

Church of Jesus Christ

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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Here We Come Caroling

News & Notes

What's inside?

Holiday activities planned

Four special events were held the Christmas and New Year's holidays in the Mount Ayr branch this year.

These include singing at Liberty Hall in Lamoni, a caroling party, helping out families in need and a New Year's Eve party.

The branch sang at Liberty Hall Sunday, Dec. 7. This will be during the annual Christmas open house at Liberty Hall.

The branch caroling party was held

Sunday, Dec. 14. We met at Ron and Di's home to begin caroling and sang at 10 homes. We had a soup supper following the caroling at their home. A good crowd took part.

The branch also helped with the Christmas project at the MATURA Neighborhood Center in Mount Ayr again.

The branch "adopted" 10 children for Christmas. An outfit of clothes and a toy were to be purchased for each

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ANOTHER LOOK AT CHRIST'S BIRTH

High Priest Alan Smith
Mount Ayr, IA
December 7, 2014

It's amazing to me whenever I recognize for the first time how the hand of God is working in the world in ways I had never understood before. This morning we will be looking at the story of the shepherds who came to see the Christ child in detail and I hope you find that recognizing some of the plan behind this announcement of the Savior to the world will make the story even more rich and more of a blessing to you.

Let's first start with the familiar story as recorded in Luke 2:1-20:

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 be taxed, every one in his own city.

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.

And it came to pass, when the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go, even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

And when they had seen, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. All they who heard it, wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds; But Mary kept all these things and pondered them 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.

There are many reasons I'm focusing on this story this morning. I may be focusing on this part of the story because of the experience of holding my little grandson Timothy these past weeks and seeing him swaddled in a blanket. Maybe its from looking again at the video of the Christmas song from son Nathan's musical "The Good Shepherd." Then there was a video clip I saw on Facebook that got me looking into more about the shepherds story.

I have recognized that the reason Christ was first announced to the shepherds was the symbolism that he was to be the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world. But that part of the story was brought home to me by the words of Nathan's song "There Were Shepherds." I'd like to share those with

you this morning.

*There were kings and princes governing the country with an iron hand.
There were priests and teachers serving at the Lord's command
There were merchants and soldiers, farmers and fishermen and then
There were shepherds on the hills
Watching flocks by night
Humble shepherds
heard the angles singing as the sky was filled with light.*

*There was the virgin Mary
Radiant with love toward her newborn son
There was her husband Joseph awed at what the Lord had done
As they watched by the manger
No others came to share their joy
Til the shepherds appeared at the stable door
How the wondered.
This child was like no other they had ever seen before*

*See the shepherds
Praising God and telling everyone the new
They have seen him
All the angels said was true.
As the night turned to morning the heralds of the savior's birth
Were the shepherds
Honest people who could recognize
In the stable
They had seen the lamb of God
Jesus Christ*

It makes sense that the shepherds would recognize the lamb of God, though this was a new concept for me when I first heard the song. I should



know that God had a masterful plan for everything and that we should find that it wasn't by chance that the shepherds were the first of the general public to know that Christ was born.

So let's go back to the story of the birth of Jesus and look at it in some detail. I have been finding a good deal of new information about the circumstances of the birth and the shepherds who were invited to see the new born lamb. I was searching the internet for it, so I can't vouch for everything I found 100 percent. But I've found it in many places, and not found sites debunking this new information.

The Stable

We often have the understanding that Jesus was born on Mary and Joseph's first night in Bethlehem. But that's not what the scripture says.

And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

This would indicate that they could have been there for some time before the birth.

And were Mary and Joseph weren't really turned away from a hotel? Joseph's family -- the house of David -- had ancestral property in Bethlehem. It seems reasonable that Joseph and Mary would have come to their family's ancestral home with hope that the Messiah would be born in the place where David was born. After all, the angels had shared the news about their baby with them.

The Greek word, kataluma, used in this scripture, means "lodging place" and it's usually translated "upper room" not "inn." It can refer to a room of a house where out of town guests could spend the night or even just a dining room. For example, in Mark 14:14, Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples in an "upper room" (same word used here).

Bethlehem was a town of 300 or so -- a little town. One wouldn't expect that Mary and Joseph went from Holiday Inn to Ramada Inn knocking

on doors looking for a place to stay, as we sometimes think when we hear the story. They would make the trip back to stay with family. As well as being the ancestral home of David, who was once a shepherd, there was the contrast of this little town that set in the shadow of Herod's big palace nearby. The birth of the real "king" was among the common folk, not in the palace.

Then why were Mary and Joseph in the "stable"? The scriptures don't really say that they were in a stable, just that Jesus was put in a manger. One writer explains that according to the Torah, when a woman had an issue of blood for any reason, she was ritually unclean for that time and for seven days thereafter. She remained ceremonially unclean until she was purified by entering a mikvah (water immersion) in the witnessing presence of a rabbi. While she was ritually unclean, she had to live separately from the rest of the family so as not to defile the people in the household and by her presence rendering them ceremonially unclean. Therefore, during those times, the woman would leave and stay in a nearby area where she would not defile the home. (Leviticus 15:19-23).

During childbirth and with the issue of blood loss, the same rule applied to women giving birth. If she were to give birth in the common living area, she would defile the family and make it necessary for them to be ceremonially purified by both a ritual immersion and a sacrifice; therefore, women would leave the home and give birth elsewhere. After the cessation of blood and the required time of waiting for purification, the woman and child would perform the necessary rituals of purification to be ceremonially clean and return to the household with the rest of the family.

Thus, with this understanding, there being "no place for them in the kataluma" would be regarded as com-

pletely appropriate. But this is no indication that she would be summarily ostracized to reside in a stable of animals by her family who cared for her well-being. All the katalumas were filled with other family members. So they had to go to the next best place to stay.

We'll come back to where this place might have been in a moment.

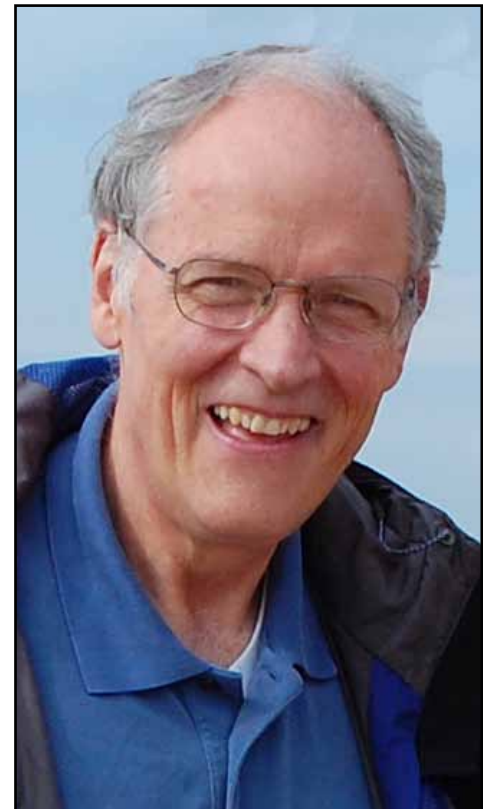
The Shepherds

Did God choose just a random group of shepherds to tell that his son was being born?

Not if some of the information I discovered is correct.

Here's what one writer says:

"Luke 2:8-18 records that there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their sheep by night. Who then were these shepherds? Without question these were shepherds who resided near Bethlehem. They were none other but the shepherds from "Migdal Edar," or the tower of the flock, who were well aware that the Targum, or paraphrases of scripture, had hinted and many of the rabbis taught that Messiah might well be announced



Alan Smith



from "Migdal Edar" at Bethlehem."

There had to be a supply of lambs for sacrifice in the temple. During all the year, many were sacrificed each day -- the males for burnt offering and the females for peace offerings. At pass-over there needed to be a larger supply for each family. According to sources I found, special sheep were raised in flocks and the lambs were given special treatment so they would be without blemish. They even talk about special shepherds that watched over these temple flocks.

This place of birthing was kept clean and neat so that there were be less chance that the baby lambs would be blemished, and thus not suitable for the sacrifices.

The prophet Micah even foretold that the place would be Migdal Edar, the tower of the flock, in Micah 4:8:

And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.

It makes sense that the shepherds, who looked over the temple sheep would know what manger the angels were talking about because they went there without any further directions. It was the place where the temple lambs were born under their care.

Migdal Edar was a tower that provided for watching over the sheep over wide distances. It also had a natural cave with stone mangers where the ewes were brought for the births so that that the lambs could be protected. It was kept especially clean for this purpose and could have been the next best thing when Mary and Joseph had to have a space away from the rest of the family.

