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Remembering Christmas Past
Presidents of the Church Celebrate the Birth of the Son of Man and Remember His Servant
Joseph Smith

Larry C. Porter

At Christmastime the story of the sojourn of Jesus Christ from Bethlehem to Calvary enjoys a resurgence among countless millions. For Latter-day Saints there is a second tradition associated with this special season—remembering the Prophet Joseph Smith and the course of events in his life from Sharon, Vermont, to Carthage, Illinois. As we commemorate anew these two births, we have cause to turn back time and review selected Christmas memories and moments from the lives of the fifteen Presidents of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Some of these glimpses are personal and soul-stirring in nature, others are homespun. Some accounts are deeply spiritual, while others reflect the tinsel and festive gaiety of the traditional celebration. Often the prophets’ Christmastime experiences and messages are emblematic of conditions affecting the entire Church at that moment, but at the same time all of the accounts illustrate the lasting and eternal significance of the Christmas season.

These memories and messages are arranged by year under each President’s name. Each respective President primarily expresses his own feelings and observations, but periodically others in the household or persons contemporary to the situation lend substance to the moment. In some of the instances where information on Christmas celebrations is limited, we have tried to explain the circumstances the prophet was experiencing during that time. The Christmastime observations, thoughts, and traditions included in this account show how the fifteen Presidents of the Church celebrated the birth of the Savior and remembered the life of Joseph Smith Jr.

**First President, Joseph Smith Jr.**

A series of reverses, which had left the Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith family in financial difficulty, prompted Solomon Mack, father of Lucy, to
provide the couple with a homesite on his own hundred-acre farm, which bridged the Sharon-Royalton township lines in Windsor County, Vermont. It was on the Sharon side that Joseph Smith Jr., future prophet of the Restoration, was born just two days before Christmas on Monday, December 23, 1805.¹ That first Christmas was celebrated in the midst of his siblings, Alvin, Hyrum, and Sophronia, as they surrounded the family hearthstone atop Dairy Hill. The birth of the infant Joseph must have reminded the family of another sacred event occurring under similarly humble circumstances in a Bethlehem manger.

We can only surmise what was occurring during certain of the thirty-eight Christmases enjoyed by Joseph Smith. Although Joseph’s Christmas activities are not always accounted for, selective episodes do give us a sense of what it was like to keep Christmas with the Prophet.

Christmas with Emma

For Joseph, Christmas 1826 was most certainly filled with contemplations of his Harmony sweetheart, Miss Emma Hale, who he had been courting from the residences of two respective employers, Josiah Stowell of Bainbridge Township, Chenango County, New York, and Joseph Knight Sr., Colesville Township, in Broome County. Their marriage took place within a matter of weeks, on January 18, 1827, at South Bainbridge, New York. The newlyweds went to live with Joseph’s parents at Manchester, where he farmed with his father for a season and was in a position to remove the gold plates from the Hill Cumorah on September 22.²

During December 1827, Joseph and Emma moved from Manchester, New York, to Harmony, Pennsylvania, where they took up an initial residence with Isaac and Elizabeth Hale, Emma’s father and mother. Here on the Susquehanna he was finally able to begin a serious examination of the characters on the newly acquired golden plates.³ The holiday season was apparently spent in the home of his in-laws. A year later, in December of 1828, Joseph and Emma, for the first time, were able to enjoy Christmas in the simplicity of their own home, a small one-and-a-half story frame structure that had been placed on thirteen acres acquired from Isaac Hale.

Revelations and Church Service

In December 1830, Joseph and Emma were residing with the Peter Whitmer Sr. family in the township of Fayette, Seneca County, New York, having left their Harmony home the preceding August. That December was singularly marked by the receipt of three revelations contained in the present Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 35, 36, and 37). One of these communications directed the Prophet and the Church to move to Ohio.
(D&C 37:1–3). During April and May of 1831, the main body of the Church in New York moved to Kirtland, Ohio, and vicinity in three primary companies.4

The Prophet and Sidney Rigdon embarked in December of 1831 on a mission to proclaim the gospel “unto the world in the regions round about” (D&C 71:2). From December 4, 1831, to the following 8th or 10th of January 1832, they preached to the people of Shalersville, Ravenna, and other Ohio communities.5

On December 25, 1832, Joseph’s thoughts were enmeshed in national politics. South Carolina was threatening to secede from the Union over protective tariffs favoring the Northern States. As the spirit moved upon him, the Prophet was given understanding of the far-reaching implications of this state of affairs. He explained, “Appearances of trouble among the nations became more visible this season than they had previously been since the Church began her journey out of the wilderness. . . . On Christmas day [1832], I received the following revelation and prophecy on war.”6

Then follows one of the most distinctive and far-reaching prophecies ever uttered by the seer—section 87 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph as foreteller chronicled the event and attendant conditions associated with

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**The Christmas War Revelation**

Perhaps the best known Christmas occurrence in early Church history is also one of the hardest to reconcile with the long-standing Christmas traditions celebrating peace and the birth of Christ. On Christmas Day 1832 in Kirtland, while praying earnestly and reflecting about slavery at home and abroad, the Prophet Joseph received a revelation that prophesied “the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at [South Carolina]” (D&C 87:2). While the revelation seems to be overtly addressing the nullification crisis that was brewing in the Palmetto state, its occurrence on Christmas Day has been accorded little significance. Why did the Lord reveal a message on war while much of the world was celebrating his birth? Was the Prophet, perhaps, aware of war and slavery’s ironic juxtaposition against the peace and freedom brought by Christ? The paradox in the timing of this Christmas revelation is certainly evocative.

Section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants may offer a further glimpse into the revelation’s timing. Referring in 1843 to the 1832 prophecy on war, Joseph connected it again with “the slavery question” but now also linked it clearly to events that would happen “previous to the coming of the Son of Man” (D&C 130:12–13; see also 14–17). Had commemoration of the Savior’s first coming turned Joseph’s thoughts to the Second Coming? If so, the Christmas holiday may be considered relevant in interpreting this revelation.
the United States Civil War. That conflict was to herald the commencement of a series of devastating hostilities and wars that would eventually envelope the whole world.

Christmas at Home

On one Christmas Eve, new convert Jonathan Crosby traveled to Kirtland to meet the Prophet. Joseph Smith invited Crosby to join an assembly of friends—Hyrum Smith, Reynolds Cahoon, Martin Harris, John Carl, and George A. Smith—for a "very pleasant time" at the Smith’s home. The company “drank peper & sider and had supper.” The next day, Crosby was invited to a Christmas “feast,” where Patriarch Joseph Smith Sr. was giving blessings.7

As Joseph recorded in his journal, weather conditions on December 1, 1835, set the stage for a traditional season: “At home spent the day in writing, for the M[essenger] & Advocate, the snow is falling and we have fine sleighing.”8 This December proved to be a marvelous season for the Prophet. The true spirit of giving was manifest. During the course of the month numbers of Saints went out of their way to contribute of their temporal substance to the Prophet in order that he might have means to continue to do the Lord’s work. Reflecting on the goodness of the Saints he spoke of their kindnesses to him as noted on December 9:

My heart swells with gratitude inexpressible when I realize the great condescension of my heavenly Fathers, in opening the hearts of these, my beloved brethren to administer so liberally, to my wants and I ask God in the name of Jesus Christ, to multiply, blessings, without number upon their heads, and bless me with much wisdom and understanding, and dispose of me, to the best advantage, for my brethren, and the advancement of thy cause and Kingdom, and whether my days are many or few whether in life or in death I say in my heart, O Lord let me enjoy the society of such brethren.9

And on December 25, Joseph experienced the simple joys of Christmas as expressed in his heartfelt sentiment, “At home all this day and enjoyed myself with my family it being Chris[t]mas day the only time I have had this privilege so satisfactorily for a long time.”10

Christmas 1835 is the last account of a Christmas celebration in the Smith home until 1843. For the next eight years, Joseph seems to have been preoccupied with Church and other family issues during the holiday seasons. Returning to Kirtland on December 10, 1837, from a trip to Missouri, Joseph found that many members—some in high places—had turned against the Church.11 Some of the malcontents had leagued to deprive him
of his presidency and, if need be, his life. By January 1838, Joseph, Brigham Young, and Sidney Rigdon had been forced to flee Kirtland.

December in Liberty Jail

By December 1838, the Church in Missouri had suffered a series of severe setbacks. A committing court at Richmond had found “probable cause” and charged Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Alexander McRae, and Caleb Baldwin with a multiplicity of crimes, including murder and “overt acts of treason.” They were imprisoned in Liberty, Missouri, on December 1, 1838.12 The prisoners found themselves in the crudest of circumstances—a fourteen by fourteen and one-half foot dungeon with only a trap door entrance from the main floor above. Their quarters consisted of a dirt floor covered with “worn out straw.” There was no stove for heating, and when they used an open fire the inadequate venting filled the room with insufferable smoke. There were insufficient blankets to keep them warm under freezing conditions, and the food was so foul as to be hardly palatable.13

Emma Smith made immediate arrangements to go from Far West to visit her husband on December 8. She brought her six-year-old son, Joseph Smith III, and was accompanied by Phebe Rigdon and her young son, John Wickliffe Rigdon. A Dr. Madish of Terre Haute, Indiana, loaned them a two-seated carriage “drawn by a beautiful span of cream horses” for the journey. John Rigdon recalled: “We started rather late in the morn & did not get to the jail til after dark & they would not let [us] go in till the next morn. After taking breakfast at the hotel we were taken to the jail & there remained for three days.”14

On December 16, the Prophet wrote words of comfort to the beleaguered Saints from his place of imprisonment:

Dear brethren, do not think that our hearts faint, as though some strange thing had happened unto us, for we have seen and been assured of all these things beforehand, and have an assurance of a better hope than that of our persecutors. Therefore God hath made broad our shoulders for the burden. We glory in our tribulation, because we know that God is with us, that He is our friend, and that He will save our souls. We do not care for them that can kill the body; they cannot harm our souls. We ask no favors at the hands of mobs, nor of the world, nor of the devil, nor of his emissaries the dissenters, and those who love, and make, and swear falsehoods, to take away our lives. We have never dissembled, nor will we for the sake of our lives.15

Emma was again at the jail on December 20, for a two-day visit. This time the wives of Alexander McRae and Caleb Baldwin went with her. In
the midst of the sparsest of fare the hearts of the prisoners were made glad that dire Christmas season by the presence of these loved ones.16 It was only such visits as this and the kindness of friends and fellow Saints that made the prisoner’s habitation durable from December 1, 1838, to April 6, 1839, when a change of venue took them to Gallatin, Daviess County, Missouri.

In November 1839, Joseph led a small delegation to Washington, D.C., to obtain redress through the United States Congress for losses in real and personal property suffered by the Latter-day Saints. While awaiting a decision, Joseph visited Philadelphia from December 21 to December 30, 1839. He preached to the Saints during this Christmastime in the “City of Brotherly Love.” On December 16, 1840, the Prophet welcomed passage of the act chartering the City of Nauvoo.17 In December 1842, Joseph was concerned for Emma, who was soon to be delivered of a newborn. The infant arrived the day after Christmas, and Joseph made this simple entry: “She was delivered of a son, which did not survive its birth.”18

Christmas with a Beloved Friend

Perhaps no Christmas was more pleasant in the span of the Prophet’s lifetime than his last earthly celebration on December 25, 1843, in Nauvoo (fig. 1). All the ingredients of what might be regarded as a traditional observance of that day were present. Joseph and Emma had just occupied the hospitable quarters of the newly constructed Mansion House. In the early morning hours, the household was awakened to harmonious strains of beautiful music. The Prophet recorded:

This morning, about one o’clock, I was aroused by an English sister, Lettice Rushton, widow of Richard Rushton, Senior,19 (who ten years ago, lost her sight,) accompanied by three of her sons, with their wives, and her two daughters, with their husbands, and several of her neighbors, singing, “Mortals, awake! with angels join,” &c., which caused a thrill of pleasure to run through my soul. All of my family and boarders arose to hear the serenade, and I felt to thank my Heavenly Father for their visit, and blessed them in the name of the Lord. They also visited my brother Hyrum, who was awakened from his sleep. He arose and went out of doors. He shook hands with and blessed each one of them in the name of the Lord, and said that he thought at first that a cohort of angels had come to visit him, it was such heavenly music to him . . .

At two o’clock [P.M.], about fifty couples sat down at my table to dine. . . .

A large party supped at my house, and spent the evening in music, dancing, &c., in a most cheerful and friendly manner. During the festivities, a man with his hair long and falling over his shoulders, and apparently drunk, came in and acted like a Missourian. I requested the captain
of the police to put him out of doors. A scuffle ensued, and I had the opportunity to look him full in the face, when, to my great surprise and joy untold, I discovered it was my long-tried, warm, but cruelly persecuted friend, Orrin Porter Rockwell, just arrived from nearly a year’s imprisonment, without conviction, in Missouri. 20

This rare, yet unexpected gift closed the activities of a beautiful Christmas Day. The Prophet must have felt all the warmth engendered by a lasting friendship between the two, which had spanned the years from the earliest days of the Restoration in New York. Joseph wrote the following day, December 26, “I rejoiced that Rockwell had returned from the clutches of Missouri, and that God had delivered him out of their hands.” 21

Joseph was not privileged to see another Christmas season. Enemies from within and without the Church deemed otherwise. Even as he contemplated the new year and prospects of his 1844 U.S. presidential candidacy “for conscience sake,” the Prophet’s antagonists planned his destruction. He and his brother Hyrum were mortally wounded at Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844.

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Fig. 1. Illustration of Nauvoo at Christmas by Ken Baxter, 1996. The Prophet Joseph Smith celebrated Christmas 1843 with Emma and their family in the Mansion House. During Christmas dinner the family was surprised by an unexpected visitor.
SECOND PRESIDENT, BRIGHAM YOUNG

The Christmas seasons between 1844 and 1847 denote a period of particular importance in the life of Brigham Young and that of the fledgling Church. The Saints, still reeling from the loss of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, struggled with feelings of extreme animosity toward those who had so unjustly wronged them. Brigham Young expressed wise counsel to those around him in a Christmas setting. On December 25, 1844, Brigham recorded in his journal:

I spent an agreeable time at Brother [Joseph Wellington] Collidge’s, in company with Elders Heber C. Kimball, George A. Smith, A. M. Lyman, John Taylor and their ladies. The band was in attendance. We partook of a substantial dinner; after which I made a few remarks expressive of my good feelings and love to my brethren. I remarked that the Lord would never suffer us to overcome our enemies while we cherished feelings of revenge, when we prevailed over our enemies it must be from a sense of duty and not of revenge.22

Christmas 1845 saw the Nauvoo Saints involved in an intense effort to complete their temple endowments and sealings before their anticipated departure for the West the following spring. Their designs were decidedly complicated by continual harassment from their enemies, who under the pretense of law were attempting to arrest Brigham Young and other leading Brethren. In spite of these encumbrances, the work of the temple moved forward day and night. Brigham Young spent most of Christmas Day and on through the entire night in the temple. He recorded:

12:15 p.m., George D. Grant brought word that the United States marshal is in the city again. Elder Kimball sent a message to him by Elder Grant, and at 12:15 Elder Kimball and I left the Temple.

