

Church of Jesus Christ

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Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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"If ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ."

Moroni 7:18



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News & Notes

Approximately 25 Saints gathered to bring a little Christmas cheer to several folks sequestered in their homes this Christmas. Voices, bells and strings all rang out as we celebrated the Savior's birth through our caroling and then with fellowship back at the Smith home in Lamon. If there's one thing we know how to do, it is sing and eat together. If you missed out this past Christmas never fear, we are planning another one for 2021.

A restoration-wide gathering is being held this April at the Waldo

Restoration Branch. Sponsored by the CRE, all Saints are invited to prepare through a 41 days (pg 19), which will culminate in a two day gathering April 9 & 10. The gathering centers around the theme, "**The Field is no longer fallow - A time to plant.**" We are prepared for the Lord's planting and we cannot allow the field to return fallow. The weekend will consist of challenging sermonettes, followed by opportunity for prayer, testimony and sharing." For further details please see the CRE website at: www.eldersconference.org



DOES JESUS DWELL IN YOUR HEART?

Elder Terry Chown
Springboro, Ohio
December 6, 2021

As a Call to Worship High Priest Sherman Phipps shared Helaman 2:25. *Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name; yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.*

It is said that the scriptures contain the greatest love story of all time. Really the climax of the entire scriptures is when He will dwell with us. To Sherman's point in his opening remarks, I know that when He does dwell with us that we will remember Him because He will be right there with us and that is the climax of the entire creation story. It's interesting to me that in Josh Jordison's class he is talking about the process of salvation and what I would like to share with you this morning is the good news about why there is a process for salvation. He also mentioned, just in passing, John 3:16 and it's no coincidence I am sure that I would like to use that scripture as a jumping off point for what I would

like to share with you this morning. I know that you are all familiar with it. It's one that you probably have memorized. It says, *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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* (John 3:16-17)

This is why there is a process of salvation and a plan of salvation that John was talking about. It's because He so loves each and every one of us that He needed a way to bring us back into His presence. All He asks of us in return is our hearts. Why is that important? Why is it so important that Christ have our hearts? Because He needs a place for His Spirit to dwell in us, to be the guiding force in our lives, if you will. With His Spirit in our hearts we will bear the fruits of the Spirit that we are told in Ephesians is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. All things that are good, righteous and true are fruits of the Spirit, and it goes on to detail that they include love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Surely His Spirit is in our hearts so that we can bear these fruits.

This past week I went down to the northeastern side of Cincinnati to take a Covid test because Pam and I had been traveling in Iowa and Missouri the previous week. I thought I would probably need a test before they would let me return to work. As I was driving in Cincinnati I saw a car that was changing lanes and cutting people off. You've seen these drivers before yourself I am sure. Where they are in such a large hurry it seems that it doesn't matter what's going on around them. It's all about them and what they want and getting to where they feel like they need to go. As you have had happened I am sure we came to the next stop light and there he is one car in front of me in the lane next to me having gotten really nowhere any faster than he would have had he just stayed with the flow of the traffic. As I looked over at the car to see who was driving it I could see his license plate. It was a personalized plate (I'll hold this up and read it in case you can't see the video.) that said SOIN2ME. I thought to myself this is where we are at in the world. We live in a society where people are so into me that to them it doesn't matter what the impact is on the people around them. They don't bear the fruits of the Spirit. There's no love in the hearts of men. But I also want to emphasize that there are many, many good people in the world, not just in this church.

We experience the fruits of the Spirit from people in all walks of life and what a blessing that is when it happens. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen often enough because we've not made a place in our hearts for His Spirit to dwell so that we will remember Him.

My son had a habit of writing his favorite phrases on Post-It notes and placing those notes on his bedroom wall or closet door. They were reminders of the fruits of the Spirit and the way that he wanted to live his life. This was one of the notes on his bedroom wall. It says *Do justly, love mercy and walk humbly*. Of course, that's based on a scripture from Micah 6:8. Certainly these are fruits of the Spirit.

We are called as a people to have the Spirit in our heart and to bear the fruits of the Spirit. We were told *The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as*



be of a contrite spirit. (Psalms 34:18) *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* (Isaiah 57:15)

Can you imagine, this scripture says that the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity will not only draw nigh to us but will dwell within us. Surely that's a condition that as a people we want to have.

Christ said that in His mansion there are many rooms. He is building one of those rooms for each of you to dwell in with Him. God loves us so much that co-existence in His kingdom is what He ultimately wants. That is why there is a plan of salvation. That kingdom can be now. It can be now when we are dwelling with Him by having His Spirit in our hearts. Psalms 51:10 says *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* When we collectively have His Spirit dwelling in our hearts and the fruits of the Spirit abound, we will be one with each other and one with Him. Oh, what a happy people we will be.

The love that He has for us will be the tie that binds His children together in unbreakable bonds because we will be dwelling with Him and Him with us. . . . *for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.* (3rd Nephi 5:27) And the Lord will call His people, Zion, because they WILL BE of one heart and of one mind, and they WILL dwell in righteousness; and there WILL BE no poor among them. This is when that "everlasting covenant" will be fulfilled. *That when thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall tremble with joy; And the general assembly of the church of the firstborn shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth, and shall have place until the end come.* (Genesis 9:22-23) And we will dwell with Him.

Of course, the forces of evil seem to thwart the cause of Zion but they will not meet with success. I think often of the account in the book of Job. Here was a man who by the scriptures was perfect. He walked upright before God and had no sin in his life. We read from Job 1:6 *Now there was a day when the children of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.* (And truly isn't that the case today?) *And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job,* (Doesn't it seem strange that of all the people the Lord could have pointed out He points out Job who by this account was perfect and upright before the Lord. Why him?) *that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.* (But Satan thought that that's what it was all about, the stuff that Job had and he said to the Lord.) *But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that*

he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. (I can't imagine what the Lord was thinking but I wonder if He was thinking, 'Watch this!' because He knew that Job had the Lord's Spirit in His heart and so He said to Satan, 'Do what you will.') *And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.* (Job 1:6-12)

You know the story. From there forward everything that Job had was taken away from him; all his material belongings and even his family. Here was a man who was perfect and walked upright before the Lord and everything was taken away from him. How can we then not expect that sometimes this might happen to us as well but listen, listen to Job's response. I think the Lord wanted to make an object lesson for Satan because he knew that this would be Job's response. From Job 1:20-21 *Then Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground and worshiped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* Job had the Lord's Spirit dwelling in his heart and it was because of that that he was able to persevere and endure to the end. In the end as you know so the story goes Job was rewarded for his faithfulness.

God knows that the forces of evil remain at work today just as in Job's day but He promises to be faithful to us just as He was to Job. For God so loves His children and His word will not be void. *Behold, ye are little children, and ye cannot bear all things now; ye must grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me; and none of them (none of them) that my Father hath given me shall be lost; and the Father and I are one; I am in the Father and the Father in me; and inasmuch as ye have received me, ye are in me, and I in you; wherefore I am in your midst; and I am the good Shepherd (and the stone of Israel: he that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall), and the day cometh that you shall hear my voice and see me, and know that I am. Watch, therefore, that ye may be ready. Even so. Amen.* (D & C 50:8d-g)

As we go about our daily lives it is sometimes difficult to remember Him as Sherman has challenged us to do, to know that He dwells with us, to carry His Spirit in our hearts. I was reminded of another of Kyle's notes that he had on his wall. The note simply says *God is always with you.*

The Lord is calling us this morning to bring our sins and our afflictions to the foot of the cross and to yield them to Him and to drink freely of the waters of life by making room for His Spirit in our hearts and to remember Him. My plea to you is that you hear Him beckoning to you this day and that you respond by repenting and drinking of the waters of life. *Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men; for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith, Repent, and I will receive you; Yea, he saith, Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness. . .* (Alma 3:57-59)

Doctrine & Covenants 3:15e (paraphrased), *And if you*



do this, I will unfold unto you a great mystery; for behold, I will gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if you will simply not harden your hearts; yea, if you will come, you may partake of the waters of life freely. For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son that we might have everlasting life with Him in His Kingdom. Come to the river of life and drink. *This is my beloved Son; hear him.* (Mark 9:5)

Revelation 22:1, 17 says *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (1) And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (22) Revelations 3:20 (paraphrased) Behold, He stands at the door, and knocks; if you hear my voice, and open the door; I will come in to you, and will sup with you, and you with me.*

For God so loves His children in the world, that He gave His only Son. It is my prayer this morning that we will remember Him because we have made a place for His Spirit in our hearts to be with us. Amen.



CHOOSING GOD

Seventy George Thomas

Sedalia, Missouri

December 13, 2020

When you are baptizing outside the United States, you go over to those who are going to be baptized and it's what you say there that you don't have to say here in America. You have to tell them that what they are doing is illegal, it's against the law. When I say it's against the law I've always prayed before I eat and over there it's against the law to pray, but I always think if somebody hears me talk about Jesus Christ and they tell the authorities and I go to prison then there has to be people for me to witness in prison.