The angels only told the shepherds that they would find the Babe wrapped in "swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." There was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birth place because they already knew. These were the men who raised sacrificial

lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go, as Luke 2 indicates, for the sign of a manger could only mean their manger at the tower of the flock! You cannot explain the meaning or direction of the sign they were given or their response unless you have the right manger and the right shepherds!

And how did the shepherds take special care of the newborn lambs?

During lambing season the sheep were brought there from the fields, as the lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs. Priestly shepherds would wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes and place them in a manger until they calmed down to keep them "without defect", suitable to be sacrificial lambs for the sin of the Israelites.

Does that sound even more familiar? For Jesus to be found in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, has much more significance with this understanding.

He was truly the lamb of God.

Swaddling Clothes

Jesus was swaddled, just like the lambs were swaddled, when they were born.

And here the tradition for swaddling the children in Israel.

Right after washing the newborn in water containing salt, the baby would then be swaddled. They would take the strips of cloth, in most cases linen, and wrap the baby from head to foot, leaving his face uncovered so that he could breathe. Because he was wrapped in this manner, the baby's arms and legs would be held very straight.

The custom of swaddling represented that the child would be raised to be "straight" before the Lord, meaning that his life would be free from "crookedness." To say a person was not salted and swaddled was to say that they were dishonest, crooked and had no integrity.

Swaddling clothes were only left on the baby for a short amount of time. It

would be anywhere from fifteen minutes to two hours. During that time, the parents would pray and offer their vows to God concerning the child that God had blessed them with. At the end of that time, the swaddling clothes were removed and the normal baby attire would be put on the child.

So you can certainly understand now why the Bible says that the shepherds went in haste to see the savior. The angel had told them that Christ had been born in Bethlehem. They were also told that they would find the babe lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. They knew that they needed to get to the city quickly if they were to find and see the savior of the world. Even their hurry makes more sense now.

The Lamb of God

With hindsight we can clearly see that the manner of Jesus' birth foreshadowed the purpose for Jesus coming into the world. The prophesy of Isaiah spoke to this in Isaiah 53:4-7

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.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

The shepherds echoed this when they had seen the child.

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 . . . And the shepherds returned,



glorifying and praising God for all the things which they had heard and seen, as they were manifested unto them. Luke 2:17-18, 20

John the Baptist proclaimed that he recognized the Jesus was the lamb of God twice near the time of Jesus' baptism. Once was when Jesus was baptized. Then again the next day he said it again.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

Peter recognized this too and referred to this in his ministry.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 1 Peter 1:18-20

And the idea was explained by Philip to the eunuch using the Isaiah scripture in Acts.

But there a not a lot of other references to this in the King James version of the Bible, except for Revelations, where there are several references to the lamb.

In the Inspired Version, we are taught that this concept of Jesus as the lamb was taught much earlier.

Here's Enoch's testimony:

And, behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying,

The righteous is lifted up; and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world; and through faith I am in the bosom of the Father; and behold, Zion is with me! Genesis 7:54

If you are a Book of Mormon believer, however, you have this concept of Jesus as the lamb emphasized over and over again.

Nephi in sharing his experience in relating the vision that he and his father Lehi saw, shared the concept that Christ is the Lamb of God 31 times alone in the third Chapter of 1 Nephi.

In 2 Nephi he refers back to this understanding inviting people to be baptized.

Wherefore, I would that ye should remember that I have spoken unto you, concerning that prophet which the Lord shewed unto me, that should baptize the Lamb of God, which should take away the sin of the world.

And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water to fulfill all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water.

And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfill all righteousness in being baptized by water? Know ye not that he was holy? 2 Nephi 13: 6-8

In Ether, several places in Alma and again in Mormon, this concept is reemphasized.

Six sections of the Doctrine and Covenants echo the understanding that Jesus is the Lamb, the sacrifice for our sin.

It is wonderful to have the support of these testimonies that echo those of John the Baptist, Peter, Philip and John that Jesus came as the lamb of God. These testimonies are just like those first shepherds that saw him and recognized who he was.

"The shepherd/priests had trained all of their lives for this very moment. To

the common passerby, seeing a baby in a manger meant very little; however, to the shepherd/priest it was a sign of the coming Messiah. They were keenly aware that the Messiah would one day free the people from their sins. A baby, announced by the heavenly choir, lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes was more than they could handle – they "came with haste." They immediately recognized the sign – this baby was the One born to die for the sins of the world. And the scriptures say they shared the good news with anyone who would listen."

Do we focus on the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God when we think of this Christmas story of the shepherds? I hope we will this Christmas.

I hope we have remembered this morning with the communion. The scriptures say that eternal life is the best gift we can have -- and the Lamb of God is who can offer this gift to us.

And that brings us to a final reflection.

Final reflection

Just as there were literal physical shepherds at the birth of Christ, there were spiritual "shepherds" at the burial of Christ.

The religious leaders of Israel, such as the Pharisees, were the spiritual shepherds of Israel. It was from this group of Pharisees, the "shepherds" of Israel, that two of them stepped forward to care for the body of Jesus at his burial.

And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.

Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury." (John 19:38-40)

As one writer shared:



“This is a curious completion of the Christmas picture with Joseph of Arime-thaea and Nicodemas. Just as shepherds attended the birth of Jesus and witnessed the sign of the swaddling cloths and the manger, these ‘shepherds’ at his death and burial wrapped the body of the Mes-siah in cloths like a mummy resembling the swaddling clothes at his birth. They then laid his body on a rocky shelf in a cave tomb which resembled the stony manger carved out of the rocky side of a cave back just five miles away and 33½ years before in Bethlehem.

What a remarkable, marvelous com-pletion of the parallels between the scene of His birth and the scene of His burial?

The circle of birth and burial continues.”

This morning we remember the Lamb of God, who died and rose again -- threw off his swaddling -- and lives. For the story of Christmas is only the opening chapter of Christ moving in our lives.

Does it make it more exciting to see the detail of how Jesus was being pointed out as the Lamb of God to the people of his time -- to shepherds who would recognize him being born in the place where sheep for the sacrifice were born. That he was wrapped in clothes and laid on a rocky shelf for both his birth and death seem to me to be an indication of the perfect plan in Jesus life in both his

birth and his resurrection. And we too can join with the testimonies of those down through the ages who have recog-nized the lamb of God.

Just as we remember Christ’s birth and what that lead to in his first coming, we look with joy to his Spirit being born again in us this morning in the com-munion service we have shared. And we look forward to being able to share with him in his father’s kingdom on earth.

May the Lord’s plan for each of our lives be played out as perfectly as it was in the life of his son Jesus -- as we seek to be like him and be the sons and daughter of God as well.



Christmas Activities

The Mount Ayr branch took part in many special activities for the Christmas and New Year season during December. Above, Carolers sing at the home of Norman and Cathy Nelson in Lamoni during the caroling party. Below, the branch adopted 10 children for Christmas and provided a Christmas meal to eight families. More than 50 people gathered for the New Year’s Eve worship and fellowship activity at the home of Ron and Di Smith.





THESE THREE BOOKS ARE TRUE

High Priest Rich Rupe Trimble, MO December 14, 2014

As a Call to Worship Brother Gordon Winkler read Genesis 7:59-60. *And the Lord said, Blessed is he through whose seed Messiah shall come; for he saith, I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the Rock of heaven, which is broad as eternity; and whoso cometh in at the gate, and climbeth up by me shall never fall. Wherefore blessed are they of whom I have spoken, for they shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy.*

For his scripture reading Brother Rupe read the following scriptures. *Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the great I AM, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made; the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes: I am the same which spake and the world was made, and all things came by me: I am the same which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom. (DC 38:1a-b)*

And, behold, all things have their likeness; and all things are created and made to bear record of me; both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath, all things bear record of me. (Genesis 6:66)

For he saith, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. (Revelations 1:8)

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in him-

self; That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

. . . I will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; and also with all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world. (DC 26:3c)

Good morning, brothers and sisters. It's such a great privilege for Tresia and I to be with you today, and I might add an unexpected privilege. As I began preparing my sermon, I asked my friend Joel (Loving), "Joel, how long should my sermon be?" Joel told me that this congregation really likes long sermons! I want you to know, however, that I've successfully resisted that temptation. I also want you to know that I've made my time with you this morning a matter of considerable prayer; and I trust that you will receive the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Before I get into the heart of my message I want to acknowledge the season of the year as this is the third Sunday of Advent. This season offers us the opportunity to share with others who through the ages have longed for the coming of the Messiah. We share their joy as their hopes and dreams were realized more than 2,000 years ago. But also, implicit in this season is our longing for the Second Coming of the Messiah.

