready to commit suicide and needed someone to talk to. She needed his hope. She needed Jesus Christ. He sat down and talked to her and she did not commit suicide. Who do we touch on a daily basis?

Everywhere you read in the scriptures it talks about keeping His commandments. Seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion. What's the importance of Zion? The importance of Zion is so we can live with people that believe the way Jesus Christ does. Keeping His commandments--I know that as I walk through each and every day when I do not physically pray in the morning, my day does not go as well. It seems like if I pray and I really think about praying I have a better day. Not because He's given me something but because I am communing with God. It takes me out of my thoughts and I think about other people when I pray for them. We are told so many times to keep His commandments. How hard is it to keep His commandments? Because we live in this world we think it's horrible. There's things I can't do because I am keeping His commandments but I know that when I commune with God, it's easier to keep His commandments. You set at the



computer and someone sends you an email and you open the email up. It's humorous and you hit forward but if you stop and think is this something that I really want to forward? Is it something that glorifies God?

When I pray in the morning I find it easier to do what God is asking me to do because He's on my mind and on my heart. I know that we need to keep our spiritual life fresh because when we don't life is hard, life gets difficult. How do we keep our lives fresh, by communing with the Saints. I wish I was closer so we could come to your evening services. I wish I was closer so that we could do some things with you but I do have the opportunity to commune with the Saints in Boone. I can meet with my brother and his family and my parents.

We get together for prayer service on Wednesday night. I presided this last Wednesday night. Before the service I had been working on my sermon for today and trying to put some things together for prayer service in the 45 minutes after I got home before prayer service started. I had a client call and tell me he was coming over with his deer pelts. He wanted some deer hide tanned which meant that I was out in the shop until 7:10 pm. I was supposed to be at prayer service at 7:00 pm. My mom had already said that she wasn't feeling good and wasn't going. Lori asked me if I just wanted to cancel. Really I wanted to cancel but I knew we absolutely shouldn't cancel. Those times when you don't feel that you need Jesus Christ is when you need Him the most. We did go over to my brother's and had an awesome prayer service, that's communing with the Saints. People say that they don't have to go to church to have religion. You are right but then you only have yourself to draw off and nobody else. When I come here the Spirit fills me when I walk in and when I

really are when we are at reunion. When we're home we're being fake. When we're home we are doing things that we do because of our environment. When we are at reunion and are around the Saints we're being real. That's who we are. We walk out of reunion all pumped. I always like preaching the Sunday after reunion because I have a lot to share. We need to commune with the Saints because without the Saints we have only ourself to draw on. We need to study His word. We have our books. Everyone in here reads. We need to open them and read them. This goes for Steve Cunningham too because Steve Cunningham gets so busy that all he wants to do when he gets home is watch TV for a few minutes and go to bed. We need to pick our scriptures up and read them. Why is it important to know our scriptures?

Read the Instructions

I have a tool at home called a skife. It's like a potato peeler. It has a razor blade that goes in the skife. You actually put this surgical razor in and use it to thin your deer hide. You use it to thin around the eyes and lips. It's an awesome tool. I have had this tool for three years. When I got it I opened the box up and pulled it out. A piece of paper fell out and I put it aside. For 2 ½ to 3 years I have been using this skife. I could do a little bit and then I would have to change the blade. Then I would do a little more and have to change the blade again. The blades are 25 to 30 cents each. I would end up using 5 or 6 blades on each animal. It would work well for a while but not for a long time.

One day I opened up another skife and a piece of paper fell out again. I found out that this piece of paper had instructions on how to use the skife. It told me to take the skife and bend the blade either up or down and it would give me a bigger bite and allow that blade to cut more of the flesh.

If we don't read our scriptures we don't have the instructions on how to live our lives.

Don't Forget to Pray

Another thing to keep your spiritual life fresh is prayer which is one of the easiest things to forget to do. I try not to pray while I am driving down Highway 17 because it's really hard to pray when the other drivers are acting irresponsibly. This is an excellent opportunity to pray for while I am driving to work, to share with God. What do you pray for during that length of time? You would be surprised. I usually try to pray between Boone and Madrid which is about 17 or 18 miles. I am surprised when all of a sudden I am at Grainger and then at Camp Dodge and I am just finishing up praying. It's important just to sit down and thank God for what's outside. Look at the beauty, at the sun coming up. Today coming here we saw an eagle sitting along the side of the road. How beautiful was that? If you start thanking God and asking Him for guidance, you'll be surprised at your prayers.