Six p.m., the high council met for prayer in room No. 4; the high priests met in room No. 8.

At twenty minutes before six, Amasa Lyman, George A. Smith, Orson Hyde, and John Taylor went into the Temple, at 6:10 Parley P. Pratt and Orson Pratt, and at 6:18 Brother Heber C. Kimball and I went in.

The Twelve met in my room for counsel and prayer. After considerable conversation about the western country we united in prayer: George A. Smith was mouth.

One hundred seven persons received their ordinances. The business of the day closed at twenty minutes past ten o’clock, and notice was given that no more washings and anointings would be attended to at present. Brother Kimball and I, with some few others, remained in the Temple all night.23
Compelled by mob threats, the Saints had left the comforts of Nauvoo for primitive conditions at Winter Quarters in unorganized U. S. territory (Nebraska) on the Missouri River. An entire community of Saints had begun their removal, and Christmas Day 1846, of necessity, was largely business as usual:

Mild day. Christmas. Col. John Scott discharged the cannon thrice at sunrise. I wrote to Mr. [Logan] Fontenelle, Indian interpreter, as to some articles abstracted by the Indians from camp, also expressing a wish that Major Miller would inform us where he wished the house built for the Indians, as we had gone South at the time appointed but he had failed to meet us.

The General Council met at Dr. Richards’ octagon—held two sessions.24

Brigham Young Sustained as President

The 1847 Christmas season embraced a vital increment in the development of Church government among the Saints and in the life of Brigham Young. Returning to Winter Quarters from having guided the initial pioneer company to the Great Salt Lake Valley, Brigham and the leading Brethren conversed over the necessity of reorganizing the First Presidency with Brigham Young as president of the high priesthood. These men deemed that continuance of the three and one-half year “apostolic interregnum” since the Prophet’s martyrdom was insufficient.

On December 5, 1847, at the home of Orson Hyde, Brigham Young was sustained by nine of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as President of the Church with Heber C. Kimball as first counselor and Willard Richards as second. Over one thousand members of the Church assembled at a special conference held December 24–27, 1847, in the newly constructed Log Tabernacle at Miller’s Hollow (later Kanesville, Iowa). On December 27 they ratified the work of the Twelve by the uplifted hand.25

Brigham Young’s recording of the interim Christmas Day and his sustaining by the people on the 27th is as follows:

[December 25, 1847] The Council went to the Log Tabernacle and attended meeting. The congregation voted that the High Council on the East side of the river have all municipal power given to them by this people, and that the Bishop’s courts have authority as civil magistrates among the people, until the laws of Iowa are extended over us. . . .

A committee was appointed to investigate the laws of Iowa and ascertain what steps were necessary to be taken to effect a county organization. . . .

The council met in the evening and consulted about filling up the quorum of the Twelve Apostles. . . .
[December 27, 1847] Conference convened again when Elder Kimball spoke followed by Elder Joseph Young, myself, Elders Geo. A. Smith, Orson Pratt and Amasa Lyman, when I was unanimously elected President of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards were in like manner elected respectively my first and second counsellors. Uncle John Smith was unanimously elected Patriarch over to the whole church.

I spoke again referring to what had been accomplished by the Saints and other topics; bore testimony that the communion of the Holy Spirit was enjoyed by those present, when the conference was adjourned till the 6th of April at the Log Tabernacle.

After benediction by Elder Geo. A. Smith the congregation shouted three times “Hosannah, Hosannah, Hosannah to God and the Lamb Amen, Amen and Amen.”

Wilford Woodruff was present at the Log Tabernacle on this momentous day. In his journal, Woodruff recorded: “During the evening the people met with the band of music at the tabernacle & spent the evening in music, singing & dancing.”

Christmas Celebrations in the Salt Lake Valley

In Salt Lake City, there was time for a more festive celebration of Christmas by the Young family. Clarissa Young Spencer remembered that:

Within the short space of three years [following the arrival of the pioneers] the population of the city had increased to thousands, and the Christmas celebration took on a still greater air of gaiety. A brass band paraded up and down the streets, with the players mounted on horse-back. They serenaded at Father’s house as well as the homes of other Church leaders. All the toys were home made, the ads in the paper carrying no mention of commercial playthings. However, if a husband wished to delight his wife with a new bonnet on Christmas morning, there was Mrs. A. Smith, “Late of St. Louis,” who advertised a superior assortment of velvet, silk, satin, and straw bonnets, and a variety of fancy goods and millinery.

For days before Christmas I would slip into the family store, north of the Beehive House, and watch John Haslam tie up little square packages of nuts and raisins during his spare time. It was doubly worth my while because I could always count on his slipping me a lump of sugar or some other tasty bit while he was working. We would receive these nuts and raisins on Christmas morning along with vinegar and molasses candy that the girls had made and an abundance of “store” candy—gumdrops and peppermint sticks.
There was no tree in our home, for at that time the Christmas tree had not even come into general use in the East, but we always hung up our stockings, and every child received one toy and some clothing. We girls would receive knitted scarves, nubias (headdresses), mittens, shoes, stockings, garters, and wristers. . . . Some of us younger girls once received some red cashmere hoods that Mother’s sister had made for us. They were made with a pointed cape in the back and trimmed with white swansdown and would have been rather pretty except that they had been lined with green cambric and tied with green ribbons because they were the only materials available in the house. . . .

The boys would often receive new capes for Christmas, those being the outer garment most commonly worn. My brother Ernest, who was a big, husky fellow and didn’t feel the cold very much, would wear his about his waist in skirt fashion to the great amusement of the rest of us.

For Christmas toys the boys would get swords, drums, guns, and skates while we girls would be happy with wooden-headed dollies. The heads were turned in our own carpenter shop, then painted and sewed onto cloth bodies. When the dolls were finished they would be beautifully dressed by our diligent mothers.28

Emmeline B. Wells, wife of President Young’s counselor, Daniel H. Wells, remembered a community celebration with President Young:

By and by when the Social Hall was built, Christmas was sometimes celebrated there with dancing parties, and the enjoyment was such that those who had the opportunity of attending them remember to this day those good old times. Children’s parties, too, were given there occasionally, and our girls and boys will perhaps never forget while they live, the first Christmas tree in the Social Hall, where there was a present for every child of several large families, and all numbered and arranged in perfect order of name and age. It was a beautiful sight to us then, though it would perhaps seem very primitive now in these times of electric lights and every variety of color and brilliancy in illumination. President Young, Daniel H. Wells and others of their fellow citizens were there, but Brother Brigham was foremost in making the affair a grand success. It was an event in the lives of our children they ought never to forget, and I doubt if they ever will. I have been talking it over with one or two recently and trying to recall the most particular incidents.

Hon. John W. Young, then only a boy, handed the presents down from the tree, and I recollect Brother Brigham standing and pointing with his cane, and telling John just which to take down, and so on; the children were wild with delight and some of the mothers were quite as much elated, though not as demonstrative. After the Santa Claus tree was stripped of its gifts, the floor was cleared and the dancing commenced,
and there was good music, too, and President Young led the dance, and cut a pigeon wing to the great delight of the little folks. In fact, I think the evening was almost entirely given up to the children’s festivities, and the older ones, the fathers and mothers and more especially President Young, made them supremely happy for that one Christmas eve.

THIRD PRESIDENT, JOHN TAYLOR

On December 15, 1844, John Taylor, as editor of the *Times and Seasons*, shared with the Saints of Nauvoo his thoughts on the horrendous loss occasioned by the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in Carthage Jail during June of that year. But he optimistically announced that the “heavenly desire” still burns in the hearts of the Saints and that the embodiment of the keys of salvation are to be found in the temple ordinances:

But we have said enough: the day in which we live, the vengeance and folly of mankind, manifested in every important move, the eagerness with which truth is received by the faithful saints; and the heavenly desire, burning in the hearts of the “heirs of salvation,” like the fire in the “burning bush of Moses,” for the completion of the temple, wherein can only be consummated and practiced the holy washings; the holy anointing; and the holy conversations for the salvation of the living and the dead, are sufficient to arouse every one that wishes to be saved.

Elder Taylor and Parley P. Pratt were performing a special mission in the British Isles during the Christmas season of 1846. On December 17, the missionaries traveled by train from Edinburgh to Glasgow, Scotland. As they proceeded toward their destination, Elder Taylor composed a poem, which he set to the tune of Auld Lang Syne and sang at the Soiree in Glasgow on December 18.

The poem speaks of missionary work and speculates as to where the Church’s proselyting efforts might lead: California, Vancouver, Britain. The tree images running throughout the poem signify the gospel of Jesus Christ, which will bless and perfect all nations. In stanza four, Elder Taylor predicts that the gospel will bring peace to the historically feuding British Isles by stating that Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England will come together around the tree. Elder Taylor links the gathering of Israel to “the mountain’s top” with the peace found within Christ’s Church.

Ureka! now we’ve found the tree;  
The balm—the heavenly boon;  
That will the Saints and nations bless,  
And perfect them in one.
Chorus.— Then since our God has made us one,  
And planted freedom’s tree,  
We’ll taste its bud, but eat the fruit,  
In California. . . .

And if we to Vancouver go,  
And dwell on Britain’s isle—  
We’ll visit those we used to know,  
On Zion’s heav’ny hill.

For there upon the mountain’s top,  
The house of God shall stand:  
And to it all the nations flow,  
From every sea and land.

The shamrock, thistle, leek and rose,  
That bloom so fresh and fair,  
Shall planted be, around the tree,  
And of its fragrance share.

Then hail Columbia’s happy shore,  
And hail the British laws:  
God save the Queen, and every King,  
Who favours Zion’s cause.32

John Taylor was sustained President of the Church on October 10, 1880. His last Christmas was spent at the Kaysville, Utah, home of Thomas F. Rouche. President Taylor had gone into voluntary exile in February 1885 to avoid arrest by federal officers for violating the Edmunds Act of 1882.33 He died at the Rouche farmhouse on July 25, 1887, attended by a few family members and friends.34

FOURTH PRESIDENT, WILFORD WOODRUFF

Over a succession of years, President Woodruff experienced wide diversity in his Christmas celebrations. A potpourri of personal accounts from his journal illustrate the variety of circumstances that surrounded his Christmas activities:

[December 25, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio] Went up to the house of God [Kirtland Temple] to worship & herd a discourse from Brother Samuel Smith. Brother Hiram Smith broak bread which closed the meeting. Elder [Abraham O.] Smoot was quite sick & healed by the laying on of hands.35
December 25, 1840, London, England] Christmas Day in London The Church Bells throughout the city commenced Chanting for meeting at half past ten. We met with the Saints at Father [Henry] Corner Room Georges Row 24, at 11 o'clock & we taught the Saints Some plain principles, which had a good effect.

We took our Christmas dinner with Bro. Morgan. He had his family at home with him. The Dinner Consisted of Baked Mutton, Goose, Rabbit Pies, Minced Pies, & Plum Pudding & bread & cheese, Porter and water. We spent the evening at Mr. Albins in conversing about the things of God. ... After sitting an hour with the family we retired to rest.

This is the first Christmas I ever spent in England. Where I shall be next Christmas day the Lord only knows, & what a year to come will bring forth we cannot tell, But may the Lord preserve my life, my wife & Child in peace I pray & enable all the Saints to be established in righteousness. Christmas is considered the greatest of all days in England.36

December 25, 1841, Nauvoo, Illinois] Christmas Day was an interesting day indeed to the Twelve. We were invited to a Christmas supper at Mr. Hiram Kimball's. It was excellent Slaying [sleighing] & I got a horse & slay & carried the wives of the Twelve to Mr. Kimballs & home again after our meeting broke up. Our company consisted of B Young H. C. Kimball O. Pratt W. Richards J. Taylor & W. Woodruff All with our wives except W. Richards who waited upon Sister Hyde. We had an excellent feast. ...

A year ago this Christmas I was in London Eng & took dinner with Br & sister Morgan in company with Br Kimball but we are now again with our families.37

December 25, 1871, Woodruff farm, at Cottonwood, Salt Lake County, Utah] Was Christmas But I spent the day husking Corn.38

December 25, 1876, St. George, Utah] Christmas I went to the Temple. 40 women were Sewing Carpets and all the men were at work & Josiah Hardy worked at the Buzz Saw till 9 o'clock at night to get through so that the Ensign might be moved into the Temple for dedication. Presidet Young rode to the Temple the first time He had been out for 3 weeks. He has been laid up quite sick with inflamitory Rheumatism in his feet.39

December 25, 1883, St. George, Utah] I wrote a letter to Arza Hinckley. ... I was sealed for 13 Dead Couple. I Ordained Charoques Erastus to the office of a Seventy I think the first Lamanite Ever ordained to that office in this dispensation. There was 316 Baptisms to day which is Called Christmas.40

December 25, 1885, Salt Lake City, Utah] Christmas day I spent the day in the Chamber locked up as a prisoner while all the family went to the ward school House to attend the Christmas [party]. I wrote Letters to
George Teasdale & Thomas E. Ricks. I felt thankful to God I was Still a free man on Earth.41

[December 25, 1886, St. George, Utah] Christmas Morning Warm & pleasant. Emma [Smith Woodruff, wife] had knit 13 pair of Mittens in which she put money & Candy for the Children in their stocking and there was a great Row among the Children this morning. Grand Pa & Grand Ma got $2.50 each in their stocking with other things.

There is a great time in the street this Morning. A Band of Music ... are serenading before the House and a regular Christmas Hollowday.