All our lives we have sung "Joy to the World" at this time of year. I never realized until just recently that this song is all about the second coming of our Lord.

1st Verse: *Joy to the World! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King!*

2nd Verse: *Joy to the world! The Savior reigns . . .*

3rd Verse: *No more let sins and sorrows grow... Nor thorns infest the ground...He comes to make His blessings flow...Far as the curse is found.*

4th Verse: *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.*

The Great and Marvelous work that you and I are involved in concerns the preparatory work for His Second Coming. Certainly, the signs of the times would suggest that it will not be long.

Our scripture readings refer to Christ as Alpha because He created all things in the beginning; and Omega because the scriptures say that in the end, all things in heaven and earth shall be gathered in one in Christ Jesus. We also read that all things are made to bear witness of Christ. This statement has profound implications for us as all means all.

Dr. Lloyd Olgivie, former chaplain to the United States Senate, related the following incident to a group of distinguished church leaders. He recounted that when he had been pastor of the Hollywood Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, California, an elderly woman had taken him by the hand, looked piercingly into his eyes, and said with earnest conviction, "I pray your life will be as wonderful as it was in the mind of God when He created you."

Immediately following, Dr. Olgivie said that he returned to his study, got down on his knees, and pleaded with God, "What did You have in mind when You created me?" In the silence that followed, to his mind clearly came just one word: Jesus.

Arthur Oakman, in his book "He Who Is," told of an experience he had in the dark days just before World War II. He was at a church reunion in England.



While President Edwards was speaking, the book of Genesis was presented to him in a vision. As a result of that experience Brother Oakman testified that: It was for the kind of man appearing in the historical experience of Jesus that all this vast universe was undertaken.

Jesus is what God had in mind when He created you and me. He did not create us as clones in a cookie-cutter fashion did He? He created us to be a unique expression of the life of Christ. True joy only comes when our lives come into harmony with the purpose of our creation. John chapter one says that Christ is the true light that lighteth every man that comes into the world. In our diversity we are meant to be one in Christ. That's why Jesus said, If you are not one, you are not mine.

I've spent some time recently looking at Old Testament prophecy. Some Bible scholars suggest that there are more than 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus. Josh McDowell in his book, "Evidence That Demands a Verdict," quotes Peter Stoner in "Science Speaks," as saying that the probability of any one person living to the present time fulfilling only eight prophecies (of the 300) is 1 in 10 to the 17th power. That very large number can be stated as 'one hundred thousand trillion.'

In order to help us comprehend this staggering probability, Stoner illustrates it by supposing that we take this many silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. "They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir [it all up]. We blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel anywhere he wishes in the state of Texas, but then he must bend down and pick up one silver dollar and say this is the one. Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time." What we're doing is approaching certainty. If we go beyond eight prophecies then the numbers become astronomical.

When I finished my little survey of Old Testament prophecy, I said to no one in particular, "This is amazing! The

Old Testament really proves that Jesus is the Messiah. If people really knew more about the Old Testament, they would never have any doubts about the New.

Richard Booker in "The Miracle of the Scarlet Thread" relates this testimony. He said that like most Christians, he had a difficult time relating to the Old Testament. He wondered how this "dusty Old Testament" could have anything useful to say to a modern, westernized person such as himself. The time came however that he became dissatisfied with his life even though he was very successful by worldly standards. He petitioned God that at long last he might be able to understand the Bible. He said that with the Holy Spirit as his guide that God showed him that He gave the entire Old Testament as a picture in shadow form of His salvation message in Jesus Christ. This shadowy picture was represented by what seemed to be meaningless rituals, customs, places, names and unrelated happenings.

But he saw that they were all individual pieces of the same picture. He said, "the picture came into focus as God lifted the veil off my spiritual eyes. I could see Jesus all through the Old Testament." The Old Testament tells what's going to happen. The New Testament tells that it did happen.

St. Augustine expressed this key to understanding the Bible when he wrote, "The New is in the Old contained; the Old is by the New explained." You see, God had planned, that in His own appointed time, He would prepare for Himself a body just like ours and become one of His Creation. Since He is God, He naturally knew everything He would do when He became one of us. He knew where He would be born. He knew by what name He would be called. He knew everything about the details of His life. He even knew how He would die. Therefore, He painted this shadow of Himself in the Old Testament so that everybody would recognize Him when He came."

As a young teenager I remember listening to a stirring radio sermon by Oral Roberts entitled "The Fourth

Man," which has since become a classic. He recounts how Nebuchadnezzar cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego bound into a fiery furnace because they refused to bow down to his image of god. Nebuchadnezzar was astonished by what he saw. He asked, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" He was answered, "True, O King." Nebuchadnezzar then said, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the first, and they are not burned; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Daniel 3:25)

Roberts then shouts: "Let me tell you who this fourth man is." He then proceeds to identify Christ in every book of the Bible. It begins in Genesis where He is the Seed of the Woman, in Exodus He is the Passover Lamb, in Leviticus He is our High Priest, in Deuteronomy a Prophet like Moses, in Ruth our Kinsman Redeemer, in Ezra our Faithful Scribe, in Psalms our Shepherd, in Isaiah the Prince of Peace and he continues through to Revelation where Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I want to share with you two experiences that have become foundational for me. The first and most important is my testimony of Christ. I wish I could say that my life, spiritually speaking, has always been a straight line trending upwards, but sadly that has not been the case. However, through the ups and downs that I have experienced, my testimony of Christ has been my anchor, always calling me back when I would leave that straight and narrow path.

As a young man in my very early 20's, I was driving to work one morning when suddenly the Holy Spirit startled me. It interrupted whatever train of thought I had and declared these words with great conviction: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." These same words were then repeated to me over and over; each time with such increasing power and intensity until finally I could take it to more; and I had to say out loud, "Lord, it's enough; I believe."

I felt that if I hadn't spoken up, the power of that experience was such that I would have been consumed. It's the



most intense feeling I've ever had in my life. I both heard and felt; and from that experience I can say with the Apostle Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

The other foundational experience in my life is the dream that my grandmother had concerning me when I was only two or three years of age. She dreamt that the time would come that I would be standing in the pulpit and I would hold up the three books of the church and repeat these words: "These three books are true. Especially the red letters."

That dream has meant many different things to me over my lifetime. At first this dream merely indicated to me that eventually I would have a priesthood call. Secondly, it meant that at some time I would literally fulfill my grandmother's dream when during the course of a sermon I would hold up our three books and repeat those exact words. Third, this dream seemed to refer to the words of Christ in red-letter editions of the New Testament. The only thing I could figure about that dream was that I would have a testimony of Christ. And then fairly late in life I realized that the three books are true because they testify of and contain the words of Christ.

Of course, over time this all happened. But suffice it to say that only in the past few years have I realized that the fulfillment of my grandmother's dream pointed to this time period of my life, when it has literally become my life's work to bear witness of our three books. This has become my purpose and my fulfillment in life.

About four years ago, I spoke at the Grain Valley RLDS church, which is one of the grandfathered congregations with the Community of Christ. After I spoke, a sister said that she wanted to email me a testimony which she subsequently did. This testimony has become a significant one for me and it concerns a testimony that someone had shared with her.

Several years ago a sister shared with me an experience she had when she was young (I'm thinking this must have been in the 50s or 60s). I cannot

remember her specific experience, but I remember well what the Lord showed me about her testimony. She said that she had an experience where she was told that in the latter days we would lose our Three Standard Books. She interpreted this to mean that they would be taken from us in the same way that some governments had gathered and burned books in the past. However, as she was speaking I felt overwhelmingly that we would willingly give them up.

Unfortunately, time has borne out this experience. This hasn't happened all at once but over several decades. My church, the institutional church, instead of influencing the larger Christian community; have been influenced by them and we have become like them. No, the government hasn't gathered or burned our books; but they have surely been consumed by the torch of doubt; which destroys the words without so much as charring a single page!

Unless we are overcome by doubt, we do not need to be concerned as to the relevance of God's word, whether it is given 2,000 years ago or today. The word fulfills itself when men apply its power at whatever time and whatever place! God makes the difference. He transcends time.

God will fulfill His promises on His own terms. His terms are to follow His plan. His plan is outlined in the scriptures. We cannot escape it. With our own intelligence we may see something which seems right to us. But if what we seek is not faithful to God's word, it will fail. Theology must be made to conform to scripture, and not the reverse. The problem is not that the word has been tested and found wanting. The problem is that men have been tested and found wanting. To believers, God's word is the soil in which the seed of faith is sown.