When I was in the military I used to do PT. Trust me I got out 5 years ago and have not done one lick of PT since. I think it is showing. My suit is getting tight. I use to play Santa Claus but when I tried to put my Santa Claus suit on a year ago, it was almost too tight. When your Santa Claus suit doesn't fit you, you know you have a problem. About two months before the PT test, I would start going to the gym where I would spend an hour to an hour and a half. I would get on the elliptical machine, I would go out and walk and lift some weights. That first week I worked out my legs hurt and my arms hurt. I didn't feel good. I was tired but I had to pass the PT test because if I didn't pass my PT test I would have gotten fired. That

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. And all scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim 3:14-17

walk out it gives me enough to make it through until next Sunday.

I know the feeling that I have when I go to reunions. People say we are being a fake because that's not the way we act at home but I think we are being who we

Now I can use one blade in the skife to do three or four deer. I had that piece of paper that fell out that I didn't know was instructions. Because I read the instructions on the new skife I am able to use it a lot longer before changing blades.

was real good incentive to do well. The second week it would start getting a little easier and I would start eating better because I also needed to lose a little weight. Doing PT you might as well lose weight too because your height and weight

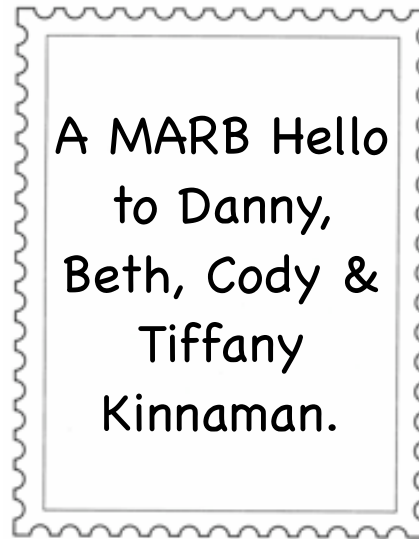


is measured. The third week was much easier. When I would get to the eighth week ready to take the PT test, I would feel good. My pants would slide on easier and I wasn't sucking my gut in to button my pants. I would feel great and would pass my PT test. I would tell myself that I wasn't going to be stupid like the last time and stop working out but one week later I would be going out to eat every day for lunch. I wouldn't be down at the gym. I would find excuses every single time why I shouldn't work out. They weren't bad excuses. I wasn't out doing things that I shouldn't but it would be because I would get busy with life.

Your prayer life is the exact same way. You turn the radio on and listen to what's going on and you fall away from praying. When you do this there are other things that start happening and you get further and further away from Christ. Those emails you get become real easy to forward and you laugh when you send them. You catch yourself having conversations you shouldn't have. All of a sudden someone comes in to talk to you and you talk to them a little bit and then they leave. Then you wonder if you heard him say that he had this problem, this issue and I let him out of my sight without doing anything. Whereas when you are with the Spirit the Spirit will give you that discernment you need so that you can help others. For twenty years I worked on my PT test two months prior to taking it but never continued to do those things that would keep me in shape. Maybe that's why my clothes are getting a little small. They are starting to shrink in the closet. You have to keep your prayer life fresh.

Last Wednesday when we had prayer service, my nephew Devon got up and prayed. Some of the things he says just blow me away. In his prayer he said, "Forgive me of my sins and help me think before I do them." I was thinking here is an 8 year old and he wants God to help him think before he sins. Guess what? I am 45 years old and I need to think before I sin. I need to be praying and asking God for help and guidance.

In this world there are many things that we can justify. The scriptures tell us the time will come when we make wrong right and we can see it happening now. Once in a while we say I don't have to go along with it but I have to accept it because of where I live. Jesus Christ made it plain when He said, Keep my commandments.



We need to protect ourselves from sin because so many times it will attack us and we won't even know it. We think we are doing good but we aren't keeping our spiritual life in shape.