We had our dinner at 3 ocok. Brother Thomas Cottam had all of his Children together and 23 grand Children. There was 20 grown persons & 24 Children at the table. The Evening was spent in music & singing.42

[December 25, 1888, Salt Lake City, Utah] All is astir this morning. The Children are Exam[in]ing their Presents. Br Wilkin went out to the penitentiary [Utah Territorial Penitentiary at Sugar House, Salt Lake City]. They took out 50 Turkeys to get up a Christmas dinner for the Prisoners. Emma had all her Children together Except Nellie & Henry.43

Wilford Woodruff was sustained as President of the Church on April 7, 1889. On Christmas Day 1889 he recorded: “I spent the day at Asahels. We took Dinner with him & spent the Evening there.”44 President Woodruff enjoyed spending Christmas with his family, and many of the Christmas Day entries during his presidency sound similar to the 1889 entry. In 1892 Christmas fell on a Sunday, so the family celebrated on December 26: “This day [December 26] was spent for Christmass. We had our Christmass Dinner. I had a large Company of Children & Grand Children and a pleasant day.”45 On December 25, 1897, President Woodruff wrote: “Christmas Day Spent the day at home with family.”46 This was his last holiday entry. President Woodruff passed away at the home of his friend Colonel Isaac Trumble in San Francisco, California, on September 2, 1898.

FIFTH PRESIDENT, LORENZO SNOW

Elder Lorenzo Snow and his sister, Eliza R. Snow, were called to participate in the rededication of Palestine for the returning of the Jews.47 The group, led by President George A. Smith, departed Salt Lake City on October 26, 1872. While en route to the Holy Land, the party toured the European Continent. President Smith’s party arrived in Nice, France, on December 24. George A. Smith detailed the tour that Lorenzo Snow and others participated in as they visited various locations in Nice on Christmas Day:

Touring with Lorenzo Snow, Eliza R. Snow, Faramorz Little, Miss Clara Little, and Paul A. Schettler.
Took a drive through Nice and vicinity, romantic[ally] situated between hills & vallies. Handsom bay, red rocky soil, rendered lovely by the hand of patient toil. The day was pleasant, the gardens green, variegated flowers abundant, Orange groves, loaded with golden fruit, contrasted beautifully with the deep dark foliage, while the lemon trees, also loaded with fruit, and the olive forests all combined to make a green contrast, never before witnesed by me on Christmas Day. . . . About 200 guests adorned our table at tagle d’ hotel which commenced with a good soup, & after 12 courses wound up with ice cream & roasted chestnuts. The sitting lasted 1½ hours.48

New Year’s Eve found the party in Milan, Italy. In anticipation of their arrival in Jerusalem, Eliza Snow devoted a stanza of an expansive poem entitled “The Year 1872” to the topic of Jesus Christ. In this stanza, Eliza emphasizes the great love in the Savior’s atoning sacrifice and looks forward to the time when Christ will come again:

I go to place my feet upon the land
Where once, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God
Was born—where once He lived and walk’d and preach’d,
And prayed, admonished, taught, rebuked and bled;
And then, to answer justice’ great demand,
And seal his mission of Eternal Love,
Upon the cross poured out his precious blood—
Arose to life triumphant o’er the tomb;
And after being seen and heard and felt,
Ascended up to heaven; and as He went,
Those who stood looking, heard and angel say,
“Ye men of Gallilee, why stand ye here
Gazing to heaven? The selfsame Jesus, whom
Ye see ascending, in like manner will
Again descend.”49

The company continued on to Jerusalem (fig. 2). On Sunday, March 2, 1873, in a tent that had been pitched on the Mount of Olives by previous arrangement, President George A. Smith led “in humble, fervent supplication, dedicating the land of Palestine for the gathering of the Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and returning heartfelt thanks and gratitude to God for the fulness of the Gospel and the blessings bestowed on the Latter-day Saints.”50

Because of the intense prosecution of the antibigamy laws by federal officers, Lorenzo Snow went on the “underground” for an extended period of time. In the early morning hours of November 19, 1885, seven U.S. marshals descended upon his home in Brigham City, Utah. Due to the indiscretion of a dog who loved his master too much and sniffed him out, Elder
Snow's hidden cubicle was discovered by the officers. An arrest and conviction for cohabitation followed. He was consequently incarcerated in the Utah Territorial Prison at Sugar House on March 12, 1886, and spent the succeeding Christmas behind locked doors.51

The gloom of imprisonment was much improved, however, by the delivery on Christmas Day of "a beautifully ornamented raisin cake" from Minna Cannon. There was also "a nice Silk Handkerchief, the S. L. Temple woven on each corner," which came from Lorenzo's son, daughter, and granddaughter. The latter gift was accompanied by this simple note of well-wishing to the venerable patriarch:

Christmas Greetings,
To Dear Papa
Dearest Pa, with joy we greet you
On, now this happy Christmas morn,
Yet because, that we must miss you
These blessings much thereby are shorn,
While you've suffered, we acknowledge
Our present loss is future gain:
And we hope now soon to see you,
And have you with us once again.
LeRoie, Mable & Lori.52

Lorenzo Snow was finally released from prison following a February 7, 1887, U.S. Supreme Court decision in his personal case.53

President Snow, then President of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, was the recipient of some highly prized gifts from his daughter Lana Snow Savage and her husband George for Christmas in 1891. In a poetic response written January 1, he not only expressed his gratitude for earthly favors but also revealed his devout belief in a future association of royal dimensions between spouses and the Father of us all:

Dear George and Lana:
That golden pen with diamond point

FIG. 2. Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In March 1873, Lorenzo Snow and others rededicated the Holy Land for the returning of the Jews. While there, the visitors were able to view many sites of Jerusalem. This illustration appeared in the Juvenile Instructor a year and a half later. Juvenile Instructor 9 (October 10, 1874), 243.
LeRoi Snow, son of President Snow, stated that his father was given to the writing of poetry, which he sent as season’s greetings to his friends.55

Lorenzo Snow was ordained and set apart as President of the Church on September 13, 1898. He enjoyed his last Christmas in the year 1900 and sent out his final note of celebration to his friends and loved ones on January 1, 1901: “In the eighty-seventh year of my age on earth, I feel full of earnest desire for the benefit of humanity. . . . May the light of truth chase darkness from your souls.”56 Lorenzo Snow died of apparent complications of pneumonia in Salt Lake City on October 10, 1901. He was buried in his beloved Brigham City, Utah.

**SIXTH PRESIDENT, JOSEPH F. SMITH**

Joseph F. Smith was but five years of age when his father, Hyrum Smith, and uncle, Joseph Smith, died. However, he did have some latent remembrances of the Prophet. From his mother, Mary Fielding Smith, and a host of contemporaries he inherited a rich recollection of the Prophet and his teachings. Joseph F. Smith was one of the Prophet’s most ardent exponents, as exhibited in a December 1894 sermon.

At the suggestion of Bishop Frederick Kesler of the Salt Lake City Sixteenth Ward, President Joseph F. Smith, second counselor to President Woodruff, met with a large and enthusiastic congregation to enjoy a
protracted evening of eulogizing the memory of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s eighty-ninth birthday, December 23, 1894. The gathering was unique because numerous individuals, who had been personally associated with Joseph Smith, remarked and bore fervent testimony of his divine calling as a prophet of the Lord. President Joseph F. Smith presented a masterful discourse on the inner nature of his uncle as he had come to know him and his works. President Smith stated:

I should like to see introduced among the Latter-day Saints, even at the risk of introducing another general holiday, the practice of celebrating or commemorating the birthday of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is now over fifty years since he was martyred; and during those fifty years, we have never had to my knowledge more than a small private gathering occasionally, in honor of the birthday of the man who was chosen of God and designated by His voice to be the mouthpiece of God Almighty to the inhabitants of the earth in the dispensation of the fullness of times. The only exception I recall was when, on the 23rd of December, 1892, a general fast was proclaimed and observed among the Latter-day Saints, preparatory to the final completion and dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in April following. We celebrate what is supposed to be the birthday of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but we get a long way off from His birthday; so that now, instead of celebrating the real birthday of our Lord, which was on the 6th of April, we celebrate the 25th of December in each year. And it is a proper thing that we should hallow His birthday, above all others. And in my judgement—and of course I may be a little biased in regard to this matter—in my judgement the next birthday celebration to that of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ should be that of Joseph Smith, to this entire people of the Latter-day Saints. . . . No matter what we may recollect of the Prophet or what may be said to us here tonight with regard to our memory of him, the one thing that I wish to call your attention to first and foremost of all other things is this, that whatever else the Prophet Joseph Smith may have done or may have been, we must not forget the fact that he was the man out of the millions of human beings that inhabited this earth at the time—the only man, that was called of God, by the voice of God Himself, to open up the dispensation of the Gospel to the world for the last time; and this is the great thing to bear in mind, that he was called of God, by the voice of God Himself, to open up the dispensation of the Gospel to the world for the last time; and this is the great thing to bear in mind, that he was called of God to introduce the Gospel to the world, to restore the holy priesthood to the children of men, to organize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the world, and to restore all the ordinances of the Gospel, for the salvation not only of the living, but also of the dead, and he was called to this mission by God Himself. Now, if somebody
tells us about Joseph Smith being fond of wrestling, fond of running a foot race, fond of having a good scuffle with some lusty neighbor or friend; or if you hear somebody tell about the good, that is, the overflowing of the human nature that was in him, it need not detract one iota from the great and glorious principles which were revealed through him to the world. . . .

. . . By the gift and power of God he translated this book (the Book of Mormon) from its original language, and from the engravings upon the golden plates into the language which we now read within the lids of this book; and it contains the fullness of the everlasting Gospel. It will lead men to the obtaining of the knowledge of truth whereby they may be saved and brought back again into the presence of God and partake of His glory and of endless lives. This is the great thing that I rejoice at, and this is the great and glorious thought that comes to my mind and that pervades my soul when I think of commemorating the anniversary of the birth of that great and glorious man, Joseph Smith; for he was the only man that I have any record of, or knowledge of, or that I have ever read of in any history, that God Himself, in connection with His son Jesus Christ, deigned to visit in person and commune with in this world. From Adam until this day, I have never heard of but this man that has ever been so favored of God. There have been other prophets, and great prophets, too, who have had angels minister to them, and others who have seen the finger of God, and who have been favored more or less; but where is the circumstance, and who is the man unto whom the Father and the Savior have appeared together in person, and declared themselves unto him? Where is that man? Nowhere that history records, except the Prophet Joseph Smith, and that while he was a youth. He was only a youth, comparatively in fact, when he was martyred, being only 38 years of age.

He was brimming over with the noblest and purest of human nature, which often gave vent in innocent amusements—in playing ball, in wrestling with his brothers and scuffling with them, and enjoying himself; he was not like a man with a stake run down his back, and with his face cast in a brazen mold that he could not smile, that he had no joy in his heart. O, he was full of joy; he was full of gladness; he was full of love, and of every other noble attribute that makes men great and good, and at the same time simple and innocent, so that he could descend to the lowest condition; and he had power, by the grace of God, to comprehend the purposes of the Almighty too. That was the character of the Prophet Joseph Smith. And while he could play with children and amuse himself at simple, innocent games among men, he also communed with the Father and the Son and spoke with angels, and they visited him, and conferred blessings and gifts and keys of power upon him that were never before bestowed upon any human being other than the Son of
God himself. No man yet that ever lived upon the earth had all the keys of the Gospel and of the dispensations bestowed upon him as were bestowed upon the Prophet Joseph Smith in the temple at Kirtland when he was visited there by the Son of God, by Moses, and by Elias and Elijah, and when the heavens were opened unto him and he received the keys of power and authority by which he could lay the foundation of the work of God, broad and deep, to cover the earth with the knowledge of God, and with His power and glory. And that work, the foundation of which he laid, is today spreading abroad among the nations of the earth, and it will continue to spread until it covers the earth as the waters cover the sea; and that is my testimony. Amen.57

A Memorial to Joseph Smith in Vermont

Joseph F. Smith was ordained and set apart as President of the Church on October 17, 1901. Early in 1905, at the request of President Joseph F. Smith and members of the First Presidency, Junius F. Wells visited the farm once belonging to Solomon Mack, lying in the townships of Sharon and Royalton in Windsor County, Vermont. Solomon was the grandfather of Joseph Smith Jr., and it was on his homestead, atop Dairy Hill, that the Prophet was born to Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith on Monday, December 23, 1805.

Junius had been directed to verify the exact confines of the farm through township records, interviews, and available historical sources. He was successful in purchasing the property and was authorized by the Brethren to build a memorial cottage on the site of the original home. It was likewise agreed that he would commission the erection of a thirty-eight-and-one-half-foot granite shaft with appropriate inscriptions to be dedicated and unveiled at that location on December 23, 1905. Elder Wells completed his arduous task and greeted President Joseph F. Smith and the Centennial Memorial Party as they arrived at South Royalton, Vermont on December 22. The group of thirty persons was comprised of Smith family members, General Authorities, and other invited guests.58

During the services held the following day, December 23, in the Joseph Smith Memorial Cottage, President Joseph F. Smith dedicated the home, the polished shaft of Vermont granite, and all appurtenances (fig. 3). The opening words of President Smith’s dedicatory prayer read:

Our Father who art in heaven! Hallowed be Thy most holy name. We Thy servants and handmaidens, representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, have gathered here to dedicate this monument to the memory of Thy servant, Joseph Smith, the great Prophet and Seer of the nineteenth century, who was born into the world near this spot, on the 23rd day of December, 1805—one hundred years ago.59
President Smith and certain members of his party spent Christmas Eve in transit to Boston by way of the railroad. On Christmas Day, the Smith family members drove to Topsfield and Boxford, Massachusetts, and there visited the home sites of Joseph Smith's ancestors, including that of Joseph Smith Sr. At the Pine Grove Cemetery in Topsfield, they paid homage to certain of these honorable men who had preserved the "watched bloodline" of the Lord's servant, Joseph Smith the Prophet. The party then returned to Boston and boarded the night train for the West via Palmyra, New York, and Kirtland, Ohio, where they stopped to tour church historic sites.60

In the December 25, 1905, Deseret News, the First Presidency gave very specific directions as to what the Saints must do in their personal actions to be consistent with the true observance of this sacred anniversary:

Bless the children; provide for the poor; comfort the distressed; visit the widow and the fatherless; forgive those who may be regarded as enemies; be filled with the spirit of blessing; have charity for all; promote peace and good will, and spread abroad the light and intelligence which flow down from heaven in the gospel of the Son of God; recognize his divine hand in all that is good and useful and that promotes the welfare of humanity.61
“Christmas, to the Latter-day Saint”

During the Christmas season of 1907, President Smith and his counselors, John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund, chose to carefully define Christmas in “What Christmas Suggests to a Latter-day Saint.” Primary emphasis was given to the meaning of Christ’s earthly ministry, a work set in motion by “the first great Christmas night” and culminating with the risen Lord’s advent and personal reign. The role of certain servants who had “gone before his face,” such as John the Baptist and Joseph Smith, were also stated. It is a thoughtful refining of the true nature of Christmas:

CHRISTMAS, to the Latter-day Saint, is both reminiscent and prophetic—a reminder of two great and solemn events, which will yet be regarded universally as the mightiest and most wonderful happenings in the history of the human race. These events were predestined to take place upon this planet before it was created. One of them was the coming of the Savior in the meridian of time, to die for the sins of the world; and the other is the prospective advent of the risen and glorified Redeemer, to reign upon the earth as King of kings....