Over there you always have to tell everybody, because of this decision, you need to be serious. Over there you have to say because of this decision some of you are going to be kicked out of your house out into the street because your family will have no more use for you as a family member since you are now a Christian. Others of you will be beaten up. If you have a job you are going to be thrown out and fired. Some of you are going to be poisoned. Some of you are just going to die because you are making this decision today. The biggie is that when the government finds out that you are now a Christian you have to tell the Lord you are willing to go to prison with a smile. I've never had anyone turn down Jesus because of what could happen.

*Sweet unto me the voice of supplication
From hearts sincere.
Sweet to my ear the humble adoration
That greets me here.*

*Be glad of heart; let not thy faith decline,
I still am near and thou are ever mine.
Walk in the light that on thy path now shineth—
Church of my choice—*

*And whatso'er to me thy heart inclineth,
Heed as my voice.
Talk not of night, nor give to sadness room—
I am thy God; fore'er dismiss thy gloom.*

*Whoso in love my counsel shall obey,
No fear need know;
My hand shall guide their feet and guard their way
'Gainst every foe.*

*Yea, I will lead, thou shalt not please in vain;
My covenant with Zion shall remain.
Lift up thine eyes! thy skies are now aglow
With rays divine!*

*I am thy light! and o'er thy course below
Fore'er will shine.
My Spirit shall thy daily portion be,
And thou art safe if thou'lt abide in me.*

Apostle Joseph Luff (June 25, 1911)



There was another time we were going to have a pretty good-sized baptism several miles south of Katmandu. We checked it over and found a good place to baptize in the river. The night before the baptism took place, I had an experience that we needed to cancel the baptism. That next morning there was a bunch of people down at the site we had chosen evidently having a birthday party and the Army came in with their helicopter and shot and killed everybody. I felt that the Lord protected us that day from having that service. Later we did have it.

Things happen that we just don't expect here. The decision you are making today to come unto the Lord Jesus I always think of as sort of like that movie the "Titanic" where the ship hits the big iceberg. When you get baptized all you are seeing of the Lord Jesus is sort of the very little top and that's about all you can really comprehend. But when you look at the big part underneath, this is the potential that the Lord Jesus Christ is giving you of what's possible once you come to know the Lord Jesus. Once you have that you can make decisions like: do I want to study and come to know more about Jesus or do I want to watch TV or play on the phone. So many people get caught up in playing on their phones. So many people get caught up in just watching TV but to really become a servant of the Lord Jesus you are talking about mighty prayer and fasting and study.

After my father died momma took us to all different types of churches: Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Church of Christ, etc. It was educational and a big deal but what I really learned out of this was that He says, like I said earlier in the class, He is no respecter of persons. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. He goes before us. He is with us always. That is always exciting to me.

I was in the Boy Scouts and had been praying because I heard some of the Bible stories so I said, 'Jesus, you talk about Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego and their experience and then you talk about the children of Israel and how they crossed the waters. You talk about little King David, you know David and Goliath. David threw the rock and got the giant. Lord, you did all these things and it says you never change. If this is really true and you don't change, do you know who I am?' So, I began to pray about this.

One time when I was in the Boy Scouts, we went down to the Superstition Mountains of Arizona. We were down there with 8 different Indian tribes gathered to learn how to tan leather and make moccasins and do Indian dancing. The last night of the camp one of the holy men stood up and said, "Tonight we would like to share something sacred and holy to us. Some call him Viracocha. Others call Him Ketchican. Others call Him the Great Spirit or the Great Healer but you pale face would have called Him Jesus Christ. This Jesus came into the village on a large white horse. He then went into the different hogans and buildings where our people lived and He healed the sick and caused the blind to see and the lame to walk. Then He taught us how to use different types of plants for medicine and how to get along with one another.

That was the first time I really felt the Holy Spirit come down on me and I knew that what he was talking about was true. This was before I had ever heard of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the Book of

Mormon. Later on I came in contact with the Zion's League and due to the leaders I was allowed to go to a youth camp at Buckhorn in Southern California. While I was there a guy by the name of Houston Hobart was teaching a class on the Book of Mormon. As I listened to that my heart burned.

Shortly after that I asked my cabin counselor Keith Kyner who was a Seventy if he knew anybody in these days who had ever had an experience with Jesus Christ like as the days of old. He says, "George, let's go down and talk." So we walked down to the meadow and I climbed up on a big pine log and he said, "George, December 7, 1941, I was in Pearl Harbor aboard ship. That morning I was up doing my calisthenics and stretching out and all of a sudden the whole world blew up. I was blown clear off the ship and went down into the water. Since bombs and bullets and shrapnel were coming in, I swam down as deep as I could. Then I would come up to get air and go back down. Pretty quickly oil started coming across and I had to push the oil away to get air. After a while that oil was on fire. All of a sudden, I tried to get air and I couldn't and I knew I was going to die. On my way down I said, "Jesus, I'm coming to you." Just as he went a little further, he heard a voice speak to him that said, "Keith, you are very special to me. Go to the top one more time." He said that with all of his strength he began to work his way up and just as he broke the water somebody lashed onto his wrist. As I heard this testimony, I felt the Holy Spirit come through me once again and I knew.

Several days later they had the final worship service, the last one at the camp where all of the campers stand up and share testimonies and offer prayers. I didn't know that somebody could stand and speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Nobody knew about my prayers. This guy came in, stood up and started speaking to the kids. Then he turned to me and he said, "And to my beloved son, George, I have heard all of your prayers. You are a chosen vessel unto me and your voice will travel across many waters and upon many continents and upon the islands of the sea. You need to search my books diligently and all of the good books that bear testimony of me that you might be a worthy servant." I didn't understand a lot of what he was saying. Later on Seventy Keith Kyner came and said to me, "George, I don't think you understood what he was telling you today. The Lord says that if you have the desire to search the scriptures and to study like He is asking you too, you have the invitation to become a Seventy and to make those things happen." I just know that this is why I have been allowed to travel and have been to a number of countries but there are so many out there. There are 319 that I haven't visited yet. The Lord has given me the desire like I said during Sunday School class to go into the Baffin Islands. I have no idea how to get there. I've had open heart surgery and was told I would only live 3-5 years back in 2004. They were wrong so I just know if my heart is OK I have a hope and a dream. The exciting thing is that we still have some people gathering who care.

I am concerned about what is being taught in schools today because so many people are going to seminaries and different places for the dollars. The neat thing about us is that because of that Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ that's in you, you have the choice to choose to be His servant or turn your



back on Him. This is why I talk about pew warmers. Because of the decision that you are making today to follow Jesus Christ, this is a new beginning and so we just see the very top of the iceberg right now. It's that potential that lies in the bottom of each one of us to choose what we want to do. This is what gets me excited about baptismal services.

I'll share two funny things that happened in Nepal. Before you ever go in anybody's house you are supposed to leave your shoes outside. I had bought some really brand new good Red Wing boots because I was going to do a lot of hiking. Well, I left them outside that one night and the next morning I came out and here was two real beat up pair of tennis shoes. We went around looking for shoes for me to wear instead, and I came across a place that was selling these brand new Nike tennis shoes. They were the type that had lights in them and strings. They were really good shoes so I got a pair. They only cost \$10.00. They worked out pretty well. However, when we went down to baptize the people, I had three people that I was allowed to share with. As I walked out there the first one went fine but then during the second one my foot felt strange and I looked up and there went the whole top of that tennis shoe floating down the river. In a minute there went the other one so I walked out barefoot. You have to watch these \$10.00 bargains!

We were down at a beautiful, beautiful place. It looked like a movie set. It was just perfect. Here was this beautiful waterfall and a crystal-clear pool to baptize the people and there were flowers around. It was just ideal. We had ordained a young priest earlier and had worked with this priest on how to put his hand up and say the name and then how to lower them under the water. Well, in practice he did that really well. Then it came time for the baptism. It was a beautiful set up. There was a good spirit. He had gone through the motions and was ready to baptize him and take him under the water but he couldn't remember how to lower him down in the water so he just grabbed him by the back of the head and pushed him under. I said, 'Well, that would never happen in Independence.'

There was another place high in the Himalayas. We had to take and build rocks down below the stream and let it fill up for the next day so the water would be deep enough. Everything went really well. We had the baptisms done and at the end I said, 'Is there anybody else who would like to be baptized today?' Someone said, 'Yes, yes!' I don't speak Nepalese so I had to talk to Indra Thapa and he translated back and forth. This person had been to the classes and he knew what he was getting into. He was standing up here and the water was down there and I said, 'You can come on down and be baptized.' So Indra hollered down to him and the guy stripped off, ran and did a watermelon and came right down and said, 'Here I am.' It's not always done just like we do here but the people have a wonderful experience of coming to know the Lord Jesus.