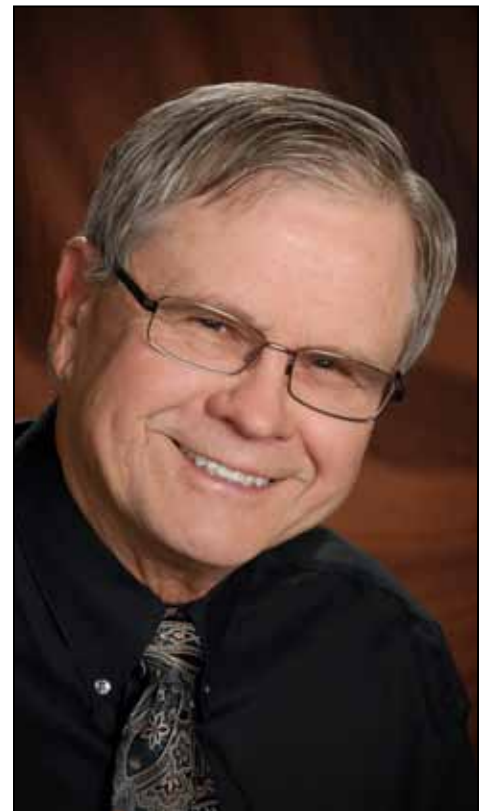
It was in the summer of 2009 when my book, "The Book of Mormon An Inconvenient Truth," was published. Immediately after that I had an unusual number of speaking opportunities. I decided that in the following months I would, as I had the opportunity in my sermons, bear witness of our three books. I realized that could be some-

what controversial so I made it a matter of prayer to God that He would provide me with a witness that I was doing what He wanted me to do. The first two sermons were at The Highlands Congregation where a guy by the name of Joel Loving was pastor.

At The Highlands we have two services and the first one I gave was at the 8:30 a.m. service. Nothing really unusual happened during the service that I could tell. At the end I held up our three books and repeated my grandmother's words: These three books are true, especially the red letters.

However, the following Wednesday night at prayer service a sister stood and bore her testimony that at the end of my sermon, as I held our three books aloft and bore my testimony of their truthfulness, that she saw a bright light surrounding me. Wow, that's pretty neat I thought. After that sermon several people went to Joel and asked that I give the same sermon at the 11 a.m. service. The following Sunday I did and again nothing unusual appeared to happen.

Again, following the prayer service on Wednesday, someone said a sister



Rich Rupe



wanted to speak to me. I found her and she said that her nine year old daughter had something to tell me.

I found her daughter and we went to sit in a corner where she proceeded to tell me about her experience. She said that when I was giving my sermon that she saw angels surrounding me. She said, in the words of a little child, they were so bright that she needed her sunglasses.

Wow! I thought, in the mouth of babes. I was completely satisfied then that I was doing what God wanted me to do. Not long after that I spoke at Gardner, Kansas. I shared with them my testimony. After that service Tresia and I went to lunch with several people. At that lunch a sister pulled me aside and said that as I was speaking she saw an aura around me.

My testimony here is not that I'm someone special; my testimony is that God is faithful to His Word. It's our job to preach the word; and it's God's job to bear witness of His word. Mark 16:20 says: *And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*

In the final part of my sermon, I want to share with you a testimony from this past summer. As I was preparing to give a sermon, I prayed to God, asking Him if there was anything in particular He wanted me to say to this congregation. In the early morning hours the next day came these words: "You are to continue to prepare your hearts and minds for that which is to come."

With these words somehow came the knowledge that "that which is to come" was referring to 2 Nephi 12:23. I still don't understand how this happened. I didn't hear a voice and I didn't go through any thought process to figure it out. It was just knowledge implanted in my mind that the spirit was referring to 2 Nephi 12:23. I looked it up and it says this: *For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger and perish.*

I was made to know that this shak-

ing to come is not something that God delights in. It is necessary that this be done because it is as this verse says, unless God shakes the kingdom of the devil, these many souls will perish. This shaking to come will be yet another warning to our nation and to the church; that we need to repent and return to God. 2 Nephi 12 goes on to say: *If the Gentiles will repent and come unto Me, I will be merciful unto them.*

I received this insight in the early hours of Tuesday morning before the Sunday I was to speak. Wednesday morning I got down on my knees and prayed to God that I might receive some confirmation. Almost immediately after that I received a text from the First People's Pastor at the time who lives in Arizona. He told me that I needed to listen to Dr. James Dobson's program Focus on the Family. For the past three days Dr. Dobson had broadcast a series of interviews with Rabbi Jonathon Cahn, the author of *The Harbinger*, the book that I'm sure you've all either read or heard about.

Rabbi Cahn pointed out that this is a nation dedicated to God, and that just like Israel, if we as a nation continue to turn from God, we'll be swept off the land just as they were. As you know, this is also the message of the Book of Mormon to America. *Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it, shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ. . .* (Ether 1:35)

Rabbi Cahn then said this: "A GREAT SHAKING IS COMING." Rabbi Cahn says that God will seek to work through this shaking for revival. He said that our choice will be either revival or judgment. He said, "The time is late, now is the time to get right with God." Rabbi Cahn confirmed the words that came to me that morning. "A great shaking is coming. Now is the time to prepare our hearts and minds for that which is to come."

Interestingly enough, this past Thursday, as I was searching for something else, I came across a sermon by

Arthur Oakman given in 1957 at a district conference. In 1957 we were well into the Cold War, and it was a fearful time which led up to the Cuban Missile Crisis not long thereafter. He was uncertain what to say to the people at the conference. He said it was not fair to minister to those people some platitude about peace when he knew that they needed to be strengthened for what they were about to face.

As he got up to speak he was directed to use Genesis 7:68-69. *And the day shall come that the earth shall rest. But before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth. And great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve. . .*

He said that his mind was directed to that part of scripture which says, . . . *great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve. . .* (69) He said, much like I would say to you today, "I wish it could be different but it isn't. The facts are, brothers and sisters, that this nation must be chastised for its wickedness, its pride, its whoredoms and its adulteries – for its worship of the golden calf. I don't want to frighten you because there is nothing to be afraid of. But as a watchman upon the towers of Zion I must lift up the warning voice, lest my conscience be not purged; and lest by my failure to utter a warning, some of you may be ensnared."

Arthur recounted for them his experience in Manchester, England on September 3, 1939, as war broke out in Europe. During the church service, a young man who had stayed home to listen to the announcement by Churchill as to whether England would enter the war, came in and said, "Well, brothers and sisters, it is war." He said that the spirit of depression and darkness fell over the congregation. Somebody suggested that they sing "God Moves in a Mysterious Way." Arthur said that when they sang this verse, "Ye fearful Saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head," that something happened to that group of people, and



it was as if they were lifted up by some unseen hand and were placed above the course of time, enabled to see and be delivered from the fear which was seizing upon other people.

He said that when those days come it is the will of God that His people not fear...that when these days of sorrow and destruction come upon the people of this country, brief as they may be yet terrible, that there will be created an opportunity by reason of this judgment that will open the ears of men, and open

their hearts to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. A brighter and more prosperous day will be seen and experienced by the people of this Church than they have ever experienced before.

Arthur then gave these words that are most gratifying to me personally, "So as we look forward into the future then, let us not be afraid, but let us be conscious of the fact that these things of which I have spoken must surely come; for as the Book of Mormon says, "For the kingdom of the devil must shake,

and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance." (2 Nephi 12:23) God said, "My people will I preserve." Our job then is to trust in His word as we "continue to prepare our minds for that which is to come."

Thank you for allowing me to be your speaker today. I pray this blessing for each of you, "May your life be as wonderful and as beautiful as it was in the mind of God on that day when he created you." This is my prayer for you. In Jesus name, Amen.



WHAT LOVE

Priest Jim Barber
Bethany, MO
December 21, 2014

Elder Tony Crandell read two scriptures for our Call to Worship. *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isaiah 9:2) Behold I am Jesus Christ, the son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. (3 Nephi 4:44, 48)*

The scripture that I am going to start out with this morning is one that all of us I'm sure know. It is John 3:16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life.*

I am going to talk this morning about love but I have to tell you something first. I hope that I don't fall down up here because I'm getting really, really old. It seems like someone thinks that I'm older than Methuselah so if I fall down maybe Ryder can come take my place. That's OK Ryder. I still love you.