As already intimated, there have been various dispensations of the gospel, which was first revealed to Adam out of heaven, where it was instituted as the means—the only means—of man’s salvation. But the greatest dispensations are, without doubt, the two immediately connected with the resurrection, namely, the one in which Christ Himself rose from the dead, and the one in which He will come in the clouds of heaven, simultaneously with the resurrection of the just, who are to reign with Him a thousand years. This final dispensation will witness the restitution of all things, the welding together of all the dispensations, the gathering into one of all things in Christ, things in heaven as well as upon the earth.

Such in brief is the divine program, as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the latter-day restorer of the religion of Jesus Christ, the pre-ordained plan of salvation. This also is the significance of Christmas, or it is what Christmas suggests to the mind of any thoughtful Latter-day Saint.

It is in honor of our Lord that we observe this day, one celebrated throughout Christendom as the birthday of the world’s Redeemer. Christ is God, even Jehovah, the God of Israel and as such we worship Him. And we also honor the memory of His faithful servants John and Joseph, who, in missions involving their martyrdom, went before His face, opening and preparing the way.

In the light of these solemn facts, and in the spirit of charity and good-will exemplified and enjoined by our blessed Redeemer, we send forth to the Latter-day Saints and to all the world, a hearty and kindly Christmas greeting!
Let no one suppose that “Mormonism,” so-called, is here to make war upon men, or upon creeds, governments, and institutions that men revere. It sustains law, order, liberty and truth, the world over. The Latter-day Saints are friends, not enemies, to mankind. That we have a message to deliver we know; and, God being our helper, we will deliver it, come life or death, come weal or woe! But we purpose doing this in the spirit of peace, in the spirit of patience and brotherly love, forgiving our enemies, and returning good for evil; oppressing no man for refusing to listen to our testimony, nor ridiculing what he holds sacred, however false or foolish it may appear to us. The liberty of conscience is inviolable, and we stand ready to defend all men in the exercise of this sacred, God-given right. We may be abused and slandered for exercising this right ourselves, but heaven forbid that we should deny it to others! Despite the human weakness that all men possess, and which prompts them to retaliate when they feel themselves wronged, we will endeavor, with the help of the Lord, to follow His divine injunction: “When men revile you, revile not again.” Our plain and simple duty is the preaching of the gospel, the gathering of scattered Israel, the redemption of Zion, and the salvation of the living and the dead. We have no warfare to wage against our fellow-men, no wrongs that we wish to avenge. We leave that to Him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” May He be merciful to those who misrepresent and bring trouble upon His people!...

But these issues are all in the hands of the Lord. He will do His own work in His own time and way. Our mission is not to curse, but to bless; not to punish or threaten, but to persuade men to do right. We preach salvation, not damnation; and in this spirit we send forth this greeting, echoing, and, if possible, emphasizing the salutation of the angels to the shepherds, on the first great Christmas night: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

**Christmases in Want**

On Christmas Day in 1914, David A. Smith, son of President Joseph F. Smith, sent a letter of heartfelt gratitude to his father, who was then in Santa Monica, California, for a period of respite after a very demanding schedule. David’s letter and the written response from his father which followed gives us wonderful insight into the filial relationship of President Smith and his son as well as a rare Christmas story from the past experience of the President. David wrote his father:

My Dear Papa:

After a day of noise and excitement, the quiet of the evening, now that the children have retired for the night, has caused my thoughts to take me back to my childhood days and especially to the celebrating of
Christmas with my brothers and sisters, and I thought of President Wilson “who arose early to-day to direct in person the Christmas festivities at the White House for his small grand niece.” I would not change places with President Wilson for anything, and yet I wonder, when I see their all, as we were, as children, with our new articles of wearing apparel, some candy, nuts and raisons [sic]; giving away to these thoughts fear overtakes me and I tremble as I begin to realize the responsibility that is resting upon me and I wonder if with all my advantages, I will be able to live up to the requirements and attain the success that your example and teaching would have me reach. Oh! Papa my heart is full of love for you and for your wives and children, my brothers and sisters, and now that I am beginning to feel a little of the responsibility that has been yours for so long; the more I realize what I owe to you; the more helpless I seem to become. All my days I have lived in the love of my dear parents, and when in my soul, for I have always had a desire to live up to every requirement. . . . Last year I had the pleasure of accompanying you when making your Christmas calls, while we miss you this year we are greatful [sic] that you are permitted to get away, in a measure at least, from you arduous labours.

I called on all of the folks yesterday and delivered their Christmas turkeys and one was sent to you, had I known earlier we might have sent two, I hope the one you did get went around.

Today I delivered to Aunt Sarah the two coats you ordered from Provo for Frank and Willard we received them this morning, as far as I can learn all are well and have had a happy Christmas.

Praying for the blessings of our heavenly Father to be with you, and with love for all, I am affectionately, your loving son.

David63

In a letter dated December 29, 1914, President Smith responded to David’s remembrances with equally stirred emotions of his own:

*My Beloved Son:*—Your most refreshing and welcome letter of Christmas eve, came to my hand yesterday, and I read and re-read it with pleasure, mingled with grateful tears.

Your letter also took me back not only to the boyhood days of my own boys and girls, but also to those of my very own. From 1846 to 1848 and 9 I knew no Christmas, and no holiday; and, indeed, if we had a Christmas or a New Year celebration at all before 1846—or until after I was married, for the life of me, at this moment, I cannot remember it. I was teamster, herd-boy, plow-boy, irrigator, harvester, with scythe or cradle, wood-hauler, thrasher, winnower (by the half-bushel measure or fanning-mill, later) general roustabout, and a fatherless, motherless, and almost friendless missionary, and withal, always penniless.
I say almost friendless. I had one true friend, a widow, frail, aged—but oh! so true! She was my never-to-be-forgotten and ever-to-be-loved and remembered Aunt Mercy R. [Fielding] Thompson. She, like my own precious mother [Mary Fielding], never forgot me while they lived. But in their time, they had very little, and it was a continuous struggle just to live!

Then when, after these dreary experiences, my own precious cherubs began to come along, we were existing on $3 per day for each working day employed, and that in tithing products at high prices. Well, I cannot tell you how we managed to live at all, but we did! God must have helped us, for I did not steal nor defraud my neighbor. I did not owe any man, woman or child one cent, except it was my gracious Aunt Mercy who, as often as she could, slipped a favor in my way. I owed no man through all those days, and I had to work—I could not be idle.

Now again to the Christmas holidays: There were my . . . precious chicks (fig. 4), but not a dollar in cash, with which to buy one thing for Christmas. I could draw a few pounds of flour, or meat, a little molasses, or something of that kind, ahead, at the general Tithing Office and pay

FIG. 4. Joseph F. Smith family, November 1898. President Smith is seated fourth from the left. President Smith recalled with gratitude the chance he had to be with his family and play with his children during Christmas seasons of economic hardship.
up at the end of the month with tithing scrip, received in payment of my labor which more than often began at 6 a.m. and ended at 11 p.m., at $3 per day in tithing pay, which was not cash.

I saw many reveling in luxuries, with means to lavish their every want, which were far more than their needs—riding in buggies, on prancing horses, enjoying their leisure, while I—we all! were on foot and of necessity tugging away with all our mights to keep soul and body together. Under these spiritless conditions, one day just before Christmas, I left the old home with feelings I cannot describe. I wanted to do something for my chicks. I wanted something to please them, and to mark the Christmas day from all other days—but not a cent to do it with! I walked up and down Main Street, looking into the shop windows—into Amussen’s jewelry store, into every store—everywhere—and then slunk out of sight of humanity and sat down and wept like a child, until my poured-out grief relieved my aching heart; and after awhile returned home, as empty as when I left, and played with my children, grateful and happy only for them.64

President Smith was engaged in a series of missions in the 1860s—1870s. In the 1880s he was likewise away from home for substantial periods of time fulfilling Church assignments while avoiding arrest warrants issued by federal officers stemming from the anti-bigamy campaign in Utah. During this extended period he had little opportunity to further his agricultural or business pursuits as some others were able to do. Financially embarrassed he had no substance. Yet these letters show that the most significant gifts in life are not necessarily tangible and tied with satin ribbon. There are moments when only the gift of love can be offered, but such is always sufficient for the day. For President Smith and his family, Christmas was an involvement of the heart where pure love, extended and reciprocated, provided the ingredients for true happiness at yuletide.

SEVENTH PRESIDENT, HEBER J. GRANT

At age twenty-five, Heber J. Grant was ordained as an Apostle by President George Q. Cannon on October 16, 1882. Already familiar with the business world of Wells Fargo and Company, Zion’s Savings Bank and Trust Company, and ZCMI, Elder Grant was a decided asset to the Brethren in fiscal and other matters. Though his initial years in the Twelve were surrounded with the chaos created by severely repressive measures directed against the Latter-day Saints, he sought to keep an air of normalcy for family members throughout the holiday season. Such normalcy can be seen in Elder Grant’s journal entry for December 25, 1888: “Spent nearly the
entire day at home. Took the little ones out in [a] buggy to make some Christmas presents. I feel truly and sincerely thankful on this Christmas day for all of the many blessings me and mine are in the enjoyment of."

Books! Books! Books!

Heber J. Grant was ordained and set apart as the Church President on November 23, 1918. During the holiday season and on other occasions, President Grant habitually gave of his substance to buy books for numerous friends. He drew from a multiplicity of titles, sometimes buying out entire editions, four or five thousand copies, of a book he particularly liked. Handwritten messages in his own deft penmanship or preprinted inscriptions were all signed in person (fig. 5). Such works as William Jennings Bryan's *The Prince of Peace*, Edgar A. Guest's *The Path to Home*, Thomas Carlyle's *Martin Luther*, David Starr Jordan's *The Strength of Being Clean*, Henry Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World*, and Orson F. Whitney's *Love and the Light* were among those circulated. He had read each volume with care himself and underscored salient passages in his own copy. Illustrative of his exhaustive giving of books in the holiday season are his activities on Christmas Day, 1925:

Spent the morning until 11:00 A.M. at the hotel, writing in books and signing slips. . . .

A lot of books arrived from Independence last night. Some of them should have been here at least ten days ago and I wrote in books until late last night and again this morning, also wrote in them this afternoon until about 3:00. . . .

Called and delivered a lot of books this evening. Gusta [President Grant's wife, Hulda Augusta Winters] was with me. . . . Presented to all the people on whom we called this afternoon and evening a copy of "The Prince of Peace." . . .

Have had a very strenuous day indeed, but have thoroughly enjoyed the day in visiting with my daughters and granddaughters and friends.

President Grant enjoyed both an exceptional number of friends in the religious sphere and also in the greater business community. His diary chronicles the massive efforts of one man to make a difference in people's lives:

Day spent with books. Books! Books! Had lunch at home today for the first time in several days. I am sending books to all the members of the Sunday School Union Board, Y.L. and Y.M.M.I.A., Primary, Relief Society boards, and to the directors of Grant & Co., Home Fire, Utah State National Bank, Zions Savings Bank, Utah Light & Power Co., Utah
Fig. 5. Inscription, Heber J. Grant to George Albert Smith, Christmas 1925. The inscription reads: “1925–26. Holiday greetings to Geo. Albert + Lucy W. Smith from your friends Mr. Mrs. Heber J. Grant. Salt Lake City.” President Grant estimated that he gave over one hundred thousand books to friends as holiday and other occasion gifts. This inscription is found in a copy of William Jennings Bryan, *The Prince of Peace* (Independence, Mo.: Zion’s Printing and Publishing, 1925).
Light & Traction Co., Z.C.M.I., Utah Hotel, Salt Lake Theater, Consolidated Wagon & Machine Co., Beneficial Life Ins. Co., Union Pacific Railroad Co., and the Pacific Coast Joint Stock Land Bank, to say nothing about personal friends. I am sorry to say that all the books have not yet arrived from the Deseret News press and that part of the books will not reach my friends until after Christmas. . . . [I] am giving over one hundred copies of the Lecture on Martin Luther to the employees in the Church offices. Owen and Rachel Heninger have been helping Brother Anderson and Bertha mailing these books. I was busy all day principally with books, and it was a little after nine o’clock P.M. when I left the office.68

During the 1935–36 school year, President Grant went to Brigham Young University, where his portrait was to be unveiled in the Heber J. Grant Memorial Library. In answer to an inquiry, the school’s president, Dr. Franklin S. Harris, told President Grant that the library had over one hundred thousand volumes on the shelves. In his address that followed, President Grant said that while he had never kept track of the number of books he had given away, he believed that the number, too, would be just about one hundred thousand volumes.69

Christmas with Family

President Grant’s Christmases seem to have been filled with children and grandchildren, in addition to his numerous friends. In 1936, he recalled the Christmas Day humor of a young grandchild:

We drove down early in the morning to American Fork and visited with Edith and her family. . . . We returned in time for a family gathering at our house at eleven o’clock. We have forty-seven living grandchildren, ten great grandchildren, and twelve grandsons-in-law and ten sons-in-law, which makes quite a tribe when we are together. One of the great grandchildren, John Taylor Anderson, five years old, put his fingers in his ears and said, “chatter, chatter, chatter,” which accurately describes what went on.70

Eighth President, George Albert Smith

In December 1905, Elder George Albert Smith, then a member of the Twelve, accompanied the large entourage of relatives and Church members who went to dedicate the Joseph Smith Memorial at Sharon, Vermont, in commemoration of the Prophet’s one hundredth birthday on December 23 (see fig. 3). On Christmas Day he visited the old ancestral homes of five generations of Smiths in the towns of Topsfield and Boxford, Massachusetts. He recorded the events of that auspicious day:
Awoke feeling well. Had a good breakfast and took the Saugus branch train in company of John Henry [Smith], Hyrum M [Smith], Ida B and Jos F. Smith Jr. at 8.20 A M. Were met at Saugus by Frank P. Bennett with three automobiles and taken to his fathers home, a most beautiful place. Here we were joined by T. P. Berrett, Howard Berrett, Prest Jos F. Smith, Ina, Edith A, Jesse M and Elias A Smith and took Automobiling to Topsfield, to old home of Asael Smith now owned by Francis Trainer. It is located about 1½ miles north of Topsfield proper. Visited the cemetery and took pictures of Monument erected by Grace Smith [George A. Smith and others initiated the monument] in 1873 to the memory of the first Robert and first and second Samuel Smith. Thence to Boxford to the old home of Robert Smith now occupied by some of his descendants named Smith. Thence through Salem to Lymme riding over the floating bridge. At Lymme Edith, Ina, Elias A and myself left the scene of the burning of the Witches at Lymme and went back to Boston leaving the others to eat Dinner with the Bennetts. This was a delightful Christmas day cold and clear but with out snow. Took train at 6:19 P. M. for Palmyra [NY]. Mr Burgess the N.E.P.A [New England Passenger Agent?] of the Nickle Plate road accompanied us to Rotterdam Junction. We had a Christmas tree on the train and spent the evening very pleasantly. Everybody received a present. I got a jumping jack.71

The following year, the holiday season caught Elder George Albert Smith on a protracted journey by train traveling from New Orleans to Salt Lake City. Obviously lonely for his beloved Lucy and little ones, he took solace in the amenities afforded the traveler:

New Orleans Monday [December 24, 1906] Spent the day at the park cemeteries etc and left at night for the land of Utah. I received lovely Christmas letters from Lucy and the children and wished myself home all day long. Bought a few trinkets and some flags.

