

The Gospel News

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CELEBRATION: THE GIFTS OF JESUS *A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles*

December is a happy month dominated by the Christmas season and the New Year holiday. As children, we looked forward to this season for many months each year. As adults, our thoughts and activities drift toward preparation for the holidays well in advance of the fun. While the birth of Jesus is the nominal reason for the season, many people have allowed a focus on Christmas gifting, along with feasting, decorating, and otherwise celebrating, to eclipse the significance of the birth of our Savior.

Occasions for giving and receiving gifts stand tall among all of our favorite things. In the very early history of man, gift giving was often associated with formation of relationships whereby mutual support and protection were expected. History also records the giving of gifts as an act of respect or obeisance by persons given audience before royalty. Per the scriptural account (Matthew 2:1-12), wise men followed a star to find the young child-born-King, Jesus, and after worshipping Him, presented precious gifts.

Whenever we give gifts, the pleasure for the giver comes from the appreciation of the one who receives. Think of the times you have thought and thought to come up with the perfect gift for someone you love and how you waited with bated breath to see that loved one's joy upon receiving it. When gifting is at its best it is impossible to determine whether it is better to give or to receive. In fact, the Apostle Paul, speaking to the Ephesians (Acts 20:35), reminded them of Christ's teaching, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Looking closely at this in context, we find that Paul was expressing his joy in bringing them the Gospel. He had sought no remuneration or material reward, but only looked for their appreciation of his giving shown by their continuation of his example, modeled after Christ's.

Earlier, we referred to the scriptural account of gifts associated with the birth of Christ. Pagan customs also embraced gift giving to celebrate birthdays of pagan deities. One of the most relevant of such customs, the feast of Saturnalia, was a Roman feast celebrating the birth of Saturn on December 25 (later changed to a December 17-23 festival). The scriptures do not specify the birth date of Jesus (many studies have suggested various dates based upon prophesy), but it was not an accident that by the fourth century, the Roman celebration of His birth came to officially replace the pagan holiday on the same date. Historians suggest that this "merger" of cultural religion with Christianity was a convenience for the comfort of Roman converts, allowing them to cling to traditions that honored a pagan deity while nominally celebrating in the name of Christ.

Over the centuries, many have argued whether or not this was significant. Today, it seems safe to assume that no one is thinking about Saturn as Christmas gifts are being exchanged. So, let us not be obsessed over the questionable validity of a date chosen many, many centuries ago. Meanwhile, however, it may be good to be wary of the potential for modern commercial, secular celebrations of Christmas to be overplayed in ways equivalent to the Roman decisions. As Saints who know Jesus, keep the season in perspective; enjoy the time appropriately while we exalt our Lord every day of our lives, not only at this time of year. When we think about gifts, let us remember what God gave.

Jesus understood gifting. He taught and demonstrated giving continually. To Nicodemus he said, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* To His disciples He said, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* He was so continually prepared to give that, at the mere touch of his garment by a believing woman in need, virtue went forth from Him and healed her (Mark 5:25-30).

Faith in Christ affords us all of God's gifts, Salvation being the greatest. Jesus Christ, during His short residence on Earth, showed us—for our sakes—that the Spirit of God can overcome the flesh and supersede the laws of nature. He related His Gospel in teachings backed up by demonstrations in action and power. While teaching Faith, Hope, and Charity, He was continually giving: healing the lame and blind, raising the dead, feeding the multitudes, and more. Jesus wants us to sustain His brand of giving. He made some profound promises to believers, including: *...He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do;...and whatsoever ye shall*

(Continued on page 3)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29	30	1 Start your day humming, "O Come All Ye Faithful:	2	3 Remember Jesus is the Reason for the Season	4 Get a group together to go Christmas Caroling	5 Help an older brother or sister prepare for Christmas
6 Share the Joy of this season with the brothers and sisters	7	8 Send Christmas cards to past members	9	10	11 Invite family and friends to your Christmas program	12
13 Invite someone over who is alone today	14	15	16 Remind family and friends of the true meaning of Christmas	17	18 Spend time with a senior member of your branch	19 Have a family over to sing carols
20 Read the story of Christ's birth to a child	21	22 Stay focused on the blessing of the birth of Jesus	23	24 Invite those alone to your Christmas celebration	25 Happy Birthday Jesus!	26
27 Hug a member who was baptized this year	28	29	30 Encourage those not baptized to start the year off right	31	1	2

November 2015

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

January 2016

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
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10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

December 2015

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*
(John 3:16).

BFP Blast From The Past

"Worship of Yesteryear"

A cold, steady rain led into the weekend. But with temperatures rising into the 50s, Saturday, December 2, was blessed with unseasonably warm and sunny weather on what would become a perfect day for the Annual Saline Christmas Parade – thirty-three years ago this month. It had been a busy time for the Saline Mission saints, spending many evenings in the neighbor's barn working into the night preparing their float on the theme of "Worship of Yesteryear." The morning itself began hours earlier with an integral part of the entry, a horse-drawn buggy, making a 5-mile trek from outside of town to the parade's start on Michigan Avenue. The float – set in a wintry environment with a small, country church, the saints dressed in nineteenth-century attire, and two high school students trumpeting the carol "O Come, All Ye Faithful" – managed to win second place and \$150.00 in prize money. For the new mission, it had been a wonderful experience. Mission Elder Frank Morle recalled, "Everyone worked very hard, stayed up late, and felt good in the knowledge that the mission was going to be seen in public."

"Worship of Yesteryear" float ▶



Purpose Statement

- To fulfill the plan of God by bringing salvation through Christ to all people.