I am going to talk some this morning about the story of Christ being born. Joseph was to be Mary's husband. I tried to put myself in Joseph's place. He loved Mary very deeply and she loved him. They were according to their cus-

toms at that time espoused which is like our period of engagement today.

The angel came to Mary and said that she was to bear a child who would be the Son of God. Now would that test your love if you were Joseph? If your wife came and said that she was expecting a child. Joseph was a very good man. He knew the scriptures and Mary also knew the scriptures and she believed but not very many people did. Joseph had to take a lot of ridicule I'm sure from those that he knew.

Joseph was just a carpenter. I shouldn't say just a carpenter. He was a carpenter but at that time it wasn't a very prestigious job. Mary could have had anyone that she wanted to be her husband; maybe someone with a lot of money because she was a very beautiful young lady and a very pure young lady but she loved Joseph and wanted him as her husband. So their parents arranged for them to be married which was the custom at that time. Mary's parents probably would have liked to pick someone else but Mary wouldn't have anyone else. She wanted Joseph.

I think about Joseph going through all the ridicule that he might have received. Some may have thought that he was slipping around and doing things that he shouldn't have been doing. Joseph could have divorced or put Mary away but if he did that then Mary probably would have been stoned because that was the custom back in those days.

If a young lady became pregnant and was not married she would be stoned.

Of course, that didn't happen because the angel Gabriel came to Joseph and told him that it was all right to take Mary as his wife. I think Joseph would have probably done that anyway because he was just that kind of a person but this increased his faith. He knew that Mary was to have the Son of God and that they were to call him Jesus.

This same angel Gabriel also went to a man named Zacharias. He was a priest in the Temple and it was his job to burn the incense when the people came to pray. When he was in the Temple burning the incense the angel Gabriel appeared to him. He was an old man and his wife was also old. The angel told him that his wife would bear a son and that his name was to be called John.

I think we have to realize that God chose these people because of the love that they had. He knew that they loved Him and worshipped Him and He knew that John and Jesus would be brought up in loving homes. That's what God is all about, love.

I'm not sure how all this is going to turn out today because I didn't take very many notes and I hope that God can fill me in on what I'm supposed to say. I've rehearsed it in my mind a dozen times but when I get up in front of people then I forget things. I hope that doesn't happen this morning. I just want you to know that God chooses His people to do a certain work because of



the abilities and talents that they have. Sometimes I wonder why He chose me but I know that He did. I hope that I can live up to what His expectations are.

Three wise men came to Herod to find out where the Messiah of the Jews was to be born because they had seen the star. Herod went to the priests and asked them and they told him that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. It seems strange to me as I read this that the priests knew that Jesus, the Messiah, was to be born in Bethlehem but they didn't recognize it when it happened.

Herod told the wise men that when they found the young child they should come back and tell him so that he could worship Him too. After the wise men went to see Jesus, they were warned in a dream that they should not go back to Herod. We know that the angel appeared later on to Joseph in a vision and told him that they needed to flee into Egypt because Jesus' life was in danger.

Tony read this morning about the things that happened on this land to foretell Jesus' birth. The sun didn't go down when Jesus was born. Samuel the Lamanite also prophesied the crucifixion. If you read in the Book of Mormon it also says that when Christ was crucified there were three days of darkness on this land. It was so dark that you couldn't even light a fire and the earth shook and trembled three or more hours. That's kind of leading me to a story that I want to share with you this morning.

Some of you may have heard this story. It's the story of the other wise man. The Magi or the wise men as they were called were astrologists, physicians and scientists and were well read in the scriptures. This is the story about the fourth wise man. He had studied the stars and scriptures and knew that it was about time for the Son of God to be born so he sold all of his household possessions and bought a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl.

He had been conferring with the other three wise men and they had decided that when this light appeared that they would all get together to go and see the Messiah. He was about 10 days away from where he was supposed to meet the other three Magi so he took

his precious stones and started on his journey. He knew that it would take him 10 days to get to the place where he was supposed to meet the other three at midnight on the 10th day.

As he started traveling on the last day he came across a man lying in the road who appeared to be dead but he wasn't. He took the time to help the man because he was a physician also and had some herbs and spices that he could give to the man. He decided that he needed to stay with him until the man was able to go on his own. He stayed with him for quite a little while. Finally he regained his strength and health and was able to take care of himself. The Magi told him that he was headed to Jerusalem to see the Messiah. The man told him that according to their scriptures the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem.

That made the Magi late to meet the others but he went on. When he got to the place where he was to meet the others they had already started their journey. They had left a message to tell him that they were going to find the King and he should follow them across the desert. His horse was completely exhausted and he knew that he couldn't cross the desert with the horse in the shape that he was in so he sold the sapphire and bought camels and provisions to cross the desert.

He finally got to Bethlehem only to discover that the the Magi had left three days before that. He came to a house where a young lady with a baby was living. He asked her if she had seen the Magi and she told him that she had seen them but they had left three days earlier and that the parents had fled with the baby during the night possibly to Egypt. There was a lot of turmoil in the land because the King had added to their taxes and was sending men around to collect the taxes.

The woman prepared a meal for the Magi and they ate. As they finished they heard the Roman soldiers coming. There were screams from the village that they were killing babies. The mother took her cloak and wrapped her baby in it and tried to hide in the dark corner of the house.

The Magi stood in the doorway as

the Roman soldier came and he told the soldier that there was no one else in the house. He reached into his purse and pulled out the ruby. He handed it to the soldier and told him that this was for the tax so the soldier went on. He was very sad because now he had lost two of the gifts for the Messiah.

He went on to Egypt and looked for the Messiah. He spent thirty-three years in Egypt helping the people of that country but finally came back to Jerusalem during the Passover. The people seemed to be headed in the same direction. The Magi asked some of them where they were going and they told him that they were going to Golgotha. They said there were two famous robbers to be crucified and with them another called Jesus of Nazareth. He was told that Jesus of Nazareth had done many wonderful works among the people and they loved Him greatly but the priests and elders had said that He must die because He said that He was the Son of God.

Pilate sent Him to the cross because he said He was the King of the Jews. The Magi then knew that this was the one that he had been seeking. He said that he would go and offer the pearl for a ransom to save Jesus so he started to follow the multitude.

As he was walking along he saw a soldier dragging a young girl down the street. She broke loose from the soldier and came to the Magi and asked him to have pity on her and save her because her father who had been a merchant was dead and she had been seized for his debts to be sold as a slave. He didn't know what to do but he knew that he could not leave this little girl there so once again he reached into his purse and pulled out the pearl and gave it to the girl. He said, 'This is the ransom, daughter. It is the last of my treasures which I kept for the King.'

As he spoke the darkness grew intense and the earth started to shake and the walls began to fall. The soldiers fled in terror but the Magi and the girl crouched beneath the wall. With one more lingering pulsation of the earthquake a heavy tile fell and struck the old man on the temple. She knelt to see if he was alive and heard a still small voice



which she couldn't understand. When she looked to see who was speaking she saw no one.

Then the Magi's lips began to move as if in answer and she heard him say, 'Not so, my Lord. For when saw I thee hungered and fed thee or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw I thee a stranger and took thee in or naked and clothed thee? When saw I thee sick or in prison and came unto thee. Thirty-three years have I looked for thee but I have never seen thy face nor ministered to thee my King.'

The voice came again and said, 'Verily, I say unto thee inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of these the least of my brethren thou hast done it unto me.' A calm radiance of wonder and joy lighted the pale face of the Magi, like the first ray of dawn on a snowy mountain peak, and one long, last breath of relief exhaled gently from his lips. His journey was ended. His treasures were accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King.

I think that's the story of true love, that we share our gifts with others. You know God's commands were to love your God with all your heart, might, mind and strength and the second was like unto it to love your neighbor as yourself. I hope that through this Christmas season that we can remember this and share the love of Christ with those that we come into contact with.

I have a couple of little stories that I'd like to share also.

Each December, I vowed to make Christmas a calm and peaceful experience. I had cut back on nonessential obligations - extensive card writing, endless baking, decorating, and even overspending. Yet still, I found myself exhausted, unable to appreciate the precious family moments, and of course, the true meaning of Christmas.

My son, Nicholas, was in kindergarten that year. It was an exciting season for a six year old. For weeks, he'd been memorizing songs for his school's "Winter Pageant." I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd be working the night of the production. Unwilling to miss his shining moment, I spoke with his teacher. She assured me there'd be a dress rehearsal the morning of the presentation.

All parents unable to attend that evening were welcome to come then.