This is a new beginning for these young men (Gabriel and Jacob Smith) and what an adventure it can be. There are going to be all types of distractions. There are going to be all types of false people out there telling you that this Jesus isn't around anymore. There will be the falsehoods about that there are no more miracles. You just have to be wary. This is

why it is so important that each of us need to pray on a regular basis and ask the Holy Spirit to be with us and to guide us and to keep the evil spirit away from us and from our homes and from our families. God bless you on this adventure with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Gabriel and Jacob werethen both baptized by their grandfather, Ron Smith. While Gabriel and Jacob were changing clothes, Brother Thomas shared some more.]

I didn't know I was poor when I was growing up until I left home and went to Graceland. I have to say nobody had ever talked to me about going to college before in my family since I was number 8 out of 10. When I left to go to Graceland my aunt said, 'Now, George, don't unpack too fast.' After I was here at Graceland for about a month, Dean Condit called me in one day and said, 'George, I just have to talk to you. How are things going?' At that time I was really studying hard to make a high D. He said, 'I have to let you know that there are people here who will help you out. If you will notice you did receive your approval very fast.' It was only about two weeks after I sent the admission form in and I didn't take a test.

The first time I was voted on they told me that I didn't have any of the qualifications and I have to say Amen. What happened is that I was voted not to come to Graceland and two days later some of the instructors had had an experience that I was to be there. I believe the reason that I came to Graceland was to find my wife because after 58 years I could not say there was ever a better adventure and a total support of having a good wife. Of course, my brother had told me a long time earlier when I was about twelve, 'George, a couple of things you need to know about life. Number 1) when it comes time and you are old enough to work if you are too lazy to get your body out of bed you don't need to eat. And 2) when it comes to these women, you don't marry the one you could live with. You find that one you can't live without.' About this time I started to really pray and fast about who my wife should be. One day I was going through the breakfast line and here was Jeanette down there taking the numbers. I found out later that we had both been praying and fasting that somehow we could find the right partner.

As I was going through the breakfast line one morning here was an egg carton. This egg carton said, George Thomas so I picked up that egg carton and took it over to the table and opened it up and there was an egg in there and this egg had written on it "Crack Me." So I cracked the egg open and inside was a little piece of paper all folded up. When I unfolded it here was this paper chicken and it said, 'This chick would like to invite you for a homecooked breakfast meal down in the home economics room.' That was the beginning of our dating.

Throughout all of the years she was a wonderful support. I have to admit if I wasn't out trying to serve the Lord at times, she would say to me, 'George, do you and the Lord have a problem?' We used to travel together different places but over the 58 years that we were married, I could not imagine any time that we have just had a vacation. It has always been a time to witness. Witnessing has always been an exciting time for me to step out of my comfort zone. Like



if I would see some First Nation people as we traveled across Canada sitting on a bench at a rest stop, I would go over and talk to them and say, 'Hey, what do you people call the Creator?' The young kids did not know but the older people did and they would say, Viracocha or Ketchican. They would give me their name for their particular tribe. I would say, 'You know I have a book here that I call the book of love because it is when your people, ancient people, used to talk with the Creator. When He talked with them He was concerned about what was going to happen to your people in this day.' They would get interested and I would say, 'You are having problems today. So many of your people are having problems with alcohol and drugs. Your young kids hold the highest rate of suicide in all the different areas.' The man I was talking to would say, 'Can I have one of those books.' Then I would say, 'Now the name of this book is called the Book of Mormon.' A lot of them would no longer be interested.

I would say, 'Wait a minute. That is a nickname for the name of that church the Mormons. Their full name is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Now this book was written by one of the authors that's in the book which contains many books. Just like in the Bible, the Bible could have been called the Book of Isaiah or we could have called it the Book of James or Haggai because they were all authors of the Bible. This was just one of the authors of the book. Matter of fact some of your ancestors were baptized in the Waters of Mormon. When the Holy Spirit talked or should I say Jesus Christ talked to your ancestors He was concerned about the people of this day and this is why it is coming forth today because of so many suicides and other problems.'

We gave out over 100 Book of Mormons crossing across Canada several years ago. Another trip we gave out 60 and another one 50. I have found that the Book of Mormon is one of the best witnesses in sharing about Jesus Christ. I find that 90% of the people who are against it have never read it before. It is an exciting book to share. That's why I am hoping to go back into Canada once again.

Francis Harper and I were driving in Manitoba one day and as we got up by Leaf Rapids we heard a voice speak to us that said, 'Stop the truck and go to that house.' So we stopped the truck and went over to the house and knocked on the door and a guy came out and said, 'Oh, you are here. Come on in.' So we went in and had a seat and shortly his wife came out and said, 'Oh, you are here.' Come to find out two weeks earlier they both had a dream that two white men were coming to their door and that they had a book for them. You know what book? These were Cree Indians. We had a wonderful opportunity to share Jesus Christ.

The reason why I talk about going to the Baffin Islands is because we went to a church that night in Leaf Rapids. It was one of the Pentecostal Churches. They were good people, good singers. During that service a guy came in and said, 'I need to talk to you before you leave.' The service went on and on and on until about 11 PM. He had an emergency and had to disappear and off he went. So I missed the opportunity to share with him. Several months later I was looking at a video called Transformations #2 put out by a sentinel group out of Seattle, WA. When this happened in this video here comes Jim Cayaka, the same guy that talked to me up in

Canada. I just know that I need to go there and talk to him some time.

These are some of my hopes and dreams. When it comes to you, I don't know what your hopes and dreams are with the Lord Jesus Christ in these coming years. None of us know how long we have to live but the idea is what do we get to share with the Lord Jesus while we still have the time.

Confirmation Service

Joel Loving shared: I want to speak boldly and very clearly. I wish that we had the perception of divine eyes and ears right now for what we have just witnessed is I think in the heavenly realm and looked upon by holy beings there very reverently with a lot of rejoicing. It is critically important. We saw two young men agree to the decision to give up on their own way of life to actually die to their own personal way of life and rise to a new beginning.

I want to read from the book of Alma 19:90. *Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal; that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord; therefore it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.* What we are about to witness is I would say clearly probably the greatest gift that can ever be given which I would say starts with the gift of the Holy Spirit. All of the great gifts start with the gift of the Holy Spirit. God responds to these young men in response to what they have just done and the feelings they have witnessed, as only God can with this greatest of gifts. This is what He wants. This is how He responds to what they have done with this gift through the prayers and the laying on of hands. It is symbolized out of the 3rd chapter of Matthew with these two verses. *And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and John saw, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Jesus. And lo, he heard a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him. (45-46)*

Gabriel and Jacob have heard Him and responded. Now He will respond as only God can with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Gabriel will be confirmed by Patriarch Ron Smith and High Priest Joel Loving and Jacob by Patriarch Ron Smith and Elder Steve Smith.

Gabriel Michael Smith, having been given the authority of Jesus Christ to do this, we pray to your Heavenly Father that you will be blessed this day with the gift of the Holy Spirit. We know that there will be many times in your life when you will be looking for the presence of the Lord. You have been given special gifts already to be aware of that spirit from time to time in your life. God has known you and loved you and brought you to this point in your life but you have, because of your decision to be baptized and to make this covenant, the opportunity to have His spirit to dwell within you for the rest of your life. To be able to call on that Spirit in times of trouble, in times of trial, in times of joy that you might be one who can be a blessing to your family, to those around you, to those that you come in contact with. That you might be the kind of blessing that only your Heavenly Father knows the depth and breadth and height of



that. We pray that as you continue in your life that you will be brought to understanding by the Spirit and that your eyes will be enlightened that you may see the things that God has for you to see. That you will see in others the gift that Jesus has given to them. That you will see the goodness of people and that your heart may learn to love and to overflow with that love as is fitting a servant of Christ. So, at this time we humbly and sincerely pray that the Lord will bless you and keep you and we say at this time, Gabriel, receive ye the Holy Ghost. In Jesus name. Amen.

Jacob Christopher Smith, it is with humility that we look to our Heavenly Father for the blessing that He will give this day that you might be able to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, that it might be a part of your life, that you might have the change in your life that you desire and that He desires of you, that you might grow according to His will and pleasure and that you might have the understanding of God's great love for you. At this time as we look to Him in prayer, we know that there will be many times when you will need to come to Him. We pray that you will be sensitive to that Spirit that leads you to walk humbly and to judge righteously and to treat others with respect and with goodness and to bring to pass in their lives the blessings of His Spirit as He shares them with you. We know that at this time in your life, in your young life, that there are many roads ahead and many choices to be made. We pray that in those choices that you will learn wisdom and that you will grow according to His plan. At this time, we say to you, our brother, receive ye the Holy Ghost. In Jesus name. Amen.