Last year a friend and I were out deer hunting. I had my vehicle there and so we loaded his gun in my vehicle. This guy is very meticulous in what he does so he unloaded his gun, pumped it so that all the shells were out and laid the gun in the back of my car. I then drove him to his vehicle. We were in a hurry and so he jumped in his vehicle and followed me home. I had a bunch of his stuff in my vehicle. We were sitting there at my home, just talking. He said he needed to get his gun. He was sitting there with the gun and the breach was open. He had unloaded the gun earlier but when he went to push it into the case it went off. The gun was unloaded! I saw him unload the gun but somehow if you get older shells you'll get a little rust around the brass. Unless this has happened to you previously you would never think of it. When the firing mechanism went in and he went to pull it out it wasn't strong enough because it was stuck in there. Stephie (Steve's daughter) had just walked past him. She was probably four feet from the barrel when it went off. I had watched him unload the gun, the breach was open but it still happened. Sin is the same way. It will grab hold of you when you least expect it to and that's why we have to keep our spiritual life fresh. We have to protect ourselves from sin. If we're going to places where we are not supposed to be we are putting ourselves in a position that satan can come in and grab hold of us. I would pray that we wouldn't do those

things. I know that there are things that I can justify but when I look back it is putting me in a place where sin prevails where I don't need to be.

I would like to read from Alma 5:17-29. These are the words of Alma which he delivered to the people of Gideon. I could see this man crying and pouring out his heart to get people to understand the importance of Jesus Christ, the importance of abstaining from sin, the importance of asking for repentance and keeping His commandments. *But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying, Repent ye, repent ye and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight: For behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. And behold, he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed, and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God; And he shall go forth, suffering pains, and afflictions, and temptations of every kind; And this that the word might be fulfilled which saith, He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people; and he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people: And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh, that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions, according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me. Now I say unto you, that ye must repent, and be born again: for the Spirit saith, If ye are not born again, ye can not inherit the kingdom of heaven; Therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness; Yea, I say unto you, Come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction; Yea, come and go forth, and shew unto your God that ye are willing to*



repent of your sins, and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day, by going into the waters of baptism; And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me. And now my beloved brethren, do you believe these things? I would ask you. Do you believe these things? Do you believe that Jesus Christ came on this earth so that we could stand with our God? Do you believe that He was born of a virgin? He suffered many things for you and me. I'd ask that if you believe these things that you would do what He tells you to do. Ask for repentance and if you have not been baptized ask to be baptized. Accept Jesus Christ in your life.

In Moroni 10:4, 5 is God's promise. *And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; And if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things.* If there are things that you are contemplating in your life and you don't know if they are from Jesus Christ, He promises that if we go to Him and ask Him He will show us the truth. He stands there at the door knocking. When you look at that door that He is knocking upon, He can't open it up from the outside. You have to open the door. I would pray that you would open the door and let Jesus Christ in your life. Not only in your life but through your actions and the things that you do, that you would touch those people that are hurting.



The rain, it raineth on the just-
And also on the unjust fella.
But chiefly on the just, because
The unjust steals the just's umbrella.

Saints' Herald, Sept. 18, 1937, p.1187

CELEBRATION OF CHRIST'S BIRTH



High Priest Sherman Phipps
Lamoni, Iowa
December 25, 2011

We had a large congregation made up of family members that we had not seen for a while. Cessaries Galusha played the piano and the harp and we were ministered to by her music. Michael Jordison opened the service with the Call to Worship from Isaiah 9:6-7.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there is no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Our service this morning was a combination of scripture, music and the spoken word. Here are some of the highlights. Our opening song was #231 in Hymns of the Saints hymnal.

*Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;*

*Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth,
Come and worship, Come and*

worship, Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Now, as it is written, the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. After his mother, Mary, was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a vision, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins. Now this took place, that all things might be fulfilled, which were spoken of the Lord, by the prophets, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, (which, being interpreted, is, God with us.) [Matthew 2:1-6]

*Cessaries Galusha played O Come, O Come, Emmanuel on the harp. (#211 in Hymns of the Saints)
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.*

*O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in its ways to go.*

*O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease,
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!*

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all his empire should be



taxed. This same taxing was when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one in his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) To be taxed, with Mary his espoused wife, she being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was none to give room for them in the inns. [Luke 2:1-7]

Liberty Elyse Jordison (age 7) played Away in a Manger on the piano.