Fortunately, Nicholas seemed happy with the compromise. So, the morning of the dress rehearsal, I filed in ten minutes early, found a spot on the cafeteria floor and sat down. Around the room, I saw several other parents quietly scampering to their seats.

As I waited, the students were led into the room. Each class, accompanied by their teacher, sat cross-legged on the floor. Then, each group, one by one, rose to perform their song. Because the public school system had long stopped referring to the holiday as "Christmas," I didn't expect anything other than fun, commercial entertainment songs of reindeer, Santa Claus, snowflakes and good cheer. So, when my son's class rose to sing, "Christmas Love," I was slightly taken aback by its bold title.

Nicholas was aglow, as were all of his classmates, adorned in fuzzy mittens, red sweaters, and bright snow caps upon their heads. Those in the front row-center stage - held up large letters, one by one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas," a child would hold up the letter C. Then, "H is for Happy," and on and on, until each child holding up his portion had presented the complete message, "Christmas Love." The performance was going smoothly, until suddenly, we noticed her; a small quiet girl in the front row holding the letter "M" upside down - totally unaware her letter "M" appeared as a "W."

The audience of first through sixth graders snickered at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W." Although many teachers tried to shush the children, the laughter continued until the last letter was raised...and we all saw it together.

A hush came over the audience and eyes began to widen. In that instant, we understood the reason we were there, why we celebrated the holiday in the first place, why even in the chaos, there was a purpose for our festivities. For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear: CHRIST-WAS LOVE.

In the book of 1st John 4:7-12 we read, *Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time, except them who believe. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

I've got one last poem that I'm going to end with this morning. It's called "The Christmas Teacup."

"Grandma, why's that teacup sitting 'neath the Christmas tree?"

Amanda asked her Grandma, with eyes wide as they could be.

"Because, my child." Grandma replied, "it's a reminder of

The many ways God demonstrates His never ending love.



Jim Barber




You see that pretty teacup was once just a lump of clay.
It yelped and cried as God began to mold it one fine day.
Then, God placed it on a wheel that wildly spun around.
As the teacup cried with fear, 'O Lord, please put me down!'

But, the Lord said, 'Not quite yet! Please trust me, if you will.'
As He gently placed the teacup deep inside a fiery kiln.
There the cup felt true despair, as flames around it burned.
She feared the Lord had left for good, never to return.

All at once cool air rushed in as the door opened wide.
God's loving hands reached in to bring His precious cup outside.
Then, came strokes from a fine brush, dipped in God's choice of paint.
Weak from the heat, engulfed in fumes, the teacup thought she'd faint.

Quietly, the teacup cried, 'O lord, what have I done?'
'My child, I'm only finishing the work that I've begun.'
God said, and locked the cup again behind the oven door—
Yet, from those flames she reemerged, a lump of clay no more.

Stronger and more beautiful, her purpose now defined,
The teacup sat in wonder as the Master's name was signed...
'Honey,' Grandma whispered, 'That teacup's like me and you.'
God has a special purpose for each struggle we go through.

So, let's sit down and share a special cup of Christmas tea,
And thank the Lord for all He does to fashion you and me
Into the folks He had in mind since long before our birth—
The loved ones Jesus came to save when He came here to earth." 

IT'S NOT BY CHANCE

Brother Jim Major
Lamoni, IA
December 28, 2014

Brother Joel Loving shared: "It is my pleasure to welcome you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. I have a secret so you'll have to listen a little closer. Before a service especially if I am up front I try always to imagine that Christ has entered the room, usually from the back where the people are. It's not about Him being up front but Him being present with us. As that imagination is sort of captured all of a sudden there is a change in me-- a recognition of the Holy Spirit, a lifting of my soul and my awareness and perception of what the priorities should be. I hope you sense in some way that because we have gathered in His name He will be here in Spirit and in Power.

I don't put people on pedestals. Sometimes when we introduce people we feel like we should make a statute for them. I don't believe in that and I don't do that. Jim is my brother and I have high regard for him. I know that when he speaks today he will speak his heart and mind as if the Lord has told him what to say. I invite your listening ear.

The Call to Worship is taken from Mosiah 1:27 in the Book of Mormon. *And now, it came to pass that Mosiah*

went and did as his father had commanded him, and proclaimed unto all the people who were in the land of Zarahemla, that thereby they might gather themselves together, to go up to the temple, to hear the words which his father should speak unto them. This, of course, is before the speech by King Benjamin, which is one of the most historical, wonderful, merciful, enlightening sermons/speeches a person has probably ever given. Who knew? Did Mosiah? Did the people? For that matter do we because we have gathered to hear Our Heavenly Father's voice through His ministers and servants? Are we ready for what's about to unfold, for what He is about to do?"

Brother Major read from Genesis 2:5-6. *For I, the Lord God, created all things of which I have spoken spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth; for I, the Lord God, had not caused it to rain upon the face of the earth. And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men, and not yet a man to till the ground, for in heaven created I them, and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air.*

Sherman (Phipps), if you are listening to this, if this sermon doesn't go well, it's your fault. I am standing in for you.

I chose that scripture because it says that we were all created in the begin-

ning, all of us, even the youngest, even some that aren't born yet -- we were all created at the same time. We have a joint heritage.

You know, speaking of heritage, I have been involved in ancestry.com in the last few years so I am beginning to find out where my heritage comes from. I never thought it came from where it has come from. In 1964 I joined the RLDS Church in Seattle, WA, through youth ministry. A high school friend of mine invited me to go to Camp Kimtaw which was a senior high camp held at Deception Pass. It's a beautiful location right on Puget Sound. There was a mountain we called Mt. Bromack, a little campground that had a swimming pool.

I went into this camp with some ulterior motives I guess you'd call it. I knew there were going to be girls there and that was kind of my interest. Zion's League had girls in it and that was attractive to me. Anyway I went to camp and began to become acquainted. Being the new kid I was welcomed. I come from a family where I am the oldest of 11 kids. We weren't a wealthy family. I had a stepfather whom I didn't care much for at all. I have since forgiven him and I hope that wherever he is he has forgiven me for my belligerence and my attitude towards him. It's interesting how we find ourselves in a situation



where we are always asking God to forgive us, every day.

I had an interesting experience at this camp. I was sitting in a Doctrine and Covenants' class. I didn't know what a Doctrine and Covenants was but I listened. I didn't know what the Book of Mormon was either. Wednesday night they had a fellowship service. We must have had 60 plus kids at this camp. They were from Canada as well. They came down from B.C. and mixed with the Seattle kids.

It was an interesting experience because I began to hear kids talking about God. Now I hadn't heard much about God because I was unchurched. It wasn't until I was in junior high that I heard someone say that they were Catholic and I wasn't sure what that was all about. I went home and asked my mother what we were. She said that she thought she went to a Protestant Church once so I thought maybe we were Protestants. I didn't know.

Those kids at camp began to share about God and how He had touched their lives and I began to weep. I didn't know about this kind of love but I was introduced to it that Wednesday and I said to those kids -- I was very shy and I didn't speak very well -- but I said, 'I don't know what you have but I want it! I want it.' This was my introduction to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I found myself in a family of people who unconditionally loved me, not only the kids but their parents, and I got invited into their homes. I was blessed with a whole new family of people.

That was probably the key thing that drew me to this movement and for some reason I haven't been able to get away from it. Not that I haven't tried. I haven't been able to reach my siblings and share with them what it was that I experienced. Although the last time we were home I tried. You see in a lot of families they get into a cycle of life and it's repeated and repeated and repeated unless there are some changes.

If there's drinking, smoking and all the other things that go along with those kinds of situations then it's repeated. Most of my brothers and sisters took up smoking. My mother was a

chain smoker. My parents actually were alcoholics, and a lot of my brothers and sisters have fallen into that same trap. I remember telling my niece, 'We have to break this cycle. You can do it! Your children don't have to go through what we went through, what my parents went through. It can be stopped!'

I thought that when I joined this church that I was the convert, but in the last couple of years I have found out that I had a great, great grandfather that joined the church in 1842 in England! I didn't know that side of my heritage because my father left me and my mother before I even got a chance to get acquainted with him. So the first five years of my life I didn't have a father. My grandmother raised me you might say. My mother was too busy doing whatever she was doing.

So, now I have found that I have a heritage in this church. My great, great grandfather joined the church in 1842 in England and my great, great uncle came to Nauvoo in 1844. I found this when I visited Nauvoo. I thought I would just look and see if anyone with the last name of Major was on the list. Well, there was -- William Warner Major. He was a miniature portrait artist. He had the opportunity to paint some of the Twelve Apostles.