Mission Statement

- The Church of Jesus Christ will teach the Gospel to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things commanded by Jesus Christ.
- To draw Israel to Christ through an effort focused on the Native Americans of North and South America.

Vision Statement

- The full manifestations of God's Spirit and power among the Saints, resulting from living and worshipping in unity and righteousness, stimulate continuous growth of the Domestic Church—even at a rate of doubling over a five year period—while strengthening the International Church.

THE CHURCH OF
Jesus Christ

Celebration: The Gifts of Jesus Continued from Page 1

ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:12-13) What are the circumstances that enable mere men and women to emulate the giving of Christ?

When Peter and John encountered the lame man begging alms at the Gate Beautiful, they were able to share the healing gift of God with him, commanding him in the name of Jesus to rise and walk. Certainly, this was among the works Jesus had foretold, but how did they manage it? Read the passage (Acts 3:1-8): The miracle occurred; the man was able to get up and walk. Presumably his entire life changed from that point on.

The account suggests that Peter and John were totally prepared for an encounter like this, as there was only the briefest pause to assess the situation prior to action. Confronting them was a man who had severe need. He was lame and poor, without the means to earn wages or otherwise provide for himself; he was reaching out to them for help as he had reached out to many other passersby among whom some helped, and many did not. Peter and John were disciples of Jesus Christ, endowed not with great wealth but with the Spirit of God AND the promise of doing works like those they had seen Jesus do or even greater. The account tells us that Peter and John believed Jesus, felt access to the Power of God, and gave that which they had.

This is an impressive story of the Gospel in action during the earliest days of the Church after the Day of Pentecost. Most of us have heard it preached and taught many, many times. How do we regard the account? Is it perceived as a part of days gone by, a beautiful history, or is it an example no less possible today than it was 2000 years ago?

(Continued on Page 4)

Word Up

The Case For Christ: Holding The "Word Up" By Elder Doug Obradovic



*Is reading scripture difficult for you?
Do the "thees" and "thous" make Christ's words seem irrelevant,
even losing their potency in translation?
Let's take a deeper dive into Jesus' message and see if we can make sense of it all.
If successful, let's agree to hold the "Word Up"!*

"Upon this rock will I build my Church" (Matthew 16:18).

Do you remember shaking wrapped gifts under the tree before Christmas, in an attempt to discover the contents? Do you remember finally opening the one you thought was that special gift and once opened, discovering that it was? The wait was worth it all once you saw the result!

The television show, **"Extreme Makeover,"** had a similar effect, spending 53 minutes teasing the viewer about what might be uncovered in the final scene. And then Ty Pennington would shout, *"Move that bus!"* and the neighborhood and all watching would scream with delight as the final home renovations were revealed.

There is a much greater reveal awaiting you. Matthew writes (16:13-23), Jesus asked His disciples, *'Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?'* And they said, *'Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.'* He saith unto them, *'But whom say ye that I am?'* And Simon Peter answered, *'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'* And Jesus answered and said unto him, *'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.'* And I say also unto thee, *'That 'thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church....'*

When probed, the disciples told Jesus He was being described many different ways, but when Jesus asked Peter who he believed He was, Peter said, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Knowing God had revealed this to Peter, Jesus introduced the Church's foundation as the rock of revelation (*"upon this rock I will build my church"*).

When experienced firsthand, the revelation of God certainly is as a firm as rock and cannot be denied. Today Christ still honors His foundation promise via His voice, dreams, visions, healings, angels, miracles and/or extraordinary answers to prayers. No television show or unwrapped gift can come close to the creating the excitement one feels through God's heaven-sent revelations.

Most importantly, they are available to each of us. When we place our trust in God, He gives generously. Sometimes we struggle, wondering whether we're worthy of His blessings. Please allow me to help you with your questioning. You're not! But then, none of us are. However, when we submit to His mercy, we are made worthy by the grace of Jesus Christ. Know this: God still speaks to His people and He wants to bless His own. He awaits our humbly begging Him to *"Move that bus!"* And when He does, just wait until you see what's behind it: the greatest reveal of all!

Do you have a favorite verse you'd like us to dissect? Please send it in to: **"Word Up"**

Celebration: The Gifts of Jesus Continued from Page 3

Let us go back to John 14, Jesus speaking to His disciples, continuing with verse 15: *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you... Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him.*

In these words, Jesus elaborated on the concept of belief in Him. The elements of loving Him and continuing in accord with His commandments are tied to the mutual co-dwelling of Christ-in-Father, Believer-in-Christ, and Christ-in-Believer. While Jesus prepared His disciples for His pending departure from this life, He also offered them an understanding of how that apparent void would not actually come to pass because that Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Ghost, is promised to in-dwell the loving faithful even so wonderfully as to be accompanied by manifestations of Jesus.

How much of this was really being absorbed by the disciples at the time the words were spoken? Their behavior immediately after Jesus was crucified proved that they were still made of flesh and blood and governed by carnal minds. But Jesus knew that they loved Him, and He worked with them to prove His resurrection and remind them of all else that He had said; for example:

- He left two angels in the sepulcher, and appeared to Mary
- He appeared to the disciples in the upper room and showed them his hands and side
- He breathed on them and pronounced the Holy Ghost upon them
- He patiently made a special repeat visit for Thomas who doubted the account of his Colleagues
- He came to them as they fished, frustrated, in the sea of Tiberius, instructing them to cast their nets on the right side and astounding them with the miraculous catch which prepared them, specifically Peter, for the question: *...lovest thou me more than these?*
- He appeared alive over a period of forty days following His passion and spoke of things pertaining to the kingdom of God and promised them that they would... *receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

Consider how glorious that 40-day period must have been! Can you imagine how many rearrangements of life, cancelled appointments, and changed plans developed during those days which indelibly confirmed the Resurrection and prepared the disciples to operate as the Church in one accord? This unification culminated in the famous Day of Pentecost when the gifts of the Holy Ghost rushed in as a mighty wind, appeared as cloven tongues of fire, filled them all, and gave them utterance in many languages with understanding by all.