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

The congregation then sang #234 in the hymnal, God's Gift of Infinite Love Blesses Earth.

*Joseph, kind Joseph, look
down in the manger,
look on this child to be
known as your son.
Care for him tenderly until
his Father
Calls him to do what no
other has done.*

*Mary, brave Mary, look
down at your first-born;
Cradle him close to you now
while you may.
Treasure these moments so
they will sustain you
When he must go to show
others the way.*

*Jesus, dear Jesus, look out at
the hillside;
See how the night is made
bright by your star.*

*Only the faithful will follow
its guiding;*

*Only the wise see the Light
that you are.*

*Angels in chorus sing glad
hallelujahs;*

*Hills echo back the good
news of the birth.*

*Bethlehem sleeps but all
heaven rejoices;*

*God's gift of infinite love
blesses earth.*

After the singing of the above song the Galusha family sang a song which Cessaries wrote entitled Sanctus Donum (Holy Gift)

*And there were in the same country,
shepherds abiding in the field, keeping
watch over their flocks by night. And lo,
an angel of the Lord appeared unto them,
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. [Luke 2:8-14]*

Hymn 237 was sung.

*Angels we have heard on
high Sweetly singing o'er the
plains,*

*And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.*

*Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous songs prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly
song?*

*Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, our newborn*

*Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

Sarah and Alana Rolfe sang and played on the violin and guitar the song Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men! followed by the reading of Luke 2:21-35. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus; which was so named of the angel, before he was conceived. And when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished; they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male which openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord; And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is written in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. And behold, there was a man at Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child, even Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph, and Mary, marveled at those things which were spoken of the child. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; Yea, a spear shall pierce through him to the wounding of thine own soul also; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

A Christmas Choir directed by Sue Beck sang 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter'.

*In the bleak mid-winter,
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on*



snow, Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold
him, Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee
away When he comes to reign;
In the bleak mid-winter A
stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels May
have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air;
But his mother only, In her
maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved With
a kiss.

What can I give him, Poor as
I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would
bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would
do my part;
Yet what I can I give him;
Give my heart.

Brother Sherman Phipps shared the following thoughts. I like seeing all you folks here. I don't know what the rest of you got for Christmas that you'll remember, but I think the gifts I'll remember are the ones I've received here this morning. I really appreciate the gifts of your presence and your talents which you have shared here this morning. I scheduled myself for this morning because I didn't think there would be anybody here. Surprise! I'm so glad to see all of you.

I think most of the scriptures that I might have used this morning have already been read. As I thought about this morning and what I might be able to share with you, I looked at these scriptures that have been read this morning and tried to think about what it would have been like to have been there in the stable looking into the manger at the Christ child. Can you imagine standing there looking at this child and knowing, for those who knew and

understood, that this was the Son of God who had taken upon Himself flesh and come to the earth to save the souls of all of mankind? I want you to consider this with me if you would. Here's this child, Jesus, lying in the manger, and who is He? According to the scriptures Christ is God in the flesh so He's the one who created everybody that's looking at Him in the stable. He's the one who created the hills upon which the shepherds were standing when the angel appeared to them and told them that Christ was to be born that night. He's the one that created the earth and the heavens from which the angels appeared. He created everything! He created that new star that we talk about. Yet here He is in this manger in a stable willing to come and take upon Himself flesh. He knew what was going to happen to Him, but He came anyhow. He did that for each one of you, everyone who's ever walked upon the face of the earth. He did that for you because He loves you. He loves you so much that He was willing to come down from this exalted state that He could have stayed in and take upon Himself flesh so that that flesh and that blood could be sacrificed for us so that we might have eternal life. He gave us the gift of life again.

I don't know if you can comprehend, I don't think I can, the kind of love that it would take to do that. To be the creator of all things and to be willing to come down and be the least of all, to be this little baby child who was completely dependent upon those He created. He was a child who came into the world just like you and I. Joshua (Ballantyne) is back there somewhere completely dependent upon those around him. Even as an adult Christ submitted Himself to those around Him and let them do what they had to do in order for God's plan to be fulfilled.