YOU ARE SPECIAL

Deacon Joshua Jordison

Lamoni, Iowa

November 11, 2020

As a Call to Worship, High Priest Sherman Phipps read 2 Nephi 3:31-50. *Nevertheless, the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth, O wretched man that I am; yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh. My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about because of the temptations and the sins which doth so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep. He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh. He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.*

Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the night time. And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me. And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceeding high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things; yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them. O then, if I have seen so great things; if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men, hath visited me in so much mercy, why should my heart weep, and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart, to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. Do not anger again, because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength, because of mine afflictions. Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say, O Lord, I will praise thee for ever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.



Sherman Phipps shared: We have Brother Josh as our speaker this morning. This is the first time he's stood in this particular responsibility. I pointed out to him in the back room and I hope it was appropriate that unlike Daniel in the lion's den and Samuel on the wall preaching to the Lamanites, his first time up here he has the assurance that all of the people sitting out here love him. I'm grateful for your presence and the support you have given him all through his years. As I thought about Josh being our speaker today, I



remembered the first time I had that responsibility. That was like 63 years ago and I am surprised I had another 63 years because I thought I was going to die at the time. It was pretty traumatic for me. But I was reminded as Josh was reading his scripture that he is a different guy than I was and it might not trouble him at all. He might be anxious to get up here and share with you so I'm going to let him do that. I really appreciate the fact that Josh has lived his life in the way that brings him here this morning.

My scripture today comes from Section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants 2a-2d. *Hearken, O ye people of my church, and ye elders, listen together, and hear my voice, while it is called today, and harden not your hearts; for verily I say unto you that I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the light and the life of the world; a light that shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. I came unto my own, and my own received me not; but unto as many as received me gave I power to do many miracles and to become the sons of God, and even unto them that believed on my name gave I power to obtain eternal life. And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me.*

Good morning. Being a big fan of Ronald Regan I've come to enjoy a witty comment or a little story as a way to start out speaking and break the ice. I was a bit disappointed because I didn't have anything to say this morning, that is until Sherm mentioned his first time speaking and how nervous he was. I was reminded of a testimony of George Thomas he shared with us in the Internship. In his testimony, he was in a situation where a gun was put to his head. He was trying to find the words to say to help in the situation, and he was reminded of a scripture in Matthew that says the Lord will give you the words when needed. At that, he placed his trust in the Lord, and the situation was resolved. So as I was preparing this week I was thinking of how I needed the words to say, and I kept reminding myself of that testimony. But now as I stand up here, I think it may have been a bit much to compare you all to a gun at my head.

I want to talk to you today about the idea that you are special which is something that I think we don't say too much today. At times our church has taken the idea of being the true church to the point of being self-righteous. We have more things that other churches don't have and that can elevate us to a point where we think we are better than others. That is not good and we should continue to be humble. But with that in mind, the simple fact is that you are all very special because you are here. As I look out at the congregation I don't think I see anybody who is not part of the restored gospel. There is something very special about that.

It is important to know that when I say you are special I don't mean that you are loved anymore or that you are worth any more to God than anybody else in the world. What it means is that you have a special mission and something that God is calling each of you to do. I think that the most important possession that all of us have is our Book of

Mormons. It is the plain and precious truth and it is the everlasting covenant that God has brought back into the world to save people and to bring about His lost covenant people.

The Bible is a great and important book. It contains the creation account, many important prophecies, and tells of Christ's ministry directly from His life. The Bible has brought many to a knowledge of Christ. There are many testimonies of Jews that open up the first page of the New Testament and read the lineage and see that Jesus was a Jew. They didn't know that. There's a website "One for Israel" that has tons of these testimonies. It is said over and over again on this website. They didn't know that Jesus was a Jew, they just thought that he was some Christian figure. The Bible is the book that proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew and is very important in our lives. But I have had a change of mind recently. A while back I listened to a radio sermon from Evan Fry titled 'Our Standard of Belief.' In it, he shared how the RLDS Saints hold the Bible as their standard of faith. That it is the foundational scripture. I kept that phrase, 'standard of belief' with me for a while. When discussing with my friend and her friend about our church I used it. When I was in the Internship, and we were learning about speaking to evangelicals, I continued to keep that "standard of belief" in my mind, knowing that many think Book of Mormon beliefs don't believe in the Bible. But as I have continued to dive into the Book of Moron, I now know that it is our 'standard of belief.' It is not just another set of scriptures, but a book of most vital importance, that should never be forgotten. That last bit of that scripture in the 45th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants says the Book of Mormon is *to be a standard for my people and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me.* That is what makes you special. You are all messengers to others of this book.

Christ brought the Book of Mormon to the Gentiles not to be an end, not so that we could have the church and we could be right and others could know that we are right, but to start collecting His people. From the 9th chapter of 3rd Nephi 87-88, 92 we read . . . for verily I say unto you, that when these things which I declare unto you, and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, which shall be given unto you of the Father, shall be made known unto the Gentiles, That they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be scattered by them (87-88); For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause, that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel (92). That right there is the true doctrine, to come unto the Father and be baptized in His name. He says that anything more than this is not of Him. That's the whole thing. From the beginning of the Book of Mormon to the very end of it that's the center point. And us being in Church have the special task of sharing the true doctrine of Christ and the salvation it brings by being witnesses of Christ, witnesses of the Book of Mormon, and



witnesses of the church. That's what makes you special. And to add even greater things is that we're living in a very special time. I think very shortly we'll see many things come to pass where the remnant of the House of Israel will come to the knowledge of Jesus.

It's beginning to happen now with the Jews now but we still haven't seen the Native Americans come to a knowledge as a whole. When the Book of Mormon is sent in power to them, they will love it. We often speak about building Zion, as though when we do things together in love will end up with it here. But Zion will come when the covenants with the house of Israel are fulfilled. When the message of the Book of Mormon, the message of Christ, are brought to the remnant. When this message comes to them they're going to be so filled with the love of Christ and the happiness that they aren't forgotten and that there was a plan laid out from the very beginning for them that they're going to come and then Zion will be built. And how do the descendants of the Lamanites come to this knowledge? By you. In the 7th chapter of 3rd Nephi verse 28. *That these sayings which ye shall write, shall be kept, and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, that through the fullness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth, because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer.*

In the Book of Mormon class which Jason and I had with the Graceland campus minister and other students, we got into talking a little bit about some doctrines and purposes of the Book of Mormon. The campus minister and other students have a little different view than us. To them the Book of Mormon is not a historic record it's just inspired writing. The Book of Mormon talks about the remnant being scattered by the hand of the Gentiles as they come forth upon this land, and that is there because Joseph Smith grew up in the 1800s and the Native Americans were being afflicted. It's culture seeping into the writing. It's not prophecy, it's just Joseph Smith writing about stuff happening in his day.

It is not nice to think of any people being pushed from their homes and afflicted. And things like that should not be forgotten. And people today are not at fault for things their great great great grandparents did. Yet we have an understanding of those events. Nephi saw and prophesied of his remnant falling away more than 1000 years after Him, and knew that because they fell away, that their future generations would be afflicted. Yet we know as Nephi did too, that the Lord would preserve a portion of them to bring about the fulfilling of the covenant which He had made with them and their fathers. And also that the Gentiles would be given the true and precious gospel to return unto them. And it is by our testimonies and witnessing that we can assist the Lord in this work. That is why we are so special. Every single day when you wake up in the morning it's important for you to say, 'Lord, this is your day. What would you have me do?' Probably in our day-to-day lives, we won't have major experiences. I probably won't be sent to Canada and back for a weekend or something. I don't think that that's what the Lord wants me to do. The thing is you are opening yourselves up.

Louise Clark Gregson and Cheryl Phipps both had experiences that brought them into the church. They didn't

just come into the church for the church's sake. They found Christ and the true testimony of the gospel. I think that we all need to really be focused and every day be searching for the testimony that we have within ourselves. We can't rely on the testimonies of others. Sure they build us up and encourage us. I love reading testimonies of people past and present. But reading about somebody else's experiences is not what gives me the ability to witness to people. What does give me the ability is the testimony that I have of my life. My testimony is not one thing, but it is like a gold vein that runs through the rock. My whole life is a testimony. Our personnel testimonies give us the ability to witness to others.

I see that we are singing the hymn "Unto God Who Knows Our Every Weakness" later. I think that that is of the Lord because this is one of my favorite hymns, and I've often been thinking that it speaks to us today. When Isabel and I did the Book of Mormon internship I was the one who suggested this hymn. I suggested this hymn for our restoration pick because I thought it spoke to us. I was kind of forceful in saying we should sing this hymn as I knew that it was perfect for the occasion.

The hymn was written in 1921 in Lamoni by a young man named Albert McCullough. He had a broken leg and at this time there was a Zion's Builder meeting going on in the Old Brick Church. It was a big event and Fred M. Smith was going to be there. Because of his broken leg, Albert couldn't attend so a group of youth came over to his house and one of them brought a guitar and ukulele and played the tune "Aloha 'Oe." When they left Albert wrote lyrics to the tune and by doing so created one of the most beloved hymns of the RLDS. And I believe that they are speaking directly to us today.