It was from this preparation and unity and in this Spirit that we find Peter and John traversing the Gate Beautiful and giving of the gifts they had been given. Here and now in the 21st century, the point of this message is not to attack the date we designate as Christmas nor any reasonable celebrations. The important thing—and the point of this message—is that we Saints have the advantage of the Restored Gospel—a gift from God for us to appreciate. God's plan included the Restoration to replace the lost understandings, to restore the Word, and to correct any misapplications of the Gospel that Christ originally demonstrated and taught. He provided a refreshed, solid foundation for His Church, His Saints, upon which we can base and build our lives serving Him in Spirit and in Truth and sharing all of His gifts as He would have them enjoyed—every day.

In the Love of God,

The Quorum of Twelve Apostles



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- 4) stir up the Spirit within

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Christmas Time *By Evangelist Mark Kovacic*

This time of year we enjoy the decorations and music of Christmas. People smile and pleasantly greet one another. People seem to treat each other better. Sometimes we ask ourselves why it can't be like this all year long. We are reminded that Jesus is the reason for the season. Yet we know that Jesus was not born in December and much of the Christmas Holiday season is simply tradition. These traditions have been passed down from prior generations and encapsulate many misunderstandings of the birth of the Messiah of Israel.

My purpose here is not to debate the value of these traditions or the true date of Jesus' birth. Neither of these points are important. What is important is what the birth of Jesus meant to His contemporaries and what it means to us today.

Let's consider the witnesses of His birth – those who were participants in the great plan of redemption. Pieces of the story are given in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke. After Mary accepted her role as the mother of the promised Messiah, she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. Filled with the Holy Ghost, Elizabeth said to Mary, *"And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

The night Jesus was born, shepherds were watching over their sheep and an angel appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The angel said, *"Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* The angel explained that a Savior was born, who was the Messiah (Christ). Then appearing with the angel was a whole group of angels glorifying God and singing, *"Peace on earth and good will towards all."* The shepherds decided that this was worth seeing and left their flocks. They went to Bethlehem and found the baby with Mary and Joseph. What is more important is what happened next. Luke wrote, *"And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them [by the angel] concerning this child."* They testified of what God showed them, what the angels said, and what they witnessed: a Savior and Messiah.

While Joseph and Mary were still in Bethlehem, wise men came to worship Jesus as the one who was born *"King of the Jews."* (Jesus' death matched his birth when 34 years later Pontius Pilate put the title *"King of Jews"* on Jesus' cross.) These wise men were led to the manger by a new star they saw in the sky. Strange that the scribes and priests in Jerusalem did not understand the importance of the star that had led these wise men from a foreign land. (I guess they forgot Numbers 24:17.) The wise men recognized the importance of the star and Him to which it belonged – the One born as a king.

Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem, according to the Law of Moses, to offer a sacrifice and to have Jesus circumcised. There they met two people, Simeon and Anna, who were moved by the Holy Ghost to witness Jesus' coming. Simeon was told by the Holy Ghost he would not die until he saw *"the Lord's Christ."* Prompted by the Spirit, he went to the Temple, saw Jesus, and took Him into his arms, and praised God saying, *"Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel."*

Anna, of the tribe of Asher, was a prophetess living in Jerusalem. She too was prompted by the Spirit and gave thanks to the Lord and witnessed to all those who were nearby that were looking for the redemption in Jerusalem that the Redeemer had come.

So what does this all mean to us and what should we do? First, it shows how the great plan of redemption was prepared by God from the beginning and that like many of His doings He prepares the way before a great event.

Second, it shows that God uses men and women to announce His intentions and actions. What better testimony than a person who has witnessed the works of God! We become the shepherds, the wise men, the prophet and prophetess to our families, friends, neighbors and even strangers who are seeking a life with meaning and purpose. We testify to others of the rising of the day star, the bright and morning star (1 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 22:16). We become the seeds of peace on earth and good will for all.

Let the New Star of Jesus shine through us in these dark times, announcing salvation to a world in need of the Prince of Peace, the King of kings, an advocate and a counsellor.

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He Holds the Keys

By Evangelist Jerry Valenti

The first article in this series described different types of prisons we may find ourselves in, only some of which include physical bars. If we were to ever find ourselves in handcuffs or chains, physical or otherwise, what would have to happen in order to be freed from them? The answer: Somebody else (someone with the keys) would have to free us.

In the case of the "innermost prison," Jesus is the One who holds the keys and offers freedom. He holds the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:18). He came to open the prison to those who are bound (Isaiah 61:1). He offers us the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). By His death on the cross, Jesus freed us from sin. By His resurrection, He freed us from death. There is nobody else who qualifies to free us from this prison. Jesus is the only one who holds the keys:

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:8).

Yes, even in this age of political correctness where nobody is supposed to think that their way is the only way, the words of Jesus still ring out, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Exactly what is it that Jesus has made us free to do?