On Texas Pacific train [December 25, 1906] Spent my Christmas posting my journal and reading and reading my letters. Had dinner of Turkey etc at Mineola Texas. Am very lonesome but feel sure my children will have a jolly time at home. Train is about 2 hours late and losing time. We arrived Fort Worth House where a splendid Christmas dinner was served. I took a walk after eating and went to two moving picture shows. Retired feeling fairly well, after visiting with the photos of my family.72

Christmases without Lucy

Elder George Albert Smith experienced a very difficult Christmas Day in 1937. He had lost his wife and sweetheart of forty-five years, Lucy Emily Woodruff Smith, on November 5, 1937. He recorded in his diary: "I remained at home all day with my family. . . All well and happy as possible.
I went with Emily and Edith to Lucy's grave and placed roses on it. The wreath the girls had placed there the night before looked fresh + green. President Smith chose not to remarry during the remaining years of his life.

Elder Smith spent Christmas Day surrounded by his children and grandchildren. A bustling household perhaps gave some relief to the lingering remorse felt over the loss of his life's companion. His diary reflects his inner sorrow while reacting to the festivities about him:

Awoke and heard the children running around the house at 8 o'clock in the morning, welcoming a joyous Christmas Day filled with much comfort and satisfaction to many people. Our Heavenly Father was kind enough to give us a snow storm so that everything is beautiful and white. . . . It was a real treat to see how happy the children were with their gifts. I do not believe they realized how generous their portion is. In fact we have all been wonderfully treated in the way of gifts from our loved ones. . . .

Surely the Lord has been very kind to me in giving me fine children as a result of a companionship with a noble woman who did her best to keep the commandments of our Heavenly Father. She was a great help to me and I miss her greatly since she was called home. My children try in every way to make up to me my loss but of course that isn't possible. . . .

It has been a very peaceful day. Have been so happy to observe the mirth and cheerfulness in the members of our household but there is an empty place that cannot be filled. It is nearly six o'clock at night and I have not yet opened my Christmas packages. Have enjoyed the others but have had no enthusiasm to see what my packages contain. I am sure they will be nice. My children always remember me generously. Before I go to bed I will have a good visit with my family and open the packages and let them enjoy them too. . . .

I played with the children, helped them enjoy their toys, read to them some faith-promoting stories and we shed tears together as we had brought to our attention the sacrifices that were made by some of our loved ones when they settled this country and made it possible for us to have a joyous place in which to live. 

A Centennial Christmas Message

George Albert Smith was ordained and set apart as President of the Church on May 21, 1945. The pioneer centennial year of 1947 was filled with major activities and responsibilities for the eighth President of the now million-member Church. President Smith's Christmas message to the Saints that year was filled with praise and thanksgiving to his Heavenly Father for the bounteous blessings enjoyed in the post-World War II era and the
emergence of the Church after one hundred years of progress since the arrival of the initial pioneer company. This epistle to the Saints also contains a charge of continued vigilance:

At the approach of another glad Christmastide my heart is filled with gratitude to my Heavenly Father for the many blessings which he has bestowed upon the Latter-day Saints during the year which is now drawing to a close.

Here in this land which has been spared actual warfare, our farms and fields have yielded bounteously; our flocks and herds have multiplied. Through diligent efforts we have produced enough of the necessities of life to sustain ourselves, and to provide a surplus which we have sent to assist our impoverished brethren and sisters in other lands. Since the close of the war, eighty-seven carloads of food, clothing and bedding have been sent by the Church to the needy and destitute across the sea. In which so many willing hands have labored and toiled during recent years.

Our missionary effort at the present time is greater than at any previous period in the history of the Church. Today there are in full-time missionary service more than four thousand of the sons and daughters of God who have been divinely commissioned to proclaim the truth to the children of men. They are sent out to teach repentance to the inhabitants of the earth, that these people may turn from the error of their ways, that they may cleave unto that which is righteous, and thereby gain the favor of our Heavenly Father and enjoy the companionship of his Spirit, which is a safe guide along the pathway of mortal life and a sure preparation for a home in his celestial kingdom.

During the present year we have been able to complete a very successful celebration in honor of the arrival, one hundred years ago, of the first pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley, under the leadership of President Brigham Young. Appropriate exercises were held by the Saints in many of the cities of the intermountain empire, celebrating the event; a modern caravan of automobiles, camouflaged as oxen-drawn covered wagons, traveled over the pioneer route from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City. At the mouth of Emigration Canyon one of the most beautiful and imposing monuments in the world was constructed, marking the end of the trail and on which was written the historic declaration of the great pioneer president, “This is the Place.”

While we are recounting our blessings, we must remember that great problems are yet before us. The world is still staggering from the effects of the recent war; cities are in ruins; famine stalks unchecked in many sections of the old world; rumblings of political and social upheavals cause men’s hearts to tremble with fear; the dove of peace is denied admittance in the councils of the nations.
But the promises of the Lord can be relied upon in the future as they have been in the past. Each passing year brings us nearer the date of his coming in power and glory. True, the hour and the day, no man knoweth. But the duty of the Latter-day Saints is to watch and pray, being valiant for the truth and abounding in good works. Despite the discontent in the world and the apparent growth of the power of evil, those who continue to stand in holy places can discern through it all the handiwork of the Lord in the consummation of his own purposes. The Almighty reigns and will continue to reign!

Therefore, at this season of the year, let personal discords be forgotten and animosities banished. Let rejoicing be heartfelt but not boisterous. Let gift giving be as generous as circumstances will allow, but not extravagant. Let the hearts of the children be made glad, and let us live that the spirit of the Prince of Peace may dwell in our homes.\footnote{75}

**Ninth President, David O. McKay**

In 1920 the First Presidency sent Elder David O. McKay of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to make a survey tour of all the island missions of the Pacific Ocean—the first member of the Twelve to do so. Other mission areas would also be visited as deemed expedient during a period lasting from 1920 to 1921. His traveling companion was Hugh J. Cannon, President of the Liberty Stake in Salt Lake City. They departed Vancouver, British Columbia on the *Empress of Japan*, bound for Yokohama, December 7, 1920. Their itinerary placed them in Tokyo, Japan, for the holiday season. Elder McKay recorded his impressions of the Christmas enjoyed with the family of President and Sister Joseph H. Stimpson of the Japan Mission (fig. 6). Elder McKay recorded:

> If mild weather, bright sunshine, a clear blue sky, green vines and leafy trees are the characteristics of Christmas in Tokyo, then this twenty-fifth of December, nineteen twenty, has been just a usual Christmas; but to one who has spent nearly all one’s holidays in northern Utah, it was most unusual.

> It is true that several days before there were evidences on every hand throughout the city that a festive season was approaching.

> ... It will not be appropriate to go into detail about the meaning and significance of these decorations, because they were not being put up for Christmas, at all, but for the New Year—Japan’s festive season—ten days hence. As Christmas eve approached, these decorations throughout the city became more profuse, and it was difficult, sometimes, to realize that these people were not making their streets more beautiful and attractive in honor of the birth of the Savior of the World.
True, the comparatively few Christians were preparing to commemorate this great event, but most of the Japanese people are not Christians.

Christmas eve, however, found four little groups of true followers of the Master fully prepared to do honor to the occasion. These were the Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ located at Osaka, Tokyo, Kofu and Sapporo.

It was Brother Cannon’s pleasure and mine to be participants in the festivities at Tokyo.

President and Sister Joseph H. Stimpson had a real Christmas tree in their room at the Mission house, and old Santa remembered their little Children here, just as he did the tens of thousands in Utah sixteen hours later. What a blessed privilege old Saint Nicholas enjoys—to cross the Pacific in that short time! By boat it took us fifteen days!

The morning hours were spent in exchanging greetings and in preparing for the children’s exercise in the afternoon.

Sixty minutes before the hour to begin, the little boys and girls began to gather at the house. And what an interesting, little motley

group they were! And how different their greetings from those our own children give! Only one or two bright young hopefuls could say, “I wish you a merry Christmas,” all the others could express the same wish only by bowing, which they did most gracefully. We American children can all learn true politeness from these polished little [children]. I had my first lesson in the art this Christmas day. . . .

Tokyo Christmas Program

Elder David O. McKay attended a “children’s exercise” on Christmas Day 1920 at the Japan mission house in Tokyo. The following is a reproduction of the program recorded by Elder McKay:

**Singing:** “Christmas Carol,”—Sunday School Children.

**Prayer:** Brother Yoshijiro Wantanabe

**Singing:** “Far, far Away on Judea’s Plains”, Sunday School Children

**Opening Address:** Brother Nikichi Takahashi

**Flower Recitation:** By nine girls.

**Girl’s Song:** “Jesus bids me shine,” by twelve little girls each holding a candle.

**[Dialogue]:** “Temperance” by five boys

**Solo:** “I’ll Be a Sunbeam,” by Miss Sadako Terauchi

**Talk:** On the Book of Mormon by Sister Taune Nachie.

**[Singing:]** “Thanksgiving Song” by the boys of the Sunday School.

**Recitation:** “Thanksgiving” by four boys

**Dialogue:** “Three Wise Men,” by the boys of the Sunday School.

**Solo:** “Aloha Oe,” sung by Miss Baba in English.

**Girls Chorus:** By girls who come to practice with the Stimpsons.

**Play:** Written by Sister Kotoe Morimoto, given by the MIA’s.

**Talk:** Elder David O. McKay of the Council of the Twelve.

**Orchestra:** Concluded by a medley of American airs.

**Closing Talk:** By Brother Jiro Fugita

**Singing:** “Kimi ga Yo.”

**Benediction:** by President Joseph H. Stimpson.

(David Oman McKay, Scrapbooks, vol. 126, “A Christmas in Tokyo,” front, typescript, Church Archives, format changed.)
The vim and energy and loudness with which they rendered their various parts were second only to their eagerness to do so. Another lesson worthy of imitation, I thought.

Though it made me somewhat sadly contemplative, it was a wonderfully interesting experience to hear those half hundred Japanese children, in their variously colored costumes, singing lustily, if not harmoniously, such songs as “Jesus wants me for a sunbeam” and “Glory to God in the Highest,” and not one of them a Christian. However, it was gratifying to note the same interest and joyousness in their responsive souls that would be manifest a few hours later by their little white brethren and sisters across the sea. When we, strangers to them, found our hearts filling with the same love for them that we have for the children at home, it was easy to understand that Christ included the Little Ones with yellow faces when He said:

“Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” . . .

Christmas, 1920, was more interesting and pleasant than I had anticipated it could possibly be over 5500 miles away from home and Loved Ones; yet as the hour next to midnight approached and we retired to our rooms, I was conscious of a very keen regret; viz., That, excepting the members of the Church, it appeared that neither parents nor children had participated in the entertainment because of any sympathy for the Gospel. They had come either for amusement or gifts or both.

I fell asleep wondering if, after all, these aren’t the principal incentives in our Christmas festivities at home.76

Memories of Childhood Christmases

On a winter’s day in 1938, President McKay, second counselor to George Albert Smith, returned to the old family home of his youth in Huntsville, Utah (fig. 7). It had been unoccupied for some time, and he was there to check on the place. As he pattered about the house with its familiar trappings, he began to muse on the innocent laughter and excited merriment of the children and their friends at Christmas seasons of long ago. Moved by his impressions of the moment, he wrote a special letter of endearment dated December 12 to his brother, Thomas E. McKay, who was then presiding over the Swiss Mission:

My Dear Brother and Playmate, Thomas E.,

I went to Huntsville the other day and visited the Old Home. It was a typical wintery day, so you can easily imagine how cold the rooms were in which no fires were burning, and in which none had been for weeks. The house was just like a large refrigerator.
There were a few things which I wanted to do so I threw your old coonskin coat over my shoulders, and soon felt warm and comfortable. For a few moments I strolled leisurely from room to room, and, being in a reminiscent mood, I let my mind wander at will down the lanes of memory. I saw “Tommy” and “Dadie” [Thomas E. and David O.] go up stairs to bed, and felt the tender touch of the dearest, sweetest mother that ever lived as she tenderly tucked the bed-clothes around her two roguish boys and gave them good-night kisses.

Again it was Christmas Eve. Our stockings having been hung where Santa couldn’t help but see them, we lay half expecting to hear the jingle of the sleigh bells announcing the approach of good old St. Nick to the chimney top—sleep came tardily, but finally the sandman succeed in closing our eyes.