*Unto God, who knows our every weakness,
With faith, we lift our hearts in prayer,
Asking in humility and meekness,
For his love, his direction, and his care.*

God knows every bit of you. He knows every weakness, every strength, how many hairs you have on your head, or how many hairs you are losing. I think when we come to God we come to Him as a child and we come to Him acknowledging our weaknesses and asking in faith that He will be with us. Our lives are busy. We have work, we have school, we have things that happen. In these last three weeks that I've been trying to prepare I have been constantly thinking about how often we say we are too busy to do something. "I would try to do this but I am busy." If you think about it I had exams to prepare for a couple of weeks ago and I was busy and I needed to study for those but the issue was that this week I also was busy and then next week I am also going to be really busy and probably the next week I'll also be busy. It's not going to ever relent. My only hope is when Christ comes we might have some rest but we still have a purpose in life that we cannot forget and Christ still has to be our focus every single day and while I struggled to prepare there were some times where I had to say, 'You know what. School is not important right now. I have to do this.' This is why we pray in meekness and humility for His direction and His care and His love.



When we were going to do the internship we had a Covid scare and I was a little bit worried about where we were going to be and that maybe we weren't going to be able to have the internship. I prayed for a couple of days that the Lord would open up the path and provide the way even though I was panicked and couldn't see the way out of it. I knew that the Lord would direct us and He did, and we were blessed by it. That goes for your lives. When you are struggling, when you have difficulties, when you have all these things that have to come before Christ, it's time to pray that He will open up a pathway and allow you to come unto Him because Christ is what's going to get you through this life.

*Though the task be great that lies before us,
We trust in One divinely strong,
Knowing well at last we'll be victorious;
We will pray that the time will not be long.*

We have a commission. This will be one of the daily scriptures that I will email out in a few days. It's somewhere in first or second Nephi. It says that all of the Lord's people are to preach repentance. This is another thing that I had difficulty with during the Graceland Book of Mormon study. We were discussing in one of our last meetings and they asked how you actually told someone to repent. How do you preach that? I said well we have commandments of God and we have things that were set out and when you don't follow those things you sin. It's important to ask in humility for repentance and to understand that you need to move from those things. At that response, they looked at me like I was a small child coming up with some silly idea. They weren't going to put me down, but what I said was silly. And that is okay. They can believe what they want to. But you and I know better. You are all here for a purpose and you are all here in this church, so you all have a duty to perform. The first thing is to show people the love of Christ and also to be preaching repentance because we are living in a world right now that is not good and it probably will not get better. Though the Lord may bless us at times, the entirety of the world probably will not go well. Who knows what we will be doing in 5 years? But the task that lies before us is going to happen.

In the second section of the Doctrine and Covenants the first thing the Lord says, and this is talking about when the 116 pages were given away. This is what Christ says, *The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God, cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught, for God doth not walk in crooked paths; neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; therefore his paths are straight and his course is one eternal round.* (1a-c) The things that He has said will come to pass. While we are special and have many blessings, revelations, and truths if you really truthfully decide not to listen to those things that are not going to stop God in His path and it's going to come down to your condemnation. Of course, I am not saying that looking at any of you. I think you are all going to respond to His work. I told Joel when he first asked me what I was going to preach about that I was going to preach about hell and damnation

because that's my go-to topic. I was thinking he was going to say, 'Well maybe not.' Instead, he replied 'Well, there are eternal consequences so that's fine.' So I got support on that topic. We know that Christ is going to be victorious and the things that we have laid before us will come to pass. Although men may have many things that go against the counsel of God, judgment will fall and God will move ahead with His work. Judgment and wrath are very real things.

*Lord, accept the humble consecration
Of our lives, our talents to thy cause,
Till thy word is preached in every nation
And each one has a knowledge of thy laws.*

So we have a purpose. We have a job. We have something that we need to be witnessing and talking to others about and proclaiming. We had that opportunity specifically on September 22nd when we were supposed to bring our Book of Mormon to work and/or school. It turns out for me that that was the day that all my classes went on Zoom. But what was important is that we took a day to focus on sharing the message. In our busy lives we need to seek out Christ saying, 'Lord, all I have to offer you is my life.' Though I personally am pretty weak and struggle with many things I think what would scare me the most would be going up to doors and knocking and talking to random people. That would panic me but we have to give our lives completely to Christ and be ready for what he calls us to do. No matter what it is. We have to be strong in our own personal testimonies and build each other up and listen for when God calls us to preach to the nations.

On a podcast that I have been listening to the hosts mentioned that at prayer services there is often a list of physical needs to pray about, something that is important to do. When I am sick I'm usually on my knees praying for healing. But the thing is all those physical things will end at some point. However, with every single physical need, we probably have a spiritual need that is not being met and that's what we really also need to be focusing on. I am not suggesting that you stop praying for physical blessings and healings. I know there are many people who have strong difficulties and many issues but the thing is how often do we just come to prayer service and say, 'I'm struggling spiritually with this issue or this problem and I need help.' Because that is what is really important, it's our spiritual selves that go on to the next life. In this life, we deal with our weak selves, and because of that, we need to really be focused on Christ and helping to assist the work to go forward.

I think sometimes we have focused a little bit too heavily on Zion. Fred M. was pretty focused on Zion as you can tell by looking at his revelations and what he pushed for. Zion is important to think about. It's a real place that is going to be established. It's good that many want to help in the establishment of Zion. Yet the thing is it's the knowledge of Christ and the knowledge of the gospel that really needs to go forward because that lays the foundation for Zion to be built. When you look around you realize how many people profess to be Christians yet in their lives they don't really show it. It's sad and I know people like this and I'm sure you



do as well. If someone asked about these people, I can assume that the reply would be that there are very good people. But I pose the question to you all, did God call you to be good or did he call you to be righteous? We don't know where they're going to go or what's going to happen in their lives but it's really, really important that we are all focused on the things of Christ and the gospel and the truth in it. This is again why the Book of Mormon will become a standard in the last days. The Book of Mormon and the Bible will come together but it's going to be the Book of Mormon that is going to be proven true. It will be made known that Christ did come down to His lost sheep, that the covenants have not been forgotten, and that His gospel which was filled with plain and precious truths were distorted by the hand of men. Even to this day people still fight about the Bible but if you open up the Book of Mormon from the first to the last page everything is clear and builds upon each other. You can just reference it constantly because each person: Nephi, Alma, Mosiah, Mormon, and Moroni say the same things because it's the plain and precious truths that they wrote knowing it would come to their remnant and also to us. This is what needs to go forth. It is the gospel that is going to go forth. So *in these latter days, with songs of praise* (As a musician you can never have enough music. Always be singing.) *we all must help to spread the gospel story. Our every deed from sin be freed until Zion be redeemed.*

That's the commission for us all. Spreading the gospel story. It can be hard in this day and age as a lot of us are on Zoom. You have such a lower chance of catching the virus by staying home, but how do you truly and effectively witness people at home. But this won't last and there may come a time where the Lord says, 'Look I am going to protect you. We need to get moving.' I have personally not been told that or had anybody else tell me that but the virus is going to end and there needs to come a time when we're ready to go and preach the gospel, and to preach Christ, and to preach the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Not to prove that we were right or that Joseph Smith was a prophet but to preach of the plain and precious truths that Christ gave us and to bring others to salvation. Doing everything that we can to assist Christ in His work.

So you are all very special. You are not worth more than your neighbor but Christ is calling each and every one of you right now. What are you going to do for Him today? How are you going to serve Him today? How are you going to serve Him tomorrow? How are you going to serve Him this month and this year? Whatever happens in the world happens. We are to be a light unto the people, to our friends, and to our families, to be praying constantly for them. We all have difficulties. Nephi himself was a weak man and he had many temptations but he was constantly striving to be released from those sins and to find strength in the Lord. We all need to be doing that daily because none of us are perfect but it's time to realize that there's a work that needs to be done and God is calling us. So be a light unto the people and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in all that you do. I pray that the Lord will be with each and every one of you.



ALMA SPEAKS TO OUR DAY

Priest Jim Barber
Bethany, Missouri
November 15, 2020

I am going to talk about Alma in the Book of Mormon this morning. I try to read the Book of Mormon about every morning. I've read it several times but it seems like every time I read it I keep finding things I either didn't remember or have forgotten. Reading the Book of Mormon kind of sparks my mind to what I wanted to talk about this morning. Mosiah was the last king in the Book of Mormon and nobody wanted to take over the kingship after Mosiah died and so they set up the reign of the Judges and they appointed Alma to be the Chief Judge over all of them. But he noticed after a few years (it's says in the 8th year) that a lot of the people were falling away from the teachings of God and they were puffed up and proud. They worshiped money more than they worshiped God and they were just not becoming a very good people so Alma decided that he needed to do something about it. He decided that he would give the judgeship to another man and then he would go out and preach to the people.