First and foremost, He has made us "free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (II Nephi 2:27). Without Jesus, there is no choice—captivity/death is the only option. With Jesus, we have the option to choose liberty and eternal life. Note that it's not forced on anyone—you still have to choose it, but we have the ability to make that choice because of Christ.

Once we choose the Lord, we are instantly freed from the guilt we have carried for past sins. We are freed from the eternal consequences we would have had to face for those sins. We are freed from the fear of looking ahead to a judgment day on which we would be judged guilty and condemned to an eternity separated from God. Replacing the guilt and fear are feelings of peace and joy, freeing us to live a blessed life.

Even when hard times come (and they will), we can take comfort in knowing that the Lord is there for us and that we will ultimately be victorious because Jesus has already won the victory. Jesus wants all of His followers to understand that the victory has already been won so that we can enjoy peace in this life:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

If you're a sports fan (or you know someone who is), think about the emotions that surface during a big game. When your team suffers a setback, you get upset. Moments of elation when your team is winning can quickly turn to feelings of despair when they fall behind. As the game approaches the end and it appears your team may not win, feelings of anxiety arise. On the whole, it can be a very draining experience.

However, imagine that you are watching a recording of the game after it has been played and you already know that your team has won the game. Your viewing experience is totally different as you won't get upset when your team suffers a setback, you won't worry when your team is behind and you won't be anxious as the end of the game approaches. Instead, you will just enjoy the game, knowing that in the end, your team wins!

This is the type of life Jesus has freed us to live. By knowing how the story ends, we don't have to dwell on setbacks in life, bumps in the road, trials of our faith, etc. The peace of knowing that we win in the end frees us to choose to focus on the blessings of life instead of the setbacks.

In addition to knowing the end of the story, God's servants also benefit from knowing what is acceptable to Him and what is not. The scriptures and the Holy Ghost provide this insight. Knowing the "boundaries" creates significant freedom.

I once visited New York City and went to the top of the World Trade Center before it was destroyed. It stood over 100 stories high. On the roof of the building, there were large railings and fences all around to prevent anybody from falling off. Normally, people think of being fenced in as a restriction. Yet, in this case, the barriers gave me the freedom to move around freely and enjoy the breathtaking view from all sides. Had there been no fences, I would have been afraid to take one step up there. The fences may have taken away my option of experiencing the thrill of a 1000 foot freefall, but I didn't mind the sacrifice.

In order to live within the boundaries of God, all we have to do when we are considering a course of action is eliminate options that we know would displease God. Once we've narrowed down the options in this way, we can feel complete freedom to choose from all remaining options. Of course, the consequences of each option need to be considered ("You are free to choose, but you are not free from the consequence of your choice"), but the choice is truly up to you. Just as the fences on the roof of the World Trade Center made visitors free to enjoy the view, knowing the boundaries of God allows us to feel free to enjoy life.

We are so blessed to be aligned with Jesus Christ, the One who holds the keys to the innermost prison! We have been made free in so many ways—free from the fear and sting of death, free from the guilt and eternal consequence of sin, free to choose our eternal home, free to enjoy a blessed life. Those who don't know the Lord may think they are free, but as Jesus said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Elder Ordained in Mesa, Arizona *By Elder Anthony Scolaro*

The Mesa, Arizona Branch was filled to overflowing on Sunday, August 30 as saints, family, and friends came to witness the ordination of Brother Anthony "A.J." Dyer into the priesthood. Brother Michael Watson, visiting from the Irvine, California Branch, opened the service on the topic of Sanctification, citing scriptures from John 17 and Alma 13, among others. Our brother pointed out how we are all sanctified by God's Word, and furthermore, we are sanctified by God's Spirit, for the purpose of glorifying Him and for bringing souls to salvation through Jesus Christ. He spoke of the labors associated with being sanctified unto God, as well as the blessings and benefits that come as we spend our lives serving the Lord.

Brother Austin Landrey followed in a similar vein, reading from Romans 8:1-2 to emphasize how fully and completely we are sanctified through Christ when we follow Him. Speaking to a congregation with many visitors (some for the first time), he explained the great love and mercy God has for each and every one of us. Whether we are called into offices in the Church or not, Jesus has sanctified us all through His precious blood shed on the cross of Calvary. Our brother gave out a spirit-filled plea to the crowd, to yield to Jesus and accept His gift of salvation.

Brother Paul Liberto, an apostle assigned to the Southwest Region, then gave an overview of the scriptures' teachings on ordination into the

priesthood. Afterward, prior to washing brother A.J.'s feet, Brother Ken Staley explained briefly how blessed he was to see his young cousin called into the priesthood. Then, as the ministry encircled our new elder, Brother Isaac D. Smith anointed Brother A.J. (his grandson-in-law) and ordained him.

Brother A.J. then expressed himself, giving thanks to God for so many blessings in his life. He said everything about today was not about him, but it was about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Afterward, Brother Peter Scolaro, another apostle assigned to the Southwest Region, expressed how blessed and rejuvenated he felt to see and hear the three youngest elders present that day—Brother Michael, Brother Austin, and Brother A.J.—speak to us with such inspiration, understanding, and authority.

We also took time to offer prayer over Brother A.J.'s wife, Sister Bethany, as it was mentioned more than once what a vital role an elder's wife plays in his ministry.

After the service we sat down to a lunch and enjoyed a beautiful time of fellowship, extending the blessings we felt throughout the day. Remember our new brother elder and his family in your prayers. Jesus said, *"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest"* (Luke 10:2).