When we came back from Seattle a year or so ago after visiting we stopped in Salt Lake City and went to the museum there and sure enough his portraits were in there. He went to Salt Lake with a lot of the church members. It's interesting the connections that I have found.

I have said before that we're on a journey and we are. We have been since the beginning when we were just spirits before we came down to earth and took upon flesh and became living beings. So there's a unique relationship that we have. Even though Michael has gone through life in a certain family and has come down (physically born) in certain ways he's my brother. You are my sisters and brothers. From the very youngest to the oldest there's a relationship that we have and a divine destiny that we've been called to.

It's not by chance that we have come

here today. It's not by chance that I have the opportunity to share this morning. It's not by chance that God has spoken to this particular group of people since 1830. It's not by chance that today we're a divided community of Restoration branches.

We have been fortunate to be blessed with the three books of scripture but we're also blessed with all good books. It's not by chance that Walter Weldon wrote this book, "Tell My People." It's a message to us. It's an important message, "Tell My People."

'Tell my people: I have gathered many of you to the land of Zion. Tell my people: You are here to build my Zion.'

'Tell my people: This is the day of your preparation.' We've been prepared and we continue to prepare.

'Tell my people: I am waiting for you my people, to sanctify your lives,' which is a process, a journey.

'Tell my people: To keep the Lord's Day holy. Tell my people: Come out of Babylon. Be not partakers of her ways.'

'Tell my people: Of the parable of the Ten Virgins. We are now in that time period. This was written in 1993.'

'Tell my people: My coming is near. Be ye ready.'

'Tell my people: Keep my commandments.'

'Tell my people: My Word must become flesh.'

'Tell my people: Foretold calamities are coming to cleanse my People and the land of Zion. Tell my Priesthood: Go ye out from among the wicked. Save yourselves. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.'

It's not by chance that Earl Curry who was a caretaker at the Kirtland Temple wrote The Endowment after having many experiences there. He asked questions and had answers given. Many of us have studied it. There's a lot that we haven't yet applied in our lives.

Sometimes I think we have a tendency to study things to death. We continue to desire to have more classes and more study. There's nothing wrong with that, there's nothing wrong with study but at some point we begin to make some choices to take some action!. Now we can do that individually and we can



do that corporately. We can be effective if we are in the right mind and spirit individually and corporately as well.

Sometimes we need to be challenged. In a lot of cases we need to be challenged. Bonnie and I have been blessed being in your presence. I sense within you a desire to please God and yet I realize that you've been through some difficult times. You have experienced some pain and suffering -- but the victory is sure. The victory is sure!

I remember I was quite perplexed when the position papers came out. I don't even remember exactly when that was but I was at reunion and then came home and was very perplexed by it. I sat down in my rocking chair and my daughter got up on my lap and I was rocking her and asking the Lord for guidance. This is the first time I ever experienced this. People talk about experiencing the power of the Spirit from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet.

That Spirit of God came upon me and I began to weep. I heard this voice, 'Jim, don't be overly concerned about what you see and what you hear. Just know that I shall be victorious in the end. I shall be victorious in the end!'

Our victory is assured. We may still have to go through some struggles. We may still have to experience some pain but our victory is assured. We look around us and see the Restoration branches broken up. Don't be overly concerned about what you see and what you hear. Just know that He shall be victorious in the end. It all will come together and it will be for the good of His Kingdom!

My patriarchal blessing says that, 'It will take a lifetime of consistent effort to bring yourself and the Saints to that place where they can receive the Endowment of Almighty God.' Not just the Priesthood receiving the endowment, all of us who have prepared ourselves to receive An Endowment of Spirit. Some of us already have received an Endowment in part. There are a lot of gifts. There's a whole spiritual element of things that we haven't begun to touch because of our spiritual condition and what we have allowed ourselves to

be distracted by.

It's time, my friends, that we look past those distractions and begin to look at what it is we have to offer. What are our spiritual gifts? How can we begin to implement them? When we do implement them individually, and especially corporately, we become a power; a power that can't be contended with. It's the power of God but we have to want to do that. We have to begin to ask the questions. It says in Section 140 that we are no further away nor closer than the spiritual conditions of God's people justifies. What is it and how do we get there? How do we get there?

I get concerned when I see a lot of our people who are spending time surviving. I have spent way too much time just trying to survive. I've given little effort to what it is God is calling me to. I don't like seeing men like Joel and Michael, and others, working in areas where they are not able to completely function as God would have them. They are on my heart because I see such potential.

It is important for us to be allowed to be free, to be people who are free to give expression to the gifts, talents and abilities that God has created in us. This will make all the difference in the influence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people, people who are crying out for a people who are giving expression to that spirit!

In everything that we do even including our budget, we should become focused on the course that we have been called to, that divine destiny that we have. It's in our DNA. Our spiritual DNA is calling out within us. We are going to be victorious in that effort if we are willing to put our mind to it.

I used to become very frustrated because I thought we were just wasting our time. But if we remain directionless we will be wasting our time and our gifts and our spiritual destiny as a people. We might look around at the Restoration Movement and because it is in the condition that it is in say, What a ragtag group this is. They really think that they are going to build the Kingdom of God here on earth? They are going to have a

part to play in that?

I say, Yes, yes, yes because Jesus surrounded Himself with ragtag people. People you wouldn't expect had any potential at all. He called fishermen and a tax collector to follow Him. They didn't have the ambition and there may be some in our midst that feel that way about themselves! But it's the role of servanthood. I'd rather call it servanthood than priesthood because we are servants. We are called to be servants. We are not called to lord it over you and say, You'd better do it this way or you'd better do it that way.' That's not the role of priesthood! What can I do to serve you? How can I serve YOU? How can I help you understand your spiritual destiny?

There are certain gifts and blessings given to those who are ordained to be servants, to assist the body to attain that sanctification, that process of becoming holy. That's what it's all about. We aren't here just to deliver sermons, good talks. We have the responsibility of sharing the Word of God! We have the ability to commune with the Church of the Firstborn! Some things that we have not strived hard enough to accomplish, as servants of the Lord.

You are more important to me than I am to myself. Your growth is more important -- but if I just let you be you, let you be in your homes, and I don't visit you, and I don't come around -- then I don't really have your interest at heart. If that's the kind of servant I am than I'm not much of a servant. So it's an area for the priesthood, and servanthood, to begin to look at ourselves and say, 'What are we here for?' We as a people need to do more than just come here on Sunday and sit and enjoy whatever it is we enjoy, even though fellowship is important.

In 1994 I went to a World Conference. Bonnie and I came down from Yakima, WA where we were living. We decided to leave and got in our fifth wheel (we've been in an RV for a long time). We drove through Colorado going up that big mountain to come down to Denver. That's a pass where you go up 11,000 feet I think. I had the pick-up down to the floorboards and we're go-



ing 20 to 25 miles an hour and I'm just chugging along. Anyway we did make it to the conference.

It was Easter. Easter Sunday I woke up and I was lying in bed thinking about Christ. I was thinking about the Church, the bride and Zion and I had this vision. I saw the bride. She came and I saw her. Her dress was in total disarray. She was dirty and disheveled. I mean she looked terrible and I said, 'Lord, delay your coming! Don't come. I don't want you to see her in this condition. I don't want you to come, please.' Then I heard the words, 'Woe, woe unto those who have the responsibility for the care of the bride.' Woe, woe unto those who have the responsibility for the care of the bride.' You know the bride is us. We're His children. The church is the bride and we are a part of the church. It broke my heart.

We're still not ready because when He comes we're to be like Him. We're to be in a Celestial condition but that takes some practice. That spiritual condition requires some practice. Something we need to be mindful of every day. We're on this journey so that we can be prepared when He comes. Servant-hood responsibility is to prepare us for that.

I ask the question, Do we feel prepared? Do we feel like we're being prepared? There's a lot of elements in this process of this journey that we're on. I'm feeling strongly that the Storehouse needs to be brought into our midst. We need to be thinking about the Storehouse. I think this coming year will present some challenges to us.

You know we were at Alan's house one Wednesday night and I felt the Spirit and that He was just so excited about being in our presence! I said at the end of the service that I felt like we were going to be having to make some decisions in the coming year, but I knew whatever decisions we made we would be successful -- so don't be afraid to make those decisions. Trust. We need to begin to see it, feel it and trust. See it -- Vision our Spiritual Destiny -- see it, our vision for this group of people. How many lives are we going to touch? We're going to touch a lot of lives. We're going to have an influence in the bringing back together and the bonding of the Resto-

ration branches because they will come together -- not all of them, but they will come together because Zion is the passion that we all have within us. It's in our spiritual DNA and when we are in that condition, when we see it, feel it and trust it, that Spiritual condition that we are able to give expression to, will act like a magnet and draw down Zion. They will put their arms around us and hug our necks. When we embrace the Truth and look upward, Zion will look downward.