The 2nd chapter of Alma verses 23-27 says, *And he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force, according to*



the wickedness and the crimes of the people. Now this man's name was Nephiah, and he was appointed chief judge; and he sat in the judgment seat, to judge and to govern the people. Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment seat unto Nephiah: And this he did, that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, And that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness, and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them, save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. As I read this I compared it to what the world is like today. We seem to have a lot of people who worship material things more than God and have strayed away from following God's commandments.

Alma wanted to do something about this so in Chapter 3:1 it talks about him going into Zarahemla. Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land. Now the things that he was telling them was that they were lifted up in pride. They didn't take care of the poor people, they thought only of themselves. In verses 54-56 it says, *And again I say unto you, Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions? Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent, or he can not be saved; Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it.* So he preached that they needed to be repentant. I'm reminded too that this is what we are supposed to do is to cry nothing but repentance unto this my people. That's what he was trying to do. In verses 77-80 he said *And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you, They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days, that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.*

I think the song that Tony picked this morning verifies this also that we need to be seeking for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives to lift us up. It says also, *And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying, Go forth and say unto this people, Repent, for except ye repent, ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of heaven.* (Alma 3:89) *And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, Can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; Yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel, and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches; Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another.* It goes on to say they are ignoring the poor and needy.

Verses 103-106 says *For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep, doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock, doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the*

last, if he can, he will destroy him. And now I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice, he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; And he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed. And after he ministered to the people there a lot of them begin to repent of their sins and were baptized. Alma set up the church in the city of Zarahemla and established many churches.

In Alma 4:1-4 it says *And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an end of speaking unto the people of the church, which was established in the city of Zarahemla, he ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church. And it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church who repented of their sins, were baptized unto repentance, and were received into the church. And it also came to pass that whosoever did belong to the church, that did not repent of their wickedness, and humble themselves before God; I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out, that their names were not numbered among those of the righteous; and thus they began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla.*

Alma didn't stop there. After he got things in order in Zarahemla he went on to another city, the city of Gideon and he did the same thing there. *Behold my beloved brethren, seeing that I have been permitted to come unto you, therefore I attempt to address you in my language; Yea, by my own mouth, seeing that it is the first time that I have spoken unto you by the words of my mouth, I having been wholly confined to the judgment seat, having had much business that I could not come unto you.* (Alma 5:1-2) So he wanted to talk to the people there also and he said the same things. In Alma 5:17-18 it says, *But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying, Repent ye, repent ye and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight: For behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.* He had much success here too and he told the people about the gospel of Christ and about the plan of salvation. In 5:40-41 it says, *Asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive, And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.* So he established churches there also and the people became a better people, following the commandments of God.

Then he also went into the land of Melek on the west of the river Sidon and he began to teach the people there throughout all the land. *And they were baptized throughout all the land, so that when he had finished his work at Melek, he departed thence, and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah.* (Alma 6:7) Now things looked a little bit different in the city of Ammonihah. *Now Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah; therefore they would not hearken unto the words of Alma. Nevertheless Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer; that he would pour out*



his Spirit upon the people who were in the city: that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance. (Alma 6:10-11)

But the people of Ammonihah rejected him and they said in verses 13-15 *And we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions. And now we know that because we are not of thy church, we know that thou hast no power over us; And thou hast delivered up the judgment seat unto Nephiah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us.* They knew that he had given up the judgment seat and so they said you are not judge over us and we are not going to listen to you and they cast him out. Alma was very weighed down. He was very sorrowful because of the things that were happening there and he was in much tribulation and anguish because of these things so he left the city of Ammonihah but while he was on his way . . . *behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying, Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice: For thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou received thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you; and behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent, the Lord God will destroy them.* (18-21)

Now this would be quite a challenge when you had been thrown out of the city and the people were not listening to you and then this angel comes and says you need to get back there but Alma was joyful because he had a second chance to preach to the people. I know sometimes we get discouraged. We try to share the gospel with people and they kind of turn their backs against us and we kind of walk off and become discouraged. That's Satan's way of getting us to not do what we should be doing which makes us discouraged. We need to lift up our hearts and voices and go back and try to do God's will. God will take care of us if we will do these things. I think there is a lot of that going on today. It's not so much that we're persecuted as Saints but there is so much indifference. People just don't seem to care. If you want to believe in God that's your right but leave us alone. Sometimes that is even worse than being persecuted.

So he went back to Ammonihah *And he entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah. And as he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man, Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat? And the man said unto him, I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision, Thou shalt receive.* (24-26) Now this man's name was Amulek and an angel had come to him and showed him a vision and said that he needed to take care of this man that he was to meet. So Amulek took Alma home and fed him and took care of him. In verses 37-39 of chapter 6 it says, *And the word came to Alma, saying, Go; and also say unto my servant Amulek, Go forth and prophesy unto this people, saying, Repent ye, for thus saith the Lord, Except ye repent, I will visit this people in mine anger; yea, and I will not turn my fierce anger away. And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people to declare the words of God unto them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost; And they had*

power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither were it possible that any man could slay them.

So Alma went out talking again to the people and in chapter 7 verse 6 it says *And they said, Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?* Then Alma said, *Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying, that inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said, that inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments, ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.* (Alma 7:15-16) We've always talked about the promise that God gave the people in this land, the Promised Land, that as long as they obeyed God's commandments they would prosper but when they didn't then they would be cast off. I think the same thing is happening today. We are ignoring God. We're just letting things go by. We're letting things creep in that keep us further away from God.

Amulek also went in and was prophesying of the same things. I think it was interesting as I read that in Chapter 8 verse 10 *As I was journeying to see a very near kindred, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto me, and said, Amulek, (Now this was back when Amulek met the angel and the angel told him what to do.) return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man, who is a chosen man of God; For he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people, and he is an hungered, and thou shalt receive him into thy house and feed him, and he shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house.* So God prepared a way for Alma to come back in to this land. He spoke to Amulek and told him what he was supposed to do. If we go on to verse 18 it says *And now when Amulek had spoken these words, the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were accused, and also of the things which were to come, according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.* As I thought about that I thought about how the people had first said to Alma, why would God just send one witness so God sent two. He did the same thing for us. We have the Book of Mormon. It is a second witness that Jesus is the Son of God.

I still remember George Knotts saying that he thought that the Book of Mormon was the best kept secret ever. We don't share the Book of Mormon the way we should. We should be sharing this book all the time and telling people about it. What it actually is is the word of God and it's a second witness that Jesus is the Son of God and we need to be telling people this.

There is one thing that I definitely wanted to share today. It is talking about the judges and in verses 21-23 it says, *Now it was those men who sought to destroy them, who were lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials, or at the trials of the crimes of the people, before the Judges. Now these lawyers were learned in all the arts and cunning of the people; and this was to enable them that they might be skillful in their profession. And it came to pass that they began to question Amulek, that thereby they might make him cross his words, or contradict the words which he should*



speak. (21-23) But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them, O ye wicked and perverse generation; ye lawyers and hypocrites; for ye are laying the foundations of the devil; For ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God; ye are laying plans to pervert the ways of the righteous, and to bring down the wrath of God upon your heads, even to the utter destruction of this people. (25-26)

Just stop and think about the judges that we have now who have okayed abortion, okayed gay rights and same sex marriage. You want to blame the judges but then you stop and think, is it really the judges or are they just giving the people what they want? There are so many people that are out demonstrating for gay rights or abortion or whatever, for legalizing drugs. What are we doing? Are we out proclaiming God's word? Are we out doing the things that we need to be doing? We need more Almas and we need more Amuleks. We need to cry unto the people that they need to repent. Otherwise we are going to be destroyed if we don't.

One of the main judges was a man named Zeezrom. He was the most cunning among all of them. *Now Zeezrom was a man who was expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good; therefore he said unto Amulek, Will ye answer the questions which I shall put unto you? And Amulek said unto him, Yea, I will if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord. (68-69)* Now the first thing that Zeezrom said unto Amulek was *Behold here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a supreme being. (70)* That was a lot of money and Zeezrom wanted to tempt him with money because that's what the people there worshiped so he thought that if he would offer Amulek money that he would deny Christ. But Amulek said *O thou child of hell, why tempt ye me? Knowest thou that the righteous yieldeth to no such temptations? (71-72)* And then Amulek said *Believest thou that there is no God? I say unto you, Nay; thou knowest that there is a God, but thou lovest that lucre more than him. (73-74)* Amulek knew that Zeezrom knew that there was a God but Zeezrom was rebelling against Him and he loved the money more than he loved God. Amulek told Zeezrom that he had lied to the people and he had lied to God.

And Zeezrom said unto him, Thou sayest there is a true and living God? And Amulek said, Yea, there is a true and a living God. Now Zeezrom said, Is there more than one God? And he answereth, No. Now Zeezrom said unto him again, How knowest thou these things? And he said, An angel hath made them known unto me. And Zeezrom said again, Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God? (79-85) Isn't Zeezrom actually admitting that he knows there is going to be somebody coming? Isn't he actually saying that it is the Son of God? Amulek says "Yea" but then Zeezrom says, *Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him, I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word. (87-88)* Then Zeezrom said, 'Well you are commanding God to do these things.' He tried to trick him into saying that this wasn't right but then Amulek had to go and say that God could not save them in their sins but he would save them from their sins if they

would repent but they had to take that first step. They had to repent.