Southeast Region and Ladies' Uplift Circle Conferences

By Sisters Rhonda Hester and Dianne Maddox

The Southeast Region and Ladies' Uplift Circle Conferences were held on July 25, 2015 at the Forest Hills, Florida Branch. The ministry spent the day in the sanctuary discussing the business at hand while excitement filled the other rooms as our sisters gathered for a Spirit filled day! There were approximately seventy-five sisters in attendance. Before the start of our business meeting, we were afforded the opportunity to fellowship with one another and sing praises to our Lord and Savior.

The Forest Hills Branch provided a delicious luncheon and dinner for all present, along with the brothers, who were attending the Southeast Region Conference. It was amazing to come together as a group and feast together. A Pilot Program was introduced under new business in our conference. *"Mini Market Day"* consists of two locals presenting items to sell as fundraisers. This program will support our Southeast Area Ladies' Uplift Circle (SEALUC) and their respective local branches. There were beautiful items for sale and we were excited to support our sisters who had worked very hard to make this program a success.

The afternoon session of our conference consisted of Local Ladies' Circle Presentations. At the request of the SEALUC President Sister Sharon Sloan, each local was given the opportunity to prepare a short presentation by continuing with the theme of our GLUC 95th Anniversary, *"Her Price is Far Above Rubies,"* based on Proverbs 31:10. As each local brought forth their presentation, the Lord showered us with His blessings. The virtuous woman was portrayed in each presentation. There were video presentations, presentations of word and song, a presentation on what it means to be virtuous, testimonies shared concerning virtuous women in the Church, a skit entitled *"The Princess and the Worry Peas,"* and a game entitled *"The Wheel of Virtue."*

The SEALUC Conference attendees left inspired and prayerful that we can remain faithful to follow all the attributes of a Proverbs 31 woman.

That evening a wonderful meeting was enjoyed by all. Brother David Checchi of the Treasure Coast branch related the experience of his conversion. He had grown up around the Church but didn't attend on a regular basis. After moving to Florida, he attended a SE Area Campout. While at the Campout, the young people were sitting around a bonfire and passing a piece of paper around. David was left out of this activity and he wondered why. When he got home, he received a letter from those young people stating how happy they were that he was at Campout. That was the piece of paper they had been passing around the fireside. Next, Brother Peter Scolaro spoke about the recent GMBA Campout and the powerful Spirit that was felt during the Tuesday evening service. He said that to be the closest we can be with God, we just have to remember two words: unity and righteousness. If we are unified and righteous, we will see amazing things come to pass. All of those who had attended the GMBA Campout were invited to the rostrum to share their experience campout to all of those that were not able to attend.

Sunday morning began at the water's shore as Brother Ananias Cotton was baptized. Our new brother met the Church through the Gonzalez family and asked for his baptism at this past GMBA campout. When we returned, the meeting began with the ordinance of

(Continued on Page 11)

The Church of Jesus Christ is established in over 20 countries around the world. While the festivities may be different and the language may not sound the same, Jesus Christ came to earth for each of us to find eternal life. In whatever language you speak, may God grant you and your family a Very Merry Christmas.

Wishing you and your family God's Blessings this Christmas and throughout the New Year.
The Gospel News Staff.

Feliz Navidad Maligayang Pasko Noheli Nziza Joyeux Noel
Happy Christmas Merry Christmas Feliz Navidad
Feliz Navidad Afishapa Feliz Navidad para todos
NATAL NLIBARAK Joyeux Noel
Moni Wa Chikondwelero Cha X'mas Merry Christmas
Feliz Navidad Happy Christmas Buon Natale
Boas Festas Merry Christmas Feliz Navidad
Krist Yesu Ko Shuva Janma Utsav Ko Upalaxhma Hardik Shuva

MERRY CHRISTMAS IN THE LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN OUR CHURCHES ALL OVER THE WORLD.

More Answers to the Question of the Month continued from Page 12

"The only gift I have worth anything is the gift of God's love, and I'd like to share it with my family. I want to tell them that people will come and go, family members will pass, but God will never leave you. He is the one to trust and to put your faith in at all times. When you are at your lowest, call upon the Lord for the strength; I remember growing up with a plaque on the wall at the foot of my bed, saying, 'Jesus is near to all who call upon him.'"—*Sister Kathleen Pastorelli, Lake Worth, FL Branch*

"Jesus the Christ Salvation".—*Brother George Katsaras, Miami-Dade/Homestead, FL Mission.*

"The joy that I feel when serving my Lord and knowing that He is always there for me."—*Sister Patty Machnik, Detroit, MI Branch #1*

"If I was to give my loved ones one gift this Christmas, it would be to give them an experience full of love and cheer like I had growing up those years long ago. I would give them those memories wrapped up with the perfect red bow, and I would tell them that material possessions come and go but the memories of traditions, family, gatherings, laughter, stories, and most of all, love, is the greatest gift you can ever give."—*Sister Missy Ross Munson, Aliquippa, PA Branch*

"I would share the gift of the Love of God and his Son Jesus Christ".—*Brother Michael Nuzzi, Liberty, OH Branch*

"I praise God that I will get to share the gift of a new grandson with my family this Christmas".—*Sister Michelle Watson, Irvine, CA Branch*

"The Gospel of Jesus Christ".—*Denise M. Dickson, Detroit, MI Branch #1*

"The Restored Gospel".—*Sister Karen Jo Pandone, Detroit, MI Branch #2*

The Great Commission *By Brother Kerry Carlini*

The Great Commission to the Church was clearly laid by Jesus Christ. Just prior His ascension, He commanded the apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." And, as for the seventy whom Christ also appointed, He "sent them two and two before his face into every city and place" as "lambs among the wolves" proclaiming that the "kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." Here are five amazing facts – that stood witness to Holy Ghost which accompanied these early saints – and to this day stand for all men and women called to fulfill the Great Commission:

- 1** God's Grace: "Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it...in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire."
- 2** Power over Satan: "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."
- 3** The Signs: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."
- 4** God's Judgment: "But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."
- 5** Eternal Life in Christ: "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

Mark 16:15-18; Luke 10:1-20; Acts 1:8



Ladies' Uplift Circle News

The First Christmas Morn

By Sister Lisa Champine, General Ladies' Uplift Circle President

In the last year we have tried to offer a glimpse into the history of The Ladies' Uplift Circle. Our submissions have revolved around our 95th anniversary celebration and The Ladies' Uplift Circle through every region of The Church of Jesus Christ. These articles included how the Circle has impacted our sisters' lives, their service to their branches and missions, and the missionary efforts of the Church. I hope and pray that you have been as blessed as I have been in reading these historical retrospectives.

Since this is the December issue, it was my desire to somehow meld two themes, the Circle and Christmas. I wasn't sure if this was even possible, but as I pondered the idea and as I looked through the articles and papers I have collected over this 95th anniversary year, I came across a hymn written by Sister Sadie Cadman that I think does it better than I ever could.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ and as we prepare for gatherings of family and friends I pray we would never forget that first Christmas morning and the significance of a baby born in a manger.

May God bless you all, and from me and The General Ladies' Uplift Circle, may you have a Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Sister Lisa Champine

The First Christmas Morn

By Sister Sadie Cadman

In Bethlehem in a manger,
Jesus, the Christ was born;
And angels sang sweetest carols
On that first Christmas morn,

While shepherds sat upon the ground,
Angels of God came down;
"A Saviour's born," was their message,
And glory shone around.

Wise Men from far precious gifts brought,
In God's word we are told;
So let us all rejoice with them
And join the choir of old.

Chorus:

Glory to God in the highest,
Angels sang at His birth;
Glory to God in the highest,
Peace and good will to earth.



God Sends a Message by a Star

sied happened. Can you imagine how desperately they must have searched the skies each night for the new star as they came closer and closer to the day they were going to be killed? Can you imagine how much they must have been praying and asking God to show the star?

The leader of the good people was the preacher, Nephi (named after the first Nephi who had come over from Jerusalem 600 years before). He was heartsick. He knelt down and began praying to God on behalf of his people who were going to be killed. All day Nephi cried unto the Lord. And it came to pass that he heard the voice of Jesus who told him, *"Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for this night the sign shall be given, and tomorrow I will be born into this world.... I will fulfill (do) all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets.... and behold the time is at hand, and this night I shall be born!"*

That night, as the sun went down, it did not start getting dark. An amazing star was in the sky! It was so bright in this side of the world that it was like *"a day and a night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night"* (See III Nephi 1: 8). Half way around the earth, in Bethlehem, this same star was shining on the manger where Baby Jesus was born. Everyone knew something special had happened the day that the huge bright star took over the sky!

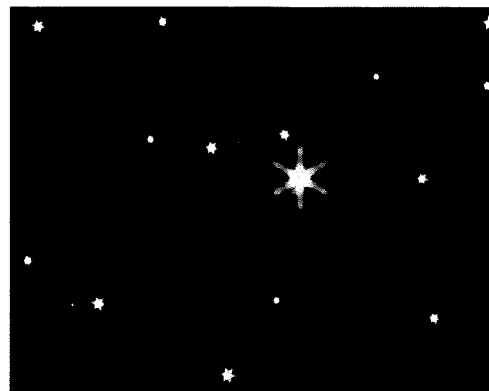
The words of the preachers were true! All of the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so extremely astonished that they fell to the earth. And they began to fear because of their sin and unbelief. (III Nephi 1: 17-20).

Many people believed now; they repented and asked God for forgiveness and joined the Church. The people began again to have peace in the land. (See III Nephi 1:23).

Over in Israel, the same star was shining from far away down on the manger where baby Jesus was lying. Other men of God who were star watchers travelled many miles from the East looking for the baby. They wanted to worship Him and bring Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (See Matthew 2:1-12). The Lord had sent His sign in the heavens and they followed the star.

The great plan of God was in action. All around the world people watched and wondered. God's plan was working. The same God we serve loved them and loves us today too. He has a plan for all times and does not forget His people.

With care,
Your friend,
Sister Jan



WORD SEARCH

THE	BELIEVERS
STAR	WERE
THAT	GOING
SHINED	TO
ON	BE
THE	KILLED
MANGER	UNLESS
WAS	STAR
SEEN	SIGN
ACROSS	CAME
WORLD	IT
IN	DID
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T	H	E	M	A	C	W	A	S
I	A	M	E	R	I	C	A	S
D	N	E	E	S	T	A	R	S
E	G	S	H	I	N	E	D	R
L	N	D	I	D	V	L	R	C
L	I	T	H	E	R	B	E	A
I	O	T	I	O	N	R	G	T
K	G	L	W	T	G	A	N	A
W	E	R	E	H	I	T	A	H
B	U	N	L	E	S	S	M	T

In the old days, people did not have electricity, telephones, television, or electronic games. They woke up with the sunrise to start to work and went to bed in the dark. Of course, in some countries, lamps with string wicks and little containers of smoking oil provided light, and there was always the hope of light from a burning fire, or a torch on special occasions. They also depended on the sun and stars in a different way than we do. They planned activities around how much light there was going to be. In Israel and other countries, in warm weather, families sat on their rooftop patios in the quiet evenings under the beautiful stars. In other countries people watched and understood how the earth moved throughout the seasons. The stars told them when to plant crops, when the tides would be dangerous, when the large herds of animals would come, or which direction to travel in. So, when God wanted thousands and thousands of people to know something special was happening, he sent them a sign in the stars.