He could have, as God, said, no thank you. I'm not doing this. I created them. I sent them to the earth. They are on their own. You know where we would be if He had done this? Well, unfortunately we would be where some of us are anyhow. Because many of us reject the gift and don't recognize what it is. I hope that will not be the case in the life of anyone sitting here this morning. I hope that you will recognize Christ for what He is and that you'll accept the gift that He seeks so diligently to share with you.

Think about this scene with the shepherds coming down to see Him. I

have wondered about that sometimes. The story said that the shepherds saw an angel and then they saw the hosts of heaven. The angels are the ones who told the shepherds to go down to Bethlehem because that night Christ would be born. I don't know if every shepherd packed up and left. I assume somebody stayed and watched the sheep but a number of them went down and viewed Christ in this manger. I wonder if every one of the shepherds that went down and looked realized what they were looking at or if some of them said, cute kid, and then went back out into the field and went on with their lives the way they had before. I think sometimes that's maybe my problem. I hear the story. The Lord blesses me so that I know that it's a true story, it's more than a story really. The word "story" is really inadequate. Then I just go on with my life the way it's always been which means I don't really accept the gift.

I thought about John the Baptist. Before Christ was born when John was still in his mother's womb, Mary who was carrying Christ at that time came to visit Elizabeth, John's mother. It says that when Mary came into Elizabeth's presence when Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John that he recognized Christ and leaped in his mother's womb. He jumped. He recognized Christ even before either John or Christ was born. When John was born he responded to that recognition and that call to serve. He did what he was sent forth to do. Sometimes I'm not so sure I do that. I wonder this morning, will we recognize this gift? Will we recognize Christ? Will we respond to Him?

Most of us here this morning know that there's another story about Christ when He appeared to the people on this continent after His crucifixion. Before He came to this continent, there was a prophet named Samuel who went to a group of people who were not very interested in the story that he had to tell them, the story of this Jesus. He went and stood on the wall of their city and told them that they needed to repent and humble themselves because Christ was coming. He even told them that it would be in five years so they had a little more definite idea than we do about when Christ is coming because He is coming again. When I read that story it's sad in a way. There's part of it that kind of excites me because I read about Samuel and how he climbed up on the wall. They shot at him and threw stones at him but he didn't



let that sway him. He went right ahead and did what he needed to do. I'd like to think I could be that kind of person but I'm 68 and I haven't gotten there yet. Part of this story is sad too because he came and told them these things and risk His life to do so, but most of them, even if they listened and believed, in no time at all went back to the life they had lived before.

What will we do? I meant to say when I started out and I didn't. I think probably most people in here probably really don't think Christ was born on December 25th. He was more likely born in the spring when the shepherds were out tending their flocks but that doesn't really matter. I was going to say before I even started this morning no matter what day it was when he was born that the date of His birth is really irrelevant so when I speak about it as though today is **the** day I don't mean to ignore the possibility that He was really born on a different day than December 25th.

The record the people in this country left talks specifically about the other thing that happened following Christ's birth. In the Bible it also becomes obvious that it happened although it doesn't perhaps point it out so specifically, but the other thing that happened immediately was that satan went abroad in the land and tried to distract those people who had had this testimony and this witness to keep them from remembering what had been revealed unto them. This morning if the Spirit of God works with you in any way at all to confirm unto you that this Jesus is His Son and that He did in fact send Jesus upon the earth in the flesh to be crucified and resurrected so that we could have eternal life, I hope we will not be dissuaded from understanding that and keeping it in our hearts. In other words, I hope we will not reject this gift.

I hope today, and surely with all this beautiful music, you will somehow hear the glad tidings of Christ's birth, that you will remember His birth, and that you will remember why He died and was resurrected because He loves each one of you. If you haven't experienced His love, I hope you will because there's nothing greater. I hope you will hear the glad tidings. I hope you will hear it in your soul, and that today you will determine to look to Christ and let Him work in your life and choose the life that He died for and not choose darkness and death but choose Christ and life.

Michael Jordison read Revelation 19:5-7 and Revelation 21:1-7; 19:16.

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his saints, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. (Rev. 19:5-7)

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write; for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Rev. 21:1-7) And he hath on a vesture, and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORD. (Rev. 19:16)

As a closing hymn we sang Hymn 258, Joy to the World.