Then Alma and Amulek both got together and they were talking with Zeezrom. Alma knew that Zeezrom was very troubled and he began to shake and to tremble because he knew that the words they were speaking were true. Even in his misery Zeezrom tried to convince the people that they needed to believe Alma and Amulek but they turned against Zeezrom and they cast him out. During this time Alma and Amulek actually converted a few people but these people were cast out too and men were sent to cast stones at them. Then they took the wives and children and cast them into the fire along with their records. Amulek told Alma that they needed to do something to save these people but Alma said that they could not because it was God's will. He knew that those people that were being stoned and killed would have an eternal reward. Sometimes we think about death but there are a lot of things that are worse than death. If you deny Christ then that is a lot worse but if you allow Christ to enter into your heart and not deny Him, your reward will be great in the next life. Life goes on. It doesn't end with death. We have to choose wisely in this life so that we will have life everlasting with God.

Then Alma and Amulek were thrown into prison. A lot of people would go into the prison and mock them and beat them. *And it came to pass after they had thus suffered for many days – and it was on the twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi – That the chief judge over the Land of Ammonihah, and many of their teachers and their lawyers, went in unto the prison where Alma and Amulek were bound with cords; And the chief judge stood before them and smote them again and saith unto them: If ye have the power of God, deliver yourselves from these bands; And then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people, according to your words. And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them, saying the same words, even until the last; And when the last had spoken unto them, the power of God was with Alma and Amulek and they arose and stood upon their feet; And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord! Give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they brake the cords with which they were bound; And when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them. (Alma 10:73-77)*

And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison and they were not hurt, for the Lord had granted unto them power according to their faith which was in Christ; And they straightway came forth out of the prison and they were loosed from their bands. And the prison had fallen to the earth, And every soul which was within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, were slain; And they straightway came forth into the city. (81-83)

And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek were commanded to depart out of that land; And they departed and came out even into the Land of Sidom; And behold, there they found all the people which had departed out of the Land of Ammonihah, who had been cast out and stoned because they believed in the words of Alma; And they related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children,



And also concerning themselves and of their power of deliverance. (86-88) Zeezrom was also in the Land of Sidom and he was very sick. He was burning with fever and he thought that Alma and Amulek probably had been slain but then in verse 91 it says, *Now when he heard that Alma and Amulek were in the Land of Sidom, his heart began to take courage, And he sent a message immediately unto them, desiring them to come unto him.* So Alma and Amulek went to Zeezrom. *And when he saw them, he stretched forth his hand and besought them that they would heal him. And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, taking him by the hand: Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation? And he answered and said: Yea, I believe all the words that thou has taught. And Alma saith: If thou believest in the redemption of Christ, thou canst be healed. And he saith: Yea, I believe according to thy words.* (94-98) *And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; And he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.* (102) *But as to the people that were in the Land of Ammonihah, they yet remained a hard-hearted and a stiff-necked people; And they repented not of their sins, ascribing all the power of Alma and Amulek to the devil, For they were of the profession of Nehor and did not believe in the repentance of their sins.* (105-106) Even though it sounds like Alma and Amulek failed there they didn't really because a lot of the people that believed on their words left Ammonihah. Yes the people of Ammonihah were very wicked people and it goes on further and says that the people of Ammonihah were eventually destroyed.

I think it is well that we remember the things that are in the Book of Mormon and we need to relate them to what is going on today. Christ is still in charge. If you obey His commandments and ask for the Holy Spirit to become a part of your life and be filled with the Holy Ghost, you can do many wonderful things if you will just believe on Him and go out in faith.



GOD IS IN CONTROL

Elder Tony Crandell

Lamoni, Iowa

December 27, 2020

You know, Christmas for most folks is a fun and joyous day and season. For other folks it is not so joyous because of things that have happened near or during the past Christmas seasons.

For kids, it is always a fun time. I have a short 2 ½ minute video I want to show. It was produced by the young adults at Southland Christian Church who are acting out the Christmas story as told by members of the very young



Sunday School class. What you will see is the young adults of the church as actors, lip-synching the story that the children are telling. It is the young adult actors you will be seeing, but it will be the children's voices you will be hearing. I show this for two reasons (1) is to show their willingness and joy to tell the story, and (2) to show you that the time our Sunday School teachers spend with them reading the biblical stories is not a waste of time. The children remember the stories albeit they may not remember all the facts absolutely correctly. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suowe2czxcA>

I have taken my scripture for today from Romans 8:24-28. *For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then with patience we do wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

Well, how was your Christmas? A couple of days ago, I went into Casey's to pay for a pizza and as I was in line to pay, I heard another person ask the cashier: "Are you ready for Christmas?" Her response was "I will be SO GLAD when Christmas is over!" You know I find that a little sad. The hustle and bustle of getting ready the traditional way we celebrate Christmas many times causes people to be glad it is over. But the relief for many is Christmas 2020 is over! "It



is Over big time!” “Over, and history!” Again, this year many people if not most will have celebrated Christmas without celebrating Christ. Perhaps, they heard about the birth of Jesus in a carol in a Christmas song and then they just ignored it or forgot about it.

There is an online story that a woman was complaining to her friend that she could not find any good Christmas cards to send her friends. “They are all so boring! What’s Jesus got to do with Christmas anyway?”

The birth of Jesus, for far too many folks, is just a story, like Santa Claus, or the Grinch that stole Christmas. I hope your Christmas included Christ this year. I hope you spent time thinking about the birth of our savior. I hope you took the opportunity to speak to family and friends about the real reason for the season.

For many people Christmas is more about having an excuse for possessing excess; that is giving each other expensive gifts beyond their true “just wants and needs” rather than about an opportunity to hear the truth about who Jesus was and is.

The merchants really like Christmas and Easter holidays. It’s the 27th of December today, but Menards is already selling Easter eggs, the little yellow marshmallow peeps. I saw an advertisement on the internet yesterday offering easy payment plans already for 2022 Christmas vacations.

Christmas comes and Christmas goes, and life moves quickly on. Perhaps, even in your own home, you have already left Christmas behind. Maybe the tree is still up, but it’s empty underneath. Maybe you had family visiting, but they have already left for their own homes. Perhaps all that’s left of your Christmas turkey is a bare skeleton or a ham bone for soup later in the week, or maybe you are planning to have the last of the turkey or ham leftovers for lunch today. All the preparation, all the excitement, AND all the expense and now it’s all over for another year. How did Christmas 2020 feel to you? Maybe your Christmas wasn’t all you expected. Now that Christmas is over, maybe the excitement has passed, and life is already returning to some kind of normal, whatever “normal” might be in your life!

I wonder if that first Christmas, Mary and Joseph were hoping for life to return to normal too. If you think your Christmas was busy it was nothing compared to that first Christmas. I want you to think back to the first Christmas. It was a very difficult time for Mary and Joseph. The long journey to Bethlehem, was not for a nice little “winter getaway,” but rather a journey so they could go and pay their taxes. A journey like that was not easy at the best of times, but when you are nine months pregnant, either walking or in a cart or on the back of a donkey it’s a journey worse than us males can imagine.

Then arriving in Bethlehem, on what seemed to be the busiest day of the year because there were no rooms available anywhere. This was centuries before the invention of the telephone - so Joseph could not call ahead to book a room. There was no internet with sites like Trip Advisor or Hotel Finder.com (a room booking app). Even if Hotel.com existed at the time, the best it would have been able to offer them was to share a smelly old stable complete with straw and animals, then giving birth in a stable, no doctor, no

midwife, and no anesthetic.

The first Christmas - the birth of Jesus, is the most important event in all of history, an event that changed our world’s relationship with God. What had the prophets said? “They shall call Him Immanuel which means God WITH us.”

Then the first ever unexpected Christmas guests arrive - the shepherds turn up. Their day had been far from normal too - angels appearing and announcing the birth of Jesus, bidding the shepherds to go off to see for themselves.

Often, when we see the little nativity pictures the wise men are there at the same time, but the truth is, they didn’t see Jesus until He was nearly two years old. The wise men – tradition calls them the magi – came from the east and worshipped Jesus, bringing gifts with them. But this is when things take a turn for the worse.