First, God had a plan. He was going to send His son Jesus to come to earth and teach people how to be loving, kind, and strong. Jesus was going to teach the people all over the earth not to fear death, about heaven, and laws about the way people should treat each other.

God sent many prophets for thousands of years to tell them about the great plan of living. In the Book of Mormon; everyone had been told that Christ was going to be born. Five years before the birth of baby Jesus, God sent powerful preachers like Samuel the Lamanite who stood on the high walls of the city and warned the people to stop fighting and being evil. The crowds hearing him got angry. They did not want to be told they were doing wrong. They shot arrows and threw spears at him as he preached, but could not hit him. God protected his messenger. Samuel told them that on the day that Jesus was going to be born, God would put a new star in the sky as a sign.

As a few years passed, some of the unbelievers began to say the time was passed for Samuel's prophecy to be fulfilled (III Nephi 1: 4-12). They set a day apart when they were going to kill all the believers unless the things that Samuel prophesied

Southeast Region and Ladies' Uplift Circle Conferences

Continued from Page 7

the bestowal of the Holy Ghost on Brother Ananias. As Brother John Griffith was praying for God to direct the brother who would perform the ordinance, Brother Scott Griffith had a vision of a white dove flying. When Brother John concluded his prayer, Brother Jim Draskovich stepped forward to offer the prayer on Brother Ananias. When Brother Jim laid his hands upon Brother Ananias and bestowed the Holy Ghost upon him, Brother Scott saw the dove go into Brother Ananias' chest.

Next, Brother Justin Onorato spoke about God's grace. Brother Justin explained that grace is defined as *"free, unmerited favor of God."* Our brother referred to Ephesians 2:8, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."* Brother Justin encouraged us to focus on the positive things in our lives, the gifts from God, not the negative things. There will always be opposition. Referring back to Brother Peter's words from the prior evening, Brother Justin described righteousness as a gift from God and only attainable with God's help. Righteousness is achieved by loving God. We are not perfect, but we are perfected in Jesus Christ.

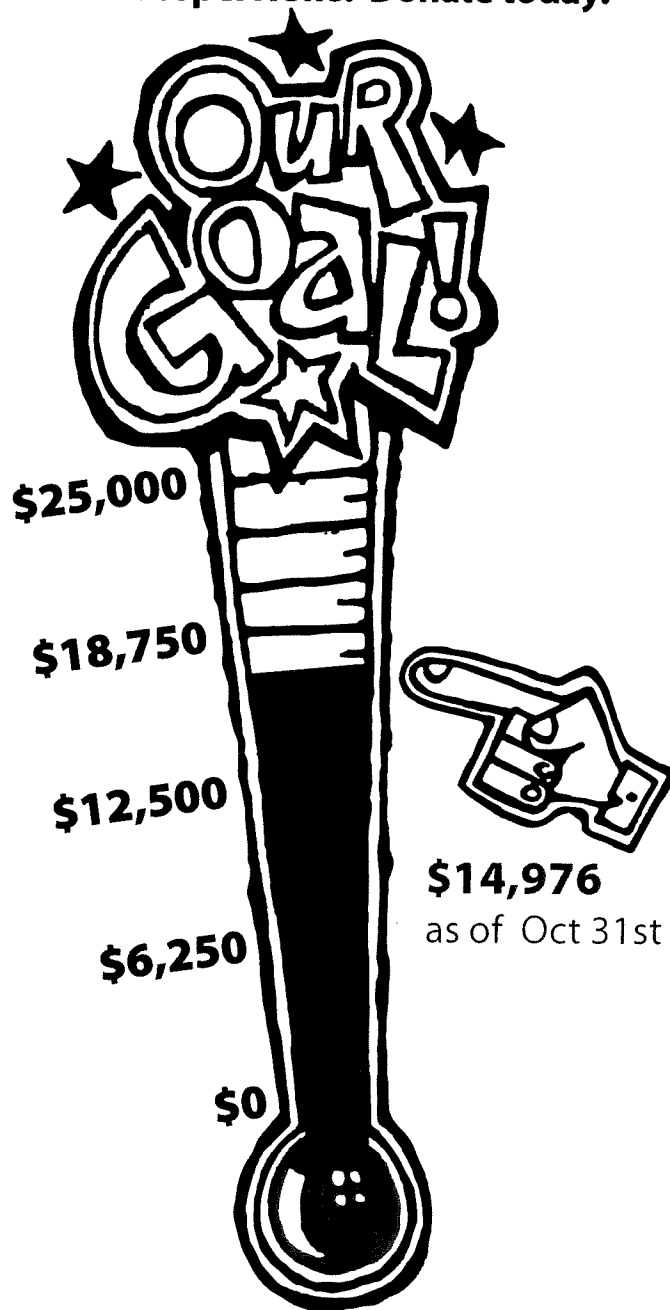
Brother Rocco Benyola then spoke and expressed how overwhelmed he was just to face the beautiful congregation. He stated that the world we live in has changed drastically, but we have God's Holy Spirit to help us survive. He encouraged us we can serve God with His strength in this world. He then reflected on a time before he was baptized. It was New Year's Eve and he was in a bar. As he looked across the room, he saw a sister that had left the Church, and he was reminded of the watch meetings that as a child he felt he had been forced to attend. He knew his place at that moment was to be in Church and not in the bar. It was that evening that he had a change of heart, and soon after that, he and his wife were baptized.