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive its King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the world; The Savior reigns; Let all their songs employ
While fields and floods, rock, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*No more let sin and sorrow grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, wonders of his love.*





January 2012



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THR	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Sunday Schedule

DATE	JAN 1st	JAN 8th	JAN 15th	JAN 22nd	JAN 29th	FEB 5th
SPEAKING	Ron Smith	Steven Smith	Jim Barber	Milo Burnett	Baby Blessing Sharing Service	Robert Rolfe
PRESIDING	Steven Smith	Sherman Phipps	Alan Smith	Steve Cunningham	Robert Rolfe	Ron Smith
PIANIST	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke
SPECIAL MUSIC	S. Cunningham Family		Michael Jordison	Steve Smith	Gable Galusha	TBD
FAMILY DEVOTIONS	Norman Nelson	Bob Rowland	Alan Smith	Ron Smith	Steven Smith	Gordon Winkler
GREETERS	Robert Rolfe	Alan Smith	Ron Smith	Steven Smith	Gordon Winkler	Ed Anderson
CUSTODIANS	Bob Rowland	Robert Rolfe	Alan Smith	Ron Smith	Ed Anderson	Jim Barber
SUNDAY EVENING	Norman Nelson	Robert Rolfe	Bob Rowland	Ron Smith	Steven Smith	Norman Nelson

Wednesday Prayer Service Schedule



DATE	JAN 4th	JAN 11th	JAN 18th	JAN 25th	FEB 1st
LOCATION	Norman Nelson	Robert Rolfe	Steven Smith	Alan Smith	Ron Smith
PRESIDING	Robert Rolfe	Steven Smith	Gordon Winkler	Ed Anderson	Alan Smith



Special Events & Activities

Sunday, January 1st: Priesthood Meeting at 8:30AM - Potluck following Communion service

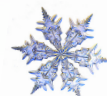
Wednesday January 18th: Day of Fasting & Prayer

Sunday January 22nd: Priesthood Meeting at 5:00 PM at Ron Smith home

Sunday January 29th: Baby Blessing of Joshua Ballantyne - Potluck following service

Birthday's this month: Corey Akers (6th), Orlin Thomas (7th), Gable Galusha (16th), Jowett Bastow (26th)

Anniversary's this month: Ed & Diane Anderson (1st), Michael & Julia Jordison (7th)





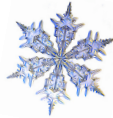
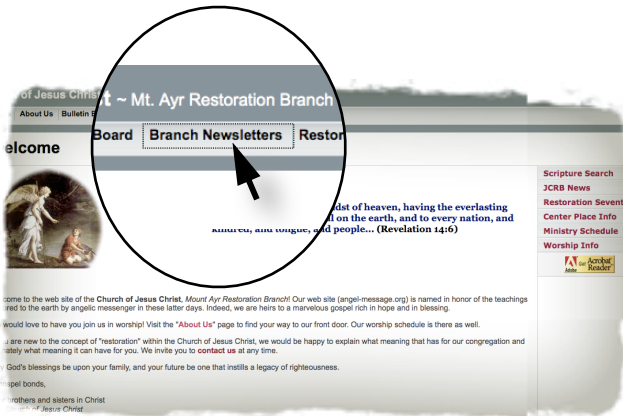
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CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST - MT AYR RESTORATION BRANCH

JANUARY 2012

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (Revelation 14:6-7)

...Pastoral Considerations

Please read the rest of Ether and see what other types and shadows you find for our day. When you get to Ether 3:5, you will find that the people with Jared and his brother "... got aboard of their vessels, or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God." I hope that this year will be a year when each of you takes time to seek out and call upon the Lord with a predetermination that you will enter into the barge/endeavor as the Lord instructs you. (The barges were

built according to God's directions [Ether 1:43-47] and not after the brother of Jared's own wisdom or imagination.) Take with you the light of the Lord (Ether 1:48-69) and be faithful and willing to finish the journey (Ether 3:5-14).

May His tender mercies be upon you.

Have a blessed New Year!



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High Priest H. Alan Smith (Counselor)
Elder Gordon Winkler (Counselor)

BISHOP'S AGENT
Elder Gordon Winkler
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