The Gospel of Matthew records the difficulties that happened after that first Christmas. The normal life that Mary and Joseph had perhaps been hoping for was not to be. Matthew records the tears and the fears, the pain and the problems. It’s not a pretty part of the Christmas story and you won’t find it on a Christmas card or sung about in a Christmas carol. Most churches spend weeks before Christmas preaching about the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. There are many accounts about what Mary and Joseph went through prior to His birth but sermons about what happened to Mary & Joseph after Christmas are pretty rare. Actually, sermons about Joseph are preached even less if ever. But, as a part of the Christmas Story, Joseph plays an important role. Joseph was the person who would become Jesus stepfather. A pretty important role, but do you realize that to my knowledge, the Bible doesn’t record/quote anything that Joseph ever said? Joseph is easily ignored in the Christmas Story. The emphasis is always on Jesus, Mary, the shepherds, the wise men. But after that first Christmas, life would never be the same for Mary AND Joseph.

Thankfully the Gospel of Matthew gives us a lot more detail about what happened to Joseph, Mary and Jesus in Matthew 2:13-23. Let’s look at verse 13-15: After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”

When the wisemen visited Mary and Joseph, they had presented them with three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Shortly after the wisemen leave, Mary and Joseph go to sleep, and Joseph has a dream. Remember this isn’t the first dream that Joseph has had. The first dream was when an angel appeared to Mary and told her she would have a child; God also spoke to Joseph in a dream. However, in this dream, an angel of the Lord tells Joseph to flee to Egypt, because Herod is going to try to kill Jesus.

There are several things we learn here: JOSEPH WAS OBEDIENT TO GOD. He didn’t waste any time. He didn’t wait until morning. He got them packed that night and headed out to Egypt. In the middle of the night, God said



“Get up and go!” Joseph didn’t argue with God. He didn’t ask God for “Plan B.” He didn’t wait to try to figure it all out. He just OBEYED. GOD PROVIDED. When God called, He provided for the trip to Egypt. God had provided financially for Joseph, Mary and Jesus with the gift of gold the wise men brought to them. Herod was furious when he realized that the wisemen had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under. Mary, Joseph and Jesus left just at the right time.

Here is an Interesting fact - The land that had once ENSLAVED the Jews, God now used to PROTECT His people. Herod was a mean, vicious person. You say “how can he have been that mean and vicious? History has a lot to say about him. Caesar Augustus was quoted as saying that it would be better to be King Herod’s pig than his son. Pigs were protected by law, Herod’s family weren’t. King Herod had already killed two of his own sons. He had them strangled. He also killed one of his 10 wives, his favorite wife, because he thought that she had been unfaithful to him (she wasn’t!). Herod killed his 18-year-old brother-in-law, because the Jews liked him better than they liked Herod. Herod also killed his favorite wives’ grandfather, and her 80-year-old uncle, who had once saved Herod’s life. Herod also killed his own uncle and his mother-in-law. Herod was the sort of person that had no hesitation or compunction in ordering all of the male babies in Bethlehem to be killed.

GOD’S PERFECT PLAN. God plan is always perfect. A situation can never occur that brings surprise to God. God does not need to have a plan B. The prophet Hosea wrote that God’s son would be called out of Egypt in Hosea 11:1. After Herod’s death, Joseph has another “dream,” and the angel speaks to him and again no questions, no arguing, no problem.

Joseph, Mary and Jesus head to Nazareth. God had protected them. Luke went into great detail about important events in the life of Jesus and the early church in both the book of Luke and the book of Acts. Yet in his Gospel in Luke 2:39-40 he sums up the 12 years after the first Christmas like this: [Luke 2:39-40](#). *And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

This next song is called *Between 12 and 33* written and sung by a family group called The McKamey’s. [Between Twelve And Thirty-Three - YouTube](#)

There are 3 things I want us to take away from this “After Christmas Story”?

1 - The Safest Place to Be, Is Where God Leads You.

-The wisemen followed a star, and it led them to the Christ-child.

-The wisemen followed God’s instructions in a dream, and they escaped Herod’s wrath.

-Joseph followed the angel’s instructions in a dream and escaped to Egypt.

-Joseph followed God’s instruction in a dream and went to Nazareth when it was safe.

The safest place you can be, is in the center of God’s

will. Whatever path you take in life, God knows where it will lead. But how much better it would be to follow the path that He leads you down.

Have you ever considered that being in this place at this time is part of God’s plan for you? Think about that. I have. I have always had a compelling feeling that I should come to the Lamoni area. In 1960, Dad was Pastor at Perry, Iowa and one day after church it was impressed upon me that I should go to Lamoni. Sandra and I came in 1965.

How about you? Have you considered why you are here in this place at this time? Did you come feeling a purpose or did you come by chance? Have you found your purpose yet?

2.- A Christian is not exempt from trouble. The Christmas story has difficulty and suffering:

- The wise men avoiding the wrath of Herod.

- Mary & Joseph fleeing for their life.

- Multitudes of innocent babies killed by a mad King. Think about that. A whole generation in that area was lost.

But God leads us through our problems and situations. He provides the way through and gives us the strength we need. He comforts us. He is always with us. We need to trust Him to be with us as we follow the path set before us, even in these perilous times with the impact of Covid-19 and the unsettling political environment.

3. God Is in Control. We can always feel safe when we are living in God’s will. That does not mean that our lives will be trouble free or that bad things won’t happen to us. Again, God is in control. Everything that happened in the Christmas story and after Christmas was known and reacted to by God. He is in the Christmas story every step of the way. And He is in our lives. If we let Him, He will also be in our story every step of our way. God is in control.

Yes, Christmas is over. My hope for you is that there will be some lingering good memories from Christmas 2020.

The beginning of a new year starts this Friday. It is an opportunity to look ahead and move forward. History is behind us, even yesterday is behind us. There is not one thing we can change about it. We can’t spend even one second looking back, looking back at what might have been. We now need to only look forward at what might yet be. We need now to look forward with hope, with expectations, with a plan to live a joyous and witnessing life.

God is in control. And if we ask Him and allow Him, He is waiting for us to only lift our eyes to the horizon and move forward. God can guide us left or right, but like a car, we must be moving forward to make any progress.

This song from a Gaither South Africa Christmas video will convey the joy and excitement of Christmas. [Kim Hopper - Fear Not \(Live\) - Bing video.](#)





Spring Gathering of the Saints

Waldo Restoration Branch - April 9 & 10

The Field is No Longer Fallow - A Time to Plant

41 Days of Preparation

Mar 1 Hosea 10:12 & Isaiah 55:6-11

Mar 2 Matthew 13:3-8 & 18-21

Mar 3 Luke 8:5-15

Mar 4 Mark 4:3-8 & 13-17

Mar 5 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Mar 6 Psalm 5

Mar 7 Proverbs 8:6-9

Mar 8 Proverbs 11:16-19

Mar 9 Isaiah 32:15-18

Mar 10 Isaiah 42:6-7 & 11-12

Mar 11 Isaiah 58:6-12

Mar 12 Matthew 5:1-18

Mar 13 Romans 8:3-6

Mar 14 Romans 14:15-19

Mar 15 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Mar 16 Mosiah 2:21-29

Mar 17 Alma 3:27-32

Mar 18 Ephesians 5:25-30

Mar 19 Jacob 3:50-56

Mar 20 Jacob 3:125-129 & 136-144

Mar 21 Mosiah 1:17-21 & 1 Corinthians 3:5-8

Mar 22 Alma 16:161-170

Mar 23 Moroni 6:3-5

Mar 24 Genesis 13:12-15

Mar 25 Genesis 14:36-40

Mar 26 Genesis 17:8-19

Mar 27 Exodus 6:2-8

Mar 28 Hosea 2:18-23

Mar 29 Mosiah 3:1-9

Mar 30 Matthew 7:26-31

Mar 31 1 Corinthians 3:8-14

Apr 1 Mosiah 9:38-43

Apr 2 D&C 4

Apr 3 D&C 11:3a-4b

Apr 4 John 12:23-25

Apr 5 Jacob 3:16-18

Apr 6 Jacob 3:57-66

Apr 7 Galatians 5:22-25

Apr 8 John 15:1-8

Apr 9 Jacob 4

Apr 10 D&C 142:5a-5b



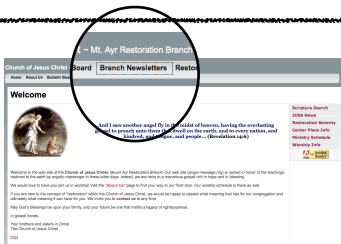
Church of Jesus Christ Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

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



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Visit the Mount Ayr Restoration Branch website at:

www.gospelrestored.org



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)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 2, 9, 16, 23

Scripture Night. Every Tuesday evening in Lamoni at 7 PM. Ron & Di Smith's home or on ZOOM.

Feb 16 Women's Meeting at Mickelson home. 5:30 PM

Apr 9-10 CRE sponsored Spring Gathering of Saints at Waldo Restoration Branch Friday night and all day Saturday. See eldersconference.org for further details. 41 days of preparation begins March 1st. See page 19

Apr 17 JCRB sponsored Women's Retreat. 9 Am-4 PM in Independence

May 21-23 Aaronic Priesthood Retreat at Missionary Branch, directed by Levi Vickery

Jun 20-26 Missionary Family Reunion - Graceland University.