Brother Paul Bemyla spoke next, saying that our works are filthy rags before God, but with God's grace we are acceptable to Him. He exhorted us that we must keep our focus on God. As when Peter walked on water, he was able to do so as long as he focused on Jesus. When he took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink. He encouraged our young people to not be distracted by this world. We must take God's Spirit with us.

We thank God for a blessed weekend and we thank the Forest Hills Branch for the hospitality they provided.

Please donate now.
The contribution is tax deductible.

Help us meet our goal of funding the Gospel News. Donate today!



Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights. James 1:17

Blessing Bits

BB Don't Bury Your Talent

Recently the NAOC asked the sisters to crochet lap blankets for the Rosebud Tribe in South Dakota. I have crocheted for many years but every time I tried to make a blanket, the sides would be uneven and I would have to pull out rows and rows and start again. I had a desire to contribute to this request so I did something different this time before I began crocheting: I prayed. I was blessed to complete this blanket before the deadline. This just proved to me that God is in the little things when we have a genuine desire to work for Him.—*Sister Gelsa Staley, Forest Hills, FL Branch*

BB "He'll Take Care of Me"

One afternoon I had to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles to add a certification to my driver's license for my new job. The young man didn't know how to take care of it, so he asked someone to assist him. Then he told me it would be \$71, but I had been told by my boss that there would not be a fee. The young man's shift was over and they sent me to another window, and she did not

know how to take care of it either. To make a long story short, they finally figured it out and I did not have to pay a fee. That was the first blessing. Then I got in my car and the CD of Songs of Zion started playing, it was "He'll Take Care of Me." A feeling of joy filled my soul and I started singing...I was singing and hitting all the right notes. This was a miraculous blessing, because many years ago after I had my thyroid removed, I could not sing anymore. I cried and sang all the way home as I praised the Lord. I can sing in church again. Thank you God for taking care of me.—*Sister Joyce Smith, Simi Valley, CA Branch*

BB Divine Comfort

On Wednesday, March 11, 2015, my physician told me that my second MRI results confirmed "findings consistent with multiple liver metastases," an end-stage cancer that is not curable. I was given this news a few minutes before leaving for church to teach the MBA class. As I was driving to church, I was concerned and asked the Lord to give me an experience like the Apostle Paul, who had an angel that stood next to him for comfort during a terrible storm (Acts 27:23). At the end of the service, a sister stood up

and testified that she saw three lights come down near me as I gave the class, and then an illuminated personage stood behind me. Truly, He sees and answers prayers. Later, after many more tests, I was told that I don't have liver metastasis but some liver hemangiomas, which are normal in many people and require no treatment whatsoever.—*Brother Anthony Cardinale, Sr., Bell, CA Branch*

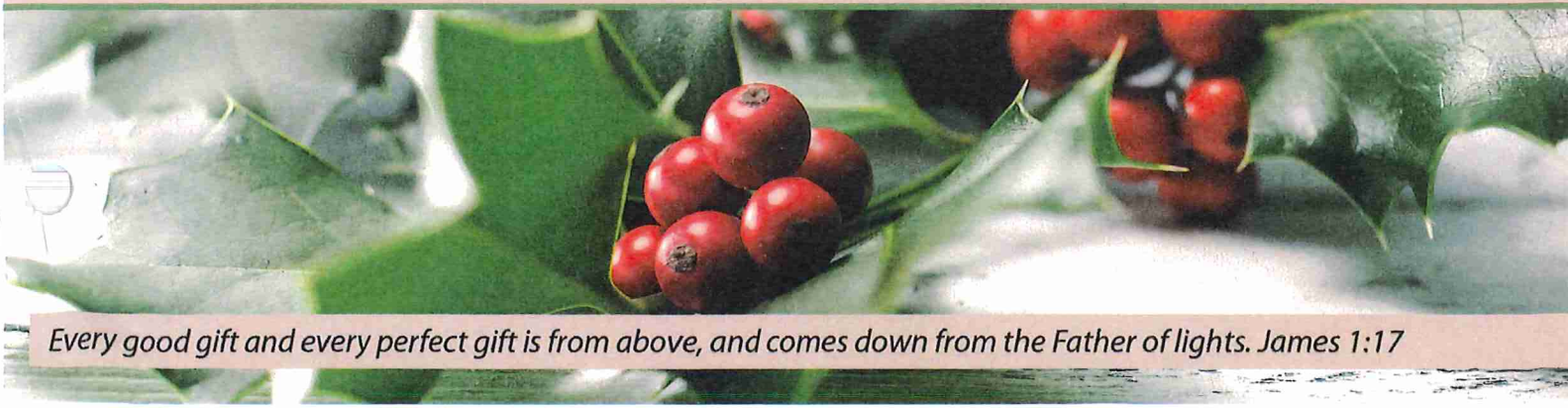
Send us your Blessing Bits [in approximately 150 words] and answer the Question of the Month by contacting us at gospelnewsinfo@gmail.com

Q Question for this month: *What brings you peace during a stressful time in your life?*

A Answer from last month: *What gift would you like to share with your loved ones this Christmas?*

"My gift would be to have all of our family together. Playing Christmas music and trimming the tree together. So, it's the gift of family bonding."—*Sister Beth Karroll, LaGrange, KY Mission.*

Turn back to page 8 for more answers to this question.



Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights. James 1:17