I don't know how much of it or if any of it that we will actually build but it's all prepared. It's all prepared to happen and it will happen. I guarantee it. It will happen. We just need to decide how we are going to be involved in it. You have all of the talent. You have all of the necessary ingredients to be the People who give that kind of expression. The world is looking for that kind of people I guarantee you.

It doesn't take much to scan the web pages and the news to look at what's going on around in the world. What's coming is not going to be pleasant. We heard Rich Rupe talk to us a couple of weeks ago who said that 'a shaking is coming!' He's not the first person that I've heard that from. It's coming and we need to be prepared.

In 1993 Walter Weldon said that 'we're in the time of the parable of the ten virgins.' I don't know how long of a time that time is, how big a window of opportunity we have left, but we need to make some decisions as a people. I'm not trying to influence you -- yes I am! I'll just be straight out, I don't care anymore -- I know what it is we need to do. I have a sense of KNOWING! You may be thinking, 'boy is he arrogant. He thinks he knows.' I'll just say that we need to begin to ask ourselves some questions, some serious questions. How do we want to participate? Do we want to participate? Will we do it together or not?

It's not any different than the Creston Experience. They did some things that prepared them for the experience that they had. We can have that experience if we do those things too, if we begin to talk about those things. We're

having a class on Zion and we have words from our servants here from this pulpit and we should begin to see some consistency from Sunday to Sunday. Taking the consistency of our classes we begin to feel a movement that we're moving towards something.

I wasn't sure I had anything to say this morning but I have this sense of knowing it's coming. Be prepared. Set your house in order. **Be prepared. Set your house in order. BE PREPARED. SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER.** I can't state this any stronger. I have this knowing -- and that knowing you can have too. Ask for it. Join with me. Let us be a people of God who will work at fulfilling His word so that we won't let His word return void. We can't. It won't or He will cease to be God.

Our Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your words, for Your Blessing. I thank you for allowing us to be here at this time. I hope that those who aren't present will hear these words and will also join with us in yielding Our will to You so that Zion will become a reality; that the joining together of Your Restoration People who have a passion for Zion will come to pass. May Your Blessing be upon each family here and upon each one who would begin to give thought to our future of being with You, and not just being in the world.

We heed Your Call to come out of Babylon. May You bless each family with strength and energy. May we come together even more often than we do now because we need to build those trusted relationships you have called us to. We need to recognize the integrity that we have towards You and to build upon it with others. We need to be open to Revelation as it comes through those whom You touch.

We need to listen to that Revelation and ask questions and expand and expound it so that we understand it clearly. Then Heavenly Father we can receive healing through forgiveness. Let us not hold any grudges toward one another but let us love one another in the deep sense that You are Love. There is only Love, and may this be Your Blessing upon us this day. In Jesus' Name. Amen!





ANNUAL FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING STATEMENT

"... Give an account of thy Stewardship," LUKE 16:2

This Statement covers the period from _____ through _____

Form with fields for LAST NAME, FIRST NAME, MIDDLE, SPOUSE, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE, HOME BRANCH

Table with sections: INCOME (A, X), BASIC LIVING NEEDS (A-J), (Y) TOTAL NECESSARY LIVING EXPENSES

- Items listed after each subsection are for example only. Each family must determine which components qualify as basic living expenses.

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Accounting Time

It's time to think about making your annual financial accounting and sharing your tithing.

There are many promises of blessing if we will respond to the financial law. As a beginning, what would the blessing be if 50 percent of the Mount Ayr branch made their accounting this year? That would be a start. How about 100 percent of our members filing our accounting? We surely would be blessed by taking this first step.

Here are some scriptures to look at as you think about making your accounting.

Accountability to God

ROM 14:12 So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God.

SEC 69:2a And also my servants who are abroad in the earth should send forth the accounts of their stewardships to the land of Zion, for the land of Zion shall be a seat and a place to receive and do all these things.

SEC 101:2 b., c.g. It is wisdom in me; therefore, a commandment I give unto you, that ye shall organize yourselves, and appoint every man his stewardship, that every man may give an account unto me of the stewardship which is appointed unto him; for it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as stewards over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures. Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor, and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.

SEC 70:3b And behold, none are exempt from this law who belong to the church of the living God . .

SEC 72:1 c. And verily in this thing ye have done wisely, for it is required of the Lord, at the hand of every steward, to render an account of his stewardship, both in time and in eternity.

SEC 70:1 c. And an account of this stewardship will I require of them in the day of judgment; wherefore I have appointed unto them, and this is their business in the church of God, to manage them and the concerns thereof; yea, the benefits thereof.



January 2015 Schedule

Date	28-Dec	4-Jan	11-Jan	18-Jan	25-Jan
Speaking	Sherman Phipps	Joel Loving	Eugene Story	Tony Crandell	Michael Jordison
Presiding	Rodney Bastow	Gordon Winkler	Ed Anderson	Jim Barber	Alan Smith
Pianist	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke	Pat Bolingbroke
Special Music	Robert Rolfe	Alan Smith	Ron Smith	Michael Jordison	Sue Beck
Family Devotions	Tony Crandall	Bob Rowland	Sue Beck	Gordon Winkler	Ron Smith
Greeters	Alan Smith	Steve Smith	George Knotts	Sherman Phipps	Bob Rowland
Custodians	Steve Smith	Rod Bastow	Alan Smith	Ron Smith	Bob Rowland
Sunday Evening	Rob Rolfe	Steve Smith	Bob Rowland	Ron Smith	Rob Rolfe
Wed. Prayer Service	31-Dec	7-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan
Location	Ron Smith	Alan Smith	Rob Rolfe	Bob Rowland	Steve Smith
Presiding	Rob Rolfe	Jim Barber	Michael Jordison	Ed Anderson	Ron Smith
Special Events					
Dec. 7- Potluck following Communion					



Happy Birthday to Gable Galusha (Jan. 16) and Jowett Bastow (Jan. 26) and any others we missed.



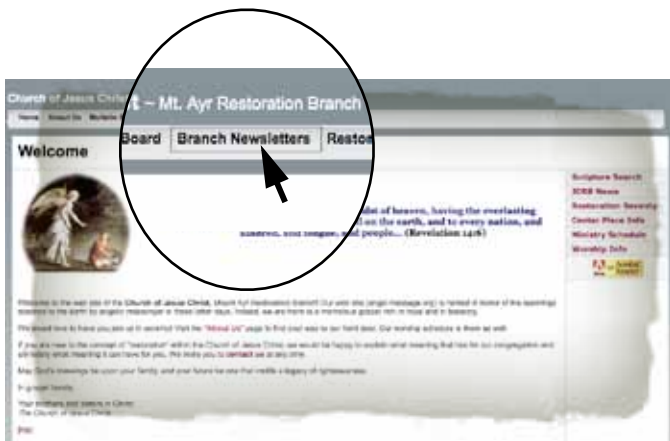
Happy Anniversary to Ed and Diane Anderson (Jan. 1) and Michael and Julie Jordison (Jan. 7) and anyone else we missed.



Church of Jesus Christ Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

c/o Cheryl Phipps
15581 270th St
Lamoni, IA 50140

Have you misplaced your MARB Newsletter?
Want to read it online or search past issues?
Visit the Mount Ayr Restoration Branch website at:
www.gospelrestored.org



CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST - MT AYR RESTORATION BRANCH

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)

MORE NEWS AND NOTES

child. We delivered them to the MATURA Neighborhood Center in time for Christmas.

We also helped to provide meals for eight families for Christmas. Items to make the meal for a family to go with the meat provided by MATURA were shared.

A New Year's Eve party was held Wednesday, Dec. 31, at the home of Ron and Di Smith in Lamoni.

Some 50 people took part in the worship, games and snacks that were part of the evening in bringing in the new year.

Youth activity

Youth from the branch will have a bowling activity later in January. Watch for details.

Service project

The branch continues to help with service projects each month.

In the past month many branch members have been helping Steve Smith get his new veterinary clinic, Pet Vet Care, remodeled and ready to open in Bethany, MO.

All kinds of skills have been put to use to help with this project.

Coming activities

Our next fellowship activity will be the Valentine's Supper planned Sunday, Feb. 15. Watch for details for this event, hosted by the youth.

People are also invited to attend Southern Gospel music concert later in the month. More details will be available next month.