Christmas morning, I can see those boys creeping down the stairs before daybreak—no electric switch to press and flood the room with light; no flashlight at hand. They didn’t even light the old kerosene lamp. Step by step they groped their way in the dark, and sought the nail (or chair) on which each had hung respectively his empty stocking. Who can ever forget the thrill of that first touch of the stocking filled with Santa’s treasures! Apple in the toe, sticks of red and white candy protruding from the top, and trinkets and presents hidden in between! Perhaps a

Fig. 7. Elder McKay driving a sleigh, Huntsville, Utah. In a 1938 letter to his brother, Elder McKay reminisced about Christmases at the old family farm in Huntsville.
trumpet stuck out with the candies; but the drum and sled were standing near by.

The air in the room was cold even though the last embers in the kitchen were still smoldering—evidence, if the boys had stopped to think, that father and mother had sat up late enough to welcome St. Nick to our house.

Soon the girls were awake also, and the lamp was lit—then the “oh’s” and the “ah’s,” and the medley of sounds of drums, jewsharp, harmonica, and music box!

As the sun came smiling over those snow-capped mountains, he turned the frost into diamonds that sparkled from the leafless trees and seemed to dance on the twelve-inch blanket of pure white snow.

Then came the playmates with their merry cry “Christmas Gift.”

In the afternoon the children’s dance! (One of those boys danced with a sweet little girl eleven successive times!) Oh the romance of childhood!

Chores—evening shadows, supper and bed, and another Christmas was gone. Why, to childhood, is Christmas day so short and the next far away?

Christmas again, anticipated by the trip up South Fork to get our own Christmas tree from the hillside. They were older then, those boys, but their stockings still were hung, and good old Santa never failed to fill them. . . .

Later came school and missions, yet still the tender ties that radiated from a devoted father and loving mother ever pulled us back to the Old Home, the dearest, sweetest spot on earth.

It is only an old country home, but no place was ever filled with truer love and devotion on the part of parents, brothers, and sisters, than those which pervaded the hearts of the loved ones in that family circle.

Hanging your coat in its accustomed place, I walked out of the front door; as the night-latch clicked, I thought it might have been the click of the lid of a treasure chest that held the wealth of memories that no money could buy.

Well, my brother and pal of youthful days, I just wanted you to share with me this glimpse of happy memories, and to say as the Yuletide now approaches, my heart is full of loving wishes to you, that you and yours may enjoy the happiest Christmas ever, and that the New Year may come laden with happiness and joy supreme.77

Christmas Message from the Prophet

David O. McKay was sustained President of the Church on April 9, 1951. President McKay recognized that the true spirit of Christmas was the
Spirit of Christ. He also realized that each individual must allow that spirit to “radiate throughout his home” (fig. 8). In his 1959 Christmas message, President McKay counseled Saints about their holiday celebrations:

At the renewing of this glorious season it is important to realize that Christmas, the day which has been set aside to celebrate Christ’s birth, is recognized as a day that should “change all grief into love.”

The danger which arises in our celebration on Christmas is the possibility of subordinating the real purpose of commemorating the spiritual to be overshadowed by the material. The true spirit of giving happiness to others, the fellowship of good friends, and the satisfying knowledge that Christmas reminds us of Christ’s promise of a new and better life must always be uppermost in our minds. The heavenly host that praised God and said: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14), give us these keynotes:

1) Faith in Deity is the first essential to happiness and peace.

2) Brotherliness is the second essential by which this happiness and peace can be maintained.

It is fitting at Christmas to renew our desires and to strengthen our determination to do all that lies within our power to make real, among men, the message heralded by the angels when the Savior was born. Let us glorify God by seeking the good, the true, the beautiful. Let us strive to establish peace on earth by exercising that same good will toward one another which God has shown toward us!

When he came as a lowly babe, there was no room at the inn; today, every heart and every home should bid him welcome. If such were true, selfishness, jealousy, enmity, and all things which bring unhappiness would be replaced by kindness, willing service, and goodwill.

The source of happiness is within one’s soul. So springs faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. First then, let each individual admit into his own heart the true spirit of Christmas. Then let it radiate throughout his home. A thousand such homes would make a true Christian city, and a thousand such cities would build a true Christian nation . . .

He came to give us life eternal. Let us accept his gift with gratitude . . .

Yes, Jesus is the Prince of Peace, but he will not bring peace to the world in any magic way. As he has always done, he will grant it only according to the law upon which it, like all blessings, is predicated. Hate breeds hate; love begets love; kindness invites more kindness; and kindness and love begat peace.

When mankind learns this simple lesson, peace will come to them as a natural result. Predatory interest will fade away. Men will see one
another as brothers, each one created in the image of God. They will understand that to love God, they must first love their neighbors as themselves.\textsuperscript{78}

\textbf{“The Responsibility of Establishing Peace”}

In December 1968, a time riddled with war and civil unrest, President McKay counseled that the responsibility for establishing peace rests upon each of us:

The responsibility of establishing peace in the world rests not alone upon the leaders of nations. It rests upon the individual, upon every home, upon every hamlet and city.

Christ’s reality must be sensed by you and by me, and the reality of his philosophy must be mine and yours if we hope to advance spiritually.

In the march of spiritual progress, there are certain necessary and definite steps, if we can only sense them:

\begin{figure}
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\caption{President McKay with children and grandchildren, Christmas 1957.}
\end{figure}
1. A consciousness of freedom. This is the principle that began when Christ accepted his appointment to his earthly mission. God desires to make men like himself, but to do so, he must first make them free.

2. A sense of self-mastery. We cannot rise unless we overcome and conquer temptation, as Christ did.

3. A sense of obligation. Here again, Christ was the example, sacrificing his own comforts and needs in order to serve others.

4. A submission of self to the will of God. Man's highest spiritual achievement is to speak and act for the good of his fellowmen, to the glory of God, and thus make of life a consecrated possession.

Today the destiny of nations is involved in this all-important question, "What think ye of Christ?" Now is the time as never before for the so-called civilized nations struggling for peace to answer this question and answer it correctly.

Without Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, the world cannot survive. The true spirit of Christmas is the spirit of Christ.79

TENTH PRESIDENT, JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH

Joseph Fielding Smith married Ethel G. Reynolds in 1908 following the untimely death of his first wife, Louie E. Shurtliff, that same year. Elder Smith described in simplicity the Christmas of 1912, one of their first holiday seasons together: "Christmas day I spent the entire day at home with my wife and children, and all were happy.780

Christmas in the Eyes of a Child

Amelia Smith McConkie, daughter of Joseph and Ethel, related her early remembrances of Christmas in her father and mother's household:

Christmas, of course, started with . . . mother and my older sisters spending a lot of time in the dining room where the sewing machine was. . . . Our Christmas was a matter of getting new clothes more than anything else. And so they would make those clothes, and hide them, and wrap them up for Christmas. And then on Christmas morning, . . . all the younger children would be so excited to see what Santa Claus had brought, that they could hardly go to sleep. . . .

There was one Christmas when my sister, Lois, was so anxious to get down and see what Santa Claus brought that she woke Joseph and I up to go down. And so we got out of bed, and tried to march downstairs together. And we had to go past mother and dad's bedroom to go down the stairs to where we were going to have Christmas presents with the
tree and everything. And of course, dad could hear the noise. So he said, "Who's there?"... Joseph and I ran back upstairs. But Lois was so far down the steps that she couldn't come back up. ... And so she went down to the family room, down in the bottom part of the house and hid under the table. ... When she went down and made so much noise, she woke dad up, and he couldn't get back to sleep, so he just came down to the basement family room and turned on the light and sat down in his nice rocking chair ... and started to read. And he read, and he read, and he read. ... She had to wait under the table until dad got up.

When asked if President Smith knew his little daughter was hiding under the table, Amelia replied, "He didn't know, no. He hadn't looked underneath the table to see if anything was there. She was stuck."

Amelia further recalled that at Christmas her father "might tell us stories about when he was a little boy." President Smith and his wife saw that their children "got an orange and an apple, ... a candy cane, and maybe some other little candy" in their stockings (fig. 9). Oranges were a special

![Fig. 9. Christmas morning. President Joseph Fielding Smith's daughter Amelia Smith McConkie remembered that each year her parents made sure the children's stockings were filled with oranges, apples, candy canes, and other treats. *Juvenile Instructor* 21 (December 15, 1886): 372, image reversed.](image-reversed)
treat. “The only time we got oranges ordinarily was when somebody got sick, and then dad thought that oranges were good medicine, when you were sick, and then he'd sit and peel the orange, and feed us one section at a time. Father made sure that we ate it.”

Music was a part of the Smith family Christmas celebrations. “Father liked good music. And one of the first Christmases I can remember was when he got . . . some records, and he’d play them, and then he’d dance around.” Amelia remembered that they “had this old Victrola that had to wind up this way to play. And dad would dance to the music, if it was a march, he’d march around, if it was a dance, he’d do a little jig, things like that.” As Christmas came to a close, the family would gather together and sing. Amelia explains: “we sang Christmas carols and we sang hymns. . . . And then, he’d say ‘well, alright now it’s time to go to bed.’ And so he’d shew us up to bed.”

Christmas in the Eyes of a Grandchild

Joseph Fielding McConkie, a grandson of President Joseph Fielding Smith, remembered a variety of cherished moments spent with his grandfather during the holiday season:

Grandfather Joseph Fielding Smith would visit every one of his children and grandchildren who lived in the Salt Lake Valley, which I think included every one of them, on Christmas day. He would always give each of his grandchildren a brand new silver dollar until he had too many grandchildren then it became a new fifty cent piece. I well remember the year of the big reduction. At one time grandfather had but few children and lamented the fact. He later said, however, that he had “a greater family than the Patriarch Jacob when he went into Egypt to get corn from Joseph.” Grandfather had ten children, minus Lewis Warren Smith, who died in World War II, and numerous grandchildren. Grandfather was a sweet man. Whenever we greeted him it was with a kiss and he expected that it would be on the lips—no embarrassment about that! He would kiss you and hug you and give you the silver dollar. It was a positive experience that always made us feel good.

My memories of him don't reach back beyond his third wife, Aunt Jessie Evans Smith. She was vivacious and full of fun and very good for him. Mickey Hart of Hart Brothers Music Store in Sugar House was our neighbor and lived just down the street on Lambourne Avenue. He was invited to come to the house and accompany Aunt Jessie on the piano. She would sing to us with her beautiful contralto voice. This was back in the days when people had time to visit with one another. Christmas was the time of year when grandfather made the rounds to see everyone.
Greetings for the Christmas Season

Joseph Fielding Smith was sustained as President of the Church on January 23, 1970. His first Christmas message to the Saints was one of thankfulness for the birth and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thanksgiving for his servant Joseph Smith:

I greet you at this Christmas Season, in love and fellowship, and with prayer that our Eternal Father will look down upon you in mercy and pour out His bounteous blessings upon you.

In these times when iniquity abounds, when there are great tribulations on the earth, when there are wars and rumors of wars, we are all in need, as never before, of the guiding and preserving care of the Lord.

We need to know that in spite of all the troubles and ills which befall us, still the Lord is governing in the affairs of the earth and that if we keep His commandments and are true and faithful to His laws, He will bless us here and now and reward us with eternal life in His kingdom in due course.

Those of us who know that Joseph Smith was called of God to restore the fulness of His everlasting gospel in these the last days, are entitled to a special feeling of peace and thanksgiving now and always . . .

We pray for peace on earth, for the spread of the gospel, and for the final triumph of truth.

We plead with our Father’s Children everywhere to join this world and eternal glory in the world to come.

And now as one who has an absolute knowledge of the truth and divinity of this great latter-day work, I bear my testimony that it is true and that we are engaged in our Father’s business.

I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that He died upon the cross for the sins of the world; that He rose from the dead; and that He hath brought life an immortality to light through the gospel.

I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God; that the gospel has been restored in this dispensation; and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in very deed the kingdom of God on earth.

And I now pray that at this Christmas Season, and at all times, we may center our faith in the Son of God and gain for ourselves that peace which passeth understanding.

I am thankful for the love and fellowship which the gospel gives us and pray that you may be guided and preserved and have the desires of your hearts in righteousness.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.
Eleventh President, Harold B. Lee

Harold B. Lee was set apart as president of the Salt Lake Pioneer Stake in 1930. Unforgettable experiences accompanied his first year as the realities and hardships of the Great Depression visited the people in his stewardship (fig. 10). The dire needs of the Saints and their neighbors became particularly noticeable when compared with the President Lee's holiday celebration:

I remember one Christmas, I think it was the first Christmas after I was made stake president,—our little girls had their Christmas morning gifts and dashed over [to the house where Donna Mae lived] to show their little friends a new doll and whatever else they had, and shortly they came back—both of them crying. "What in the world is the matter?" we asked. They said, "Well, we were over to our friends and they didn't have any Christmas. Santa Clause did not come to their place." And all too late we remembered that just across the street was a family where the father was not a member of the Church—the children were, but the mother passively so, but he had been out of work and we had forgotten.

Fig. 10. Harold B. Lee (center front) with the Salt Lake City Commision, 1938. As president of the Salt Lake Pioneer Stake, President Lee headed a campaign to insure that families affected by the Depression would have a Christmas. President Lee was very much aware of civic concerns and needs throughout his life.
Our Christmas was spoiled. We sent for the children and tried to divide what we had to try to make up for lack of thoughtfulness, but it was too late, and Christmas dinner that day did not taste very good to me. I was unhappy. I did not sleep well because I was in charge of the welfare of my people. So we made a survey, and to our amazement we found that 4800 out of our 7200–7400 were either wholly or partially dependent. There was no government work in those days. We had only ourselves and Church finances were falling off. We were told that we couldn’t look for much help from the general funds of the Church. Thus we were situated as we approached another Christmas season. We found we had over 1,000 children under 10 years of age, for whom, without someone to help them, there would be no Christmas, yet these little ones believed that there was some kind of an impersonal somebody who would come to bring them help. Then we started to prepare, on the second floor on Pierpont Street. We gathered up the toys—all the broken toys—and for a month or two before Christmas all the fathers and most of them were making toys for their own children, and mothers were there. If you wanted to get the spirit of Christmas you had to only step in and see that. We started out then to see to it that none of the 1,000 children would be without Christmas. There was to be a Christmas dinner in all the homes of those 4800 who, without our help, wouldn’t have any. Nuts, candy, oranges, a roast of beef or meat of some kind with all that went with it for Christmas. It was on the day before Christmas and I was then a City Commissioner. We had a heavy snowstorm, and I had been out all night with the crews trying to get the streets cleared, knowing that I would be to blame if any of my men fell down. I went home to get cleaned up to go back to the office, and as I started back to town there was a little boy thumbing his way into town. He stood out there in the biting cold, no overcoat, no gloves, no overshoes. I took him into the car and I said, “Son, are you ready for Christmas?” “Oh, gee, mister, we aren’t going to have any Christmas at our home. Daddy died three months ago and left Mamma and me and a little brother and sister under 10 years of age.” “Where are you going, son?” “I am going up to a free picture show.” I turned up the heat in the car and said, “Now give me your name and address.” They were not members of the Church. “Somebody will come to your home, you won’t be forgotten. Now you have a good time today.” That night I asked every bishop to go with his delivery men and see that every family was cared for. They were all to report back. I had forgotten this little boy to whom I had made a promise. I had been so busy I had forgotten this little family. I asked the bishop if he had any more left. He said, “Yes, we have.” Now I had promised the little family there would be Christmas for them. A little later he called to say, they too, had all been taken care of.
As I awoke that Christmas morning, as I ate my Christmas dinner[,] in my heart I said, “God grant that I would never let another year pass but that I, as a leader, would ‘know’ my people. I would know their needs. I would be feeling after the ones who needed most my leadership.” My carelessness had meant suffering, because I did not know my people the first year.  

Harold B. Lee’s daughter, Helen Lee Goates, shares the sequel to the Christmas story above.

Two years had passed since that sorrowful Christmas morning when we went across the street to Donna Mae’s house and found that Santa Claus had not visited our friend’s home. Now it was Christmas of 1934. I was nine years old and my sister, Maurine, was ten.

Our neighborhood, the city and the entire nation was still firmly in the grip of the ravaging world-wide depression. Unemployment was everywhere and people struggled day to day to meet the demands of just living.

While some progress was taking place in Pioneer Stake over which my father presided, in helping the Saints help themselves without succumbing to a governmental dole, there was still great concern everywhere in the Church about the well-being of the members. There was still no organized means for helping the needy through-out the Church, and it was two years before the Church Security Program was to be introduced.

After Thanksgiving Day our Daddy called a family council meeting. He told us:

“Mother and I have been thinking, girls, that there are many families around us who do not have as many blessings as we do, and unless someone comes forward they may be neglected and not have much of a Christmas. We would like to know if you two girls would like to help if we chose a needy family for Christmas?

“Remember, it would mean that you two would not have as many gifts as in the past. And for the family, we would not have so fancy a dinner, either.”

We both assured our parents that we wanted to be a part of this new plan for Christmas. It was a wise father who was preparing his daughters at an early age to find a learning experience at Christmas-time.

Soon the preparations were underway. Maurine and I found our old dolls which had largely been discarded during the past several years. Maurine’s doll was named Louise and mine was called Janet. The refurbishing called for new paint and hair. Aunt Bessie would make new clothes for both dolls. We chose other toys and games that we felt could be repaired. We were happy working in the project and looking forward
to the grand completion of the work. Meanwhile, Mother was busy making pies and preparing a turkey dinner we could all share.

Finally, Christmas Eve arrived and it was time to visit our chosen family. The newly painted dolls had been returned to us and we were delighted to put them in the beautiful new dresses that had been furnished to us. But now, all the tender feelings for those dolls returned to us. They were so beautiful and we now loved them with a new intensity surpassing our younger years.

We went with our parents trudging behind with reluctant steps. At the moment of delivery, when each of us had to place our dearly loved dolls in the arms of a new "mother," we needed a little nudge from Mom and Daddy, but we did it. Then a miracle took place. When we saw how happy those under privileged little girls were with our dolls, we felt a joy and pride that we could add to their happiness on this Christmas Eve. We went home happy and the payoff our Daddy promised was fully realized. We were happy because we were learning to share and to give.

It was one of the most memorable lessons ever taught to us by a wise father. He taught us through this experience in our young years that sharing and caring for the needs of others, even when its personally painful, brings us the greater happiness.

Harold B. Lee, our dear and wise daddy, was always a great teacher, who seized the moment to make a deep impression and a happy Christmas memory, for his two little girls.87

**Twelfth President, Spencer W. Kimball**

Throughout a lifetime of ecclesiastical service, President Spencer W. Kimball extolled the teachings and virtues of the Savior of the World. Walking the streets of Jerusalem and Bethlehem at Christmastime and beholding the environs and birthplace of the Savior of mankind was a great joy for two modern prophets. Elder Spencer W. Kimball and his wife, Camilla, in company with Elder and Sister Howard W. Hunter, arrived in the city of Jerusalem on Christmas Eve in 1961 and hurried over to Bethlehem to witness a portion of the celebration there.88 President Kimball later reminisced on those sacred moments and shared the perspectives of a prophet who had the capability to block out the mundane of a modern scene and recreate in his mind's eye what once was. He affirmed:

We celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ at this season of the year. Some years ago, Sister Kimball and I were in the Holy Land with Elder and Sister Howard W. Hunter, and on Christmas Eve we were mingling with thousands of religionists and curious from around the
world. We bent over to get through the small aperture into the Church of the Nativity and inched our way in turn to the crypt where some churches claim are the sacred spots of the manger and the birth of the Savior.

As we stood looking at the metal star in the concrete floor, it seemed to fade and we seemed to see a crude manger in a cave and sitting by it a lovely lady with a beautiful face and sweet spirit watching a little infant wrapped like other Hebrew babes in swaddling clothes. He had likely already been washed and rubbed with salt and laid on a square cloth, his little head on one corner and his tiny feet on the corner diagonally opposite. The cloth had been folded over his sides and up over his feet and the swaddling bands tied around the precious little bundle. His hands would be fastened to his sides, but he would be loosened occasionally and rubbed with olive oil and possibly dusted with powdered myrtle leaves. If still in swaddling bands, he could be handled easily on the trip to Egypt, and he could even be strapped to his mother’s back.

How grateful we are that the baby Jesus was born . . .

. . . My wife and our party move about with the surging crowds, we are jostled and pushed. We are nearly drowned in the ocean of innumerable bodies and faces. It is hard to concentrate upon the sacred object of our coming. There is little on the hill which can stir our reverence or satisfy our longing to be alone with our thoughts.

We have our taxi take us to the hill overlooking the shepherds’ field. . . . There, gazing into the valley, the only place near Bethlehem where we could find privacy, we stood in the dark, looking out into the starry sky as did the shepherds, and with the shepherds contemplating the angel dressed in exquisite whiteness in the center of infinite glory, and the words he had said to the humble shepherds (fig. 11):

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

“For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:10–12).

Did not the angels sing that night? We, too, seemed to hear faint music, not loud, but in symphonic harmony it penetrated deeply our hearts. We seemed to hear singing in unison, the never-to-be-forgotten melody, the cry of the ages: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

As the strains of the heavenly words merged with our hearts, we four sang. After singing “Far, far away on Judea’s plains, shepherds of old
heard the joyous strains,” we stood close together in the star-lighted night with our wraps pulled tight about us—physically close, mentally close, spiritually close, emotionally close; and we communed. No lights but the twinkling lanterns in the heavens, no sound but the whispering of our subdued voices. Our Father seemed to be very near. His Son seemed close. We prayed. More in unison than a single voice, our four hearts poured out love and gratitude that rose to mingle with the prayers of all mankind that night.

We prayed our gratitude. We prayed our love. Like the raising of the flood gate releasing the long impounded and pent up waters behind a dam, our voices almost inaudible, mellowed with reverence, softened by the intangible forces of the heavenly world, we poured out our prayer of thanksgiving: grateful, Father, that we know so positively that thou dost live; that we know the babe born here was in reality thy Son; grateful that thy program is real, workable and exalting. We told him we knew him, we loved him, we would follow him. We repledged to his cause our lives, our all.

**FIG. 11.** Bethlehem. Elder Spencer W. Kimball visited Bethlehem in 1961. Dismayed with the Christmas Eve crowds in the city, Elder Kimball and his party retreated to a nearby hill, and there reflected upon a quieter evening many years ago. Romanticized images of Bethlehem such as this appeared in Church magazines when Kimball was a youth. *Juvenile Instructor* 36 (December 1, 1901), 709.
The years have come and gone since then, but always at this beautiful season, we repledge ourselves to his work—and invite all people everywhere to join us in our prayers of joy and love and gratitude for the life and teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.\textsuperscript{89}

\textbf{Christmas Traditions with Camilla}

The Christmas memories and experiences of Spencer W. Kimball prominently include his wife. Spencer and Camilla spent their Christmas holidays in a variety of activities. They seemed to enjoy the social events of the season, such as performances of the \textit{Messiah} and Christmas parties. "Each year there were many activities to which Spencer and Camilla were invited," their son Edward Kimball remembered. "They tried to attend as many as possible, knowing that people appreciated their presence. Spencer was often called upon to speak." They also attended the Church meetings of various wards. On December 29, 1968, "they attended meetings of the Mexicans, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Norwegians, and their own ward."\textsuperscript{90} Edward Kimball relates the following Kimball Christmas traditions:

Every year from 1964 to 1973 Spencer and Camilla spent Christmas Eve at the home of Olive Beth Mack, their only daughter (and the only child living in Utah). There everyone participated one way or another in the reading and acting out of the Nativity. Then at home on Christmas Day there would be exchange of gifts among Spencer, Camilla, and Mary Eyring, Camilla’s deaf, unmarried sister who lived with them for twenty-five years. Sometimes one or more of the three sons (living in Illinois, Connecticut, and Wisconsin), along with their families, were visiting and participated in the Christmas morning gift giving (fig. 12). On Christmas Day Camilla always fixed a banquet for all who assembled, anywhere from a dozen to 23 family members. . . .

There is a pattern during the Christmas season most years of visiting friends ill in the hospital and of taking small gifts around to many friends.\textsuperscript{91}

The Kimballs hosted some thirty-six out-of-town family members during the Christmas season of 1967, as this was the year of their fiftieth wedding anniversary. A few days before Christmas, Elder Kimball recorded his feelings about the spirit of giving:

I walked down Main St. to nearly Third South just largely observing the people and though I saw shopkeepers and clerks weary, they generally were cheerful and friendly; and though many of the thousands of shoppers showed weariness in their faces, I thought I felt a giving spirit. The businessmen who generally walk Main St. had no look of getting in their faces but more of giving. There were whole families, there were children, there were young couples, there were young men, there were young
women—all eager in finding something to satisfy someone’s needs or wants. I thought I felt the spirit of giving in a marked degree.92

“They Named Him Joseph”

Elder Kimball felt that the Christmas season was a time to commemorate the birth and life of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He very literally honored the Prophet’s given name in a December 1966 article entitled “They Named Him Joseph”:

When theologians are reeling and stumbling, when lips are pretending and hearts are wandering, and people are “running to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord and cannot find it”—when clouds of error need dissipating and spiritual darkness needs penetrating and heavens need opening, a little infant is born. Just a few scattered neighbors in a hilly region in the backwoods even know that Lucy [Smith] is expecting. There is no prenatal care, nor nurses, no hospital, no ambulance, no delivery room. Babies live and die in this rough environment and few know about it.

Another child for Lucy! No trumpets are sounded; no hourly bulletins posted; no pictures taken; no notice is given; just a few friendly community folk pass a word along. It’s a boy! Little do the brothers and

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

**Fig. 12.** President Spencer W. Kimball with Camilla and grandchildren, Christmas 1974.
sisters dream that a prophet is born to their family; even his proud parents can little suspect his spectacular destiny. No countryside farmers or loungers at the country store, no village gossips even surmise how much they could discuss, did they but have the power of prophetic vision.

"They are naming him Joseph," it is reported. But no one knows, not even parents, at this time, that this infant and his father have been named in the scriptures for 3,500 years, named for and known to their ancestor, Joseph, the savior of Egypt and Israel. Not even his adoring mother realized, even in her most ambitious dreaming and her silent musings, that this one of her children, like his ancestor, will be the chief sheaf of grain to which all others will lean and the one star to which the son and moon and other stars will make obeisance.

He will inspire hatred and ambition; he will build an empire and restore a church—the Church of Jesus Christ. Millions will follow him; monuments will be a built to him; poets will sing of him; authors will write libraries of books about him.

No living soul can guess that this little pinkish infant will become the peer of Moses in spiritual power and greater than many prophets before him. He will talk with God, the Eternal Father, and Jesus Christ, His Son; and angels will be his great instructors. . . .

"We fancy," said Bareham, "God can manage His world only with great battalions, when all the time He is doing it with beautiful babies."

O foolish men who think to protect the world with armaments, battleships, and space equipment, when only righteousness is needed!

Having read the pages of history, six thousand years of it, can we not see that God sent His babies to become the teachers and prophets to warn us of our threatening fate? Cannot we read the handwriting on the wall? History repeats itself.

O mortal men, deaf and blind! Can we not read the past? For thousands of years have plowshares been beaten into swords and pruning hooks into spears, yet war persists. . . .

The answer to all of our problems—personal, national, and international—has been given to us many times by many prophets, ancient to modern. Why must we grovel in the earth when we could be climbing toward heaven! The path is not obscure. Perhaps it is too simple for us to see. We look to foreign programs, summit conferences, land bases. We depend on fortifications, or gods of stone; upon ships and planes and projectiles, our gods of iron—gods which have no ears, no eyes, no hearts. We pray to them for deliverance and depend upon them for protection. Like the gods of Baal, they could be "talking or pursuing or on a journey or peradventure sleeping" when they are needed most. And like Elijah, we might cry out to our world:
How long halt ye between two opinions! if the Lord be God, follow him. . . . (I Kings 18:21.)

My testimony to you is, the Lord is God. He has charted the way, but we do not follow. He personally visited Joseph Smith in our world, in our century. He outlined the way of peace in this world and eternal worlds. That path is righteousness. The Prophet Joseph with all the successor prophets proclaiming the ripening of this world in iniquity and the solution of all vexing problems. The Book of Mormon which he translated relates the story of 200 years of peace in the old days, which was the greatest era of happiness of which we have any complete record.

God lives, as does His Son, Jesus Christ; and they will not indefinitely be mocked. May we hearken and repent “for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision . . . the Lord will be the hope of his people. . . .” (Joel 3:14, 16.)

Joseph Smith is a true prophet of the living God and his successors likewise. The mantle of authority and prophecy and revelation and power lies in His choice servant who now leads us, President David O. McKay.93

President Kimball often remembered the Prophet’s birthday. In 1972, he wrote: “Today is Joseph Smith’s birthday and a holy day and what a great contribution he has made to the world and to us.” On December 23, 1973, President Kimball “spoke about the Prophet Joseph on his 168th birthday, then also tied it into the birthday of the Lord.”94 Three days later, December 26, 1973, President Harold B. Lee passed away. Spencer W. Kimball was ordained and set apart as President of the Church on December 30, 1973.

Thirteenth President, Ezra Taft Benson

Ezra Taft Benson grew up in the small farming settlement of Whitney, Idaho, with a populace of some fifty families. Much of his daily existence naturally centered in the large family of ten brothers and sisters to which he belonged. Though their means were very limited, Christmases were celebrated with all the excitement and rapture that could be generated where hearts were as one and love abounded. Those moments of revelry were not forgotten by President Benson as he reflected on the holidays in this humble setting:

I love Christmastime! And I find great joy in remembering Christmases past. Perhaps it is the emotion of the season that makes this time of year seem particularly poignant and meaningful. And especially memorable.

Many events of almost nine decades of Christmases, dating back to my childhood on the Whitney, Idaho farm where I was reared, are still clear in my mind and among some of the most enjoyable memories I have.
As a boy I loved going to the canyon to cut our Christmas tree, and I always tried to get one that reached to the ceiling.

Though we received only a few gifts, our stockings were filled with fruit, nuts and candy, and Santa always left something.

Like all children, we suffered terrible anticipation at Christmas-time—until, that is, we happened onto the Santa Claus costume in the bottom of an old trunk. Suddenly the secret was out. So that was why Father was always out doing chores when Santa came on Christmas morning. The following December it occurred to me that if Father had been playing Santa all those years, he and Mother must be hiding our gifts somewhere on the farm. I couldn’t stifle my inquisitive mind, and in no time I’d led my young brothers on a search that turned up several gifts buried in the wheat in the granary.

I’m told that I was a bit of a tease during my youth. I do remember coming in on my sister Margaret while she was balancing on a stepladder to decorate the tree. Sensing an opportunity to tease her, I feigned danger by giving the ladder a little shake. Margaret, who was not amused, ordered me out of the room and then tossed in my direction a dustpan that caught me on the lip. I still have a scar to remember that little prank by.

One of my favorite winter—and especially holiday—activities was taking out the big two-horse bobsleigh with bells on the horses. In those days, “Jingle Bells” was not only a song; it was a thrilling experience. There’s nothing quite like riding through country lanes with the sleigh-box filled with straw and a group of friends singing Christmas carols. In more recent decades my wife Flora and I have made many happy Christmas trips to visit family in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The highlight of each visit is a ride in a horse-drawn cutter or bobsleigh. It’s exhilarating to get hold of the lines of a good team drawing a bobsleigh or two-seat cutter and ride out into the Canadian open.

In Whitney on Christmas Day our family visited our grandparents, and we almost always traveled to their homes by bobsleigh. These were such happy occasions. Our grandparents were very musical and always provided entertainment of various kinds. There were recitations, skits, original poems, music and dancing. Grandma Dunkley, a convert to the Church from Scotland, would dance the Highland Fling for us, and we loved that....

I’ll never forget one Christmas, the Christmas of 1923. I returned home on Christmas Eve to my parents and ten brothers and sisters after serving two-and-a-half years as a missionary in England. Earlier that day, while traveling through Salt Lake City, Church Patriarch Hyrum G. Smith conferred upon me a blessing in which he counseled me to be
devoted to the Lord, and then promised that, in turn, the Lord would make me equal to my labors.

Then it was on to Whitney for a joyful reunion with my family. That evening Mother and Father took me into their confidence, letting me help them fill the stockings after going to the granary and elsewhere to gather presents they had hidden. This took a good part of the night. We spent the rest visiting, with me reporting on my mission and Mother and Father telling me what had happened while I was away. It was a choice evening.

My brothers and sisters arose early Christmas morning. After having a glass of milk and a piece of bread in the kitchen, they hurried into the living room to see what goodies Santa had brought them. It was a happy morning. I couldn’t hold back the tears as I felt the joy and love in our home. It seemed that we were hugging and kissing each other throughout the entire day. It was a wonderful reunion. Being away from home had only intensified my deep feelings for my noble parents and my dear brothers and sisters.95

**December 1945 and 1946: Post-War Mission**

Though World War II was over in 1945, the devastation remained. In Europe starvation was widespread, and the urgency of seeing to the temporal needs of the European Saints required a man of strong leadership. Elder Ezra Taft Benson was named president of the European Mission. Of those poignant times, President Benson remembered:

December of 1945 and 1946 will forever live in my memory. Just three days before Christmas in 1945 President George Albert Smith convened a special meeting of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve. With World War II finally over, President Smith announced it was time for the Church to reestablish contact with the Saints in Europe and distribute much-needed welfare supplies. In that meeting I was called to go to Europe as president of the European Mission to handle those assignments.

The call came as a complete surprise. Because of conditions in Europe, it was not possible to take my family with me. I had no idea what I would find when I got there, how I would arrange for travel throughout a continent that had been devastated by war, or how long the First Presidency would require me to stay. I was told that I should prepare to leave as soon as possible. This unexpected development affected greatly our preparations for Christmas and created an unusually sentimental and loving atmosphere in our home. Flora and I realized we would be separated for a period of time, and our feelings were tender at the prospect.
How grateful I was for her support, and for the knowledge we shared that this was the Lord's will for our family at this time. As the Christmas season drew to a close, I recorded in my journal: "The next year will no doubt be spent, in large measure and possibly in its entirety, abroad. It will mean some sacrifice of material comforts. I will miss my wife and sweet children and the association of the brethren and the visits to the stakes. I go, however, with no fear whatsoever, knowing that this is the Lord's work and that He will sustain me. I am grateful for the opportunity and deeply grateful that my wife, who is always most loyal, feels the same way. God bless them while I am away." 96

Upon his departure, President Benson gathered his family about him for a final family prayer together. Kissing each of them, he bid them goodbye for the present. He made a phone call to his eldest son, Reed, at Brigham Young University. Both were choked up by the expressions of love that ensued. 97 Of that emotional moment Reed remembered, "For a father and son who constantly counseled together, I realized how much I would miss my Dad." 98 President Benson recounted,

The following ten-and-a-half months were among the most challenging and yet rewarding I or my family had known. The separation tested our faith and endurance and physical energy to the limit, but helped us grow as never before.

I'll never forget the thrill of stepping off the airplane in Salt Lake City the following December, in 1946, and finding Flora waiting for me. That Christmas was among the most poignant I have ever spent. Perhaps there had been no year in my life when my soul had been so stirred or when I had faced such challenges. I had been forced to rely completely upon the Lord, and my gratitude for His goodness and watchcare filled my soul and brought me easily to tears. I had come to love deeply the Saints in Europe, and leaving them had been a bittersweet experience.

But being home again brought such deep and fulfilling joy. While the separation had been difficult for us all, we had grown even closer to one another. And as we realized how many blessings the Lord had given us throughout the year, tears flowed freely. After the children had opened their presents on Christmas Day, I wrote in my journal, "The children were most happy and appreciative. There has not been an unkind word all day. In fact, we seldom hear arguments in our home. But this day has been especially blessed. It has been such a joy to sit with my angel wife and review the past devoid of regrets, anticipate the future joyously, and count our many blessings gratefully. I shall never forget this glorious Christmas." 99
"The Real Purpose of Christmas"

Ezra Taft Benson was ordained and set apart as the President of the Church on November 10, 1985. President Benson taught each of us the divine significance of the Christmas celebration in an inspired discourse wherein he eulogized:

The real purpose of Christmas is to worship Him whose birth is commemorated during this season. How might we do that? By giving. Certainly there are genuine feelings of love and friendship wrapped up in the beautiful packages we exchange with those dear to us. But I’m concerned about another kind of giving. Considering all that the Savior has given and continues to give us, is there something we might give Him in return this Christmastime?

Christ’s great gift to us was His life and sacrifice. Should that not then be our small gift to Him—our lives and sacrifices, not only now but in the future?

Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace. Whoever will lose his life in the service of God will find eternal life.

Sacrifice is truly the crowning test of the gospel. We are tried and tested in this mortal probation to see if we will, in fact, turn our lives over to God. If we will put first in our lives the kingdom of God. (See Matthew 6:33.) To gain eternal life, we must be willing, if called upon, to sacrifice all things for the gospel and for the Lord.

Just as when one loses his life in the service of God, he really finds the abundant life, so also when one sacrifices all to God, then God in return shares all He has with him. . . .

We once knew well our Elder Brother and our Father in Heaven. We rejoiced at the prospects of earth life, which would make it possible for us to have a fulness of joy. We could hardly wait to demonstrate to our Father and our Brother, the Lord, how much we loved them and how we would be obedient to them in spite of the earthly opposition of the evil one.

Now we are here. Our memories are veiled. We are showing God and ourselves what we can do. Nothing is going to startle us more when we pass through the veil to the other side than to realize how well we know our Father and how familiar His face is to us.

God loves us. He is watching us. He wants us to succeed. We will know someday that He has not left one thing undone for the eternal
welfare of each of us. If we only knew it, heavenly hosts are pulling for us—friends in heaven that we cannot now remember who yearn for our victory. This is our day to show what we can do—what life and sacrifice we can daily, hourly, instantly make for God. If we give our all, we will get His all from the greatest of all.

Perhaps one of the greatest blessings of this wonderful Christmas season we celebrate is that it increases our sensitivity to things spiritual, to things of God. It causes us to contemplate our relationship with our Father and the degree of devotion we have for God.

It prompts us to be more tolerant and giving, more conscious of others, more generous and genuine, more filled with hope and charity and love—all Christlike attributes. No wonder the spirit of Christmas touches the hearts of people the world over. Because for at least a time, increased attention and devotion are turned toward our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ . . .

Not many years hence Christ will come again. He will come in power and might as King of kings and Lord of lords. And ultimately every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ.

But I testify now that Jesus is the Christ and that He lives.100

Fourteenth President, Howard W. Hunter

At the age of nineteen, Howard W. Hunter was a talented young musician, capable of playing alto and soprano saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, and drums. In the latter part of 1926, he was offered a contract to furnish a five-piece orchestra for a two-month stint on the passenger liner S.S. President Jackson, bound for the Orient. He spent Christmas at his Boise home, and on December 30 his parents put him on a train for Seattle, Washington. There he and his band, “Hunter’s Croonaders,” shipped out on January 5, 1927. The cruise took them to various ports of call in Japan, China, the Philippines, and Canada. When he finally returned to his beloved Boise, Howard expressed these feelings: “Home never looked as good to me as it did when we got there. This is the first time I have been away for more than a few days and I was glad to be back after a trip nearly half way around the world.”101

Christmas in the City of David

In December 1961, Elder Howard W. Hunter—then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—and his wife, Clair, joined with Elder and Sister Kimball to enjoy a brief vacation in the Holy Land before taking up an arduous series of conference assignments in Europe. Elder Hunter recorded his observations of Christmas Day in the City of David:
Today is Christmas—the first Christmas we have ever been away from home. There are people from all over the world in Jerusalem today and it is said that there were 20,000 visitors in Bethlehem last night. Clair was ill this morning. She thinks she may have had food poisoning which is not uncommon in this part of the world. Brother and Sister Kimball went to the Dome of the Rock and I spent part of the morning in the walled city. As I was returning to the hotel, Brother and Sister Kimball came by in a taxi and took me back with them. [W]e had lunch together, and then walked to the Mandelbaum Gate where all of the Christians who had come across the border from Israel were waiting to go back. Border restrictions are waived on Christmas and Easter for Christians to visit the holy shrines. The four of us walked to the Garden Tomb outside the wall this was the most quiet place in Jerusalem. As we sat in the tomb, we read from the New Testament of the events which transpired many years ago. I think I shall never forget this experience—the story of his death and resurrection became so real. At Damascus Gate we got a taxi to take us around the wall to the Virgins Fountain and Pool of Siloam on the south side. We then went back to Gethsemane and came along the upper street to St. Peters Church, built at the place where Peter denied Christ, and to the old house of Caiaphas where Christ came on the morning of the crucifixion. Under the old church are the ruins of the house. When we came out of the church we walked down the steps of the old street where Jesus passed on his way to Pilate. The taxi took us back to our hotel where we had dinner and visited until we went to bed. All the shops in Jerusalem are decorated for Christmas and Christmas music could be heard everywhere we went today. This has been a pleasant experience to spend Christmas in the place where Christ spent so much of his time.102

A Christmas Message to Children

Howard W. Hunter was ordained and set apart as President of the Church on June 5, 1994. In December of that year, President Hunter and his counselors, Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson, in a thoughtful manner formulated “A Christmas Message from the First Presidency to the Children of the World.” They entitled their epistle “The Real Christmas”:

The real Christmas … is founded in the life and mission of the Master, in the principles he taught, in his atoning sacrifice.

Christ is not just a fact of history, but the Savior of men everywhere and at all times. If we open the door he will enter. The Prince of Peace waits to give us peace of mind, which can help us to also be peacemakers.

If you desire to find the true spirit of Christmas and partake of its sweetness, find time during the hurry of the season to turn your heart to
God. Perhaps in the quiet hours and in a quiet place, on your knees—alone or with loved ones—give thanks for the good things that have come to you, and ask that his spirit might dwell in you as you earnestly strive to serve him and keep his commandments. He will take you by the hand, and his promises will be kept.

Sooner or later—and we pray sooner than later—everyone will acknowledge that Christ’s way is not only the right way, but ultimately the only way to hope and joy. Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that gentleness is better than brutality, and kindness greater than force. Whenever possible, we must become more like him.

This is our prayer and our wish for the world. We testify that Jesus is the only true source of lasting joy, that our only lasting peace is in him. We bear testimony of the Firstborn of God who has “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” who “was wounded for our transgressions” and was “bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4–5). We give you our solemn witness that Jesus Christ is the Messiah for whose coming the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob prayed during long centuries. We testify that he lives. He is the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh. He is the Savior, the Light and Life of the World. He is the real Christmas.103

FIFTEENTH PRESIDENT, GORDON B. HINCKLEY

A nineteen-year-old Gordon B. Hinckley said good-bye to the members of the Salt Lake City First Ward on June 11, 1933, as he responded to a call to serve a mission in Great Britain. In December he experienced his first Christmas away from home in the expansive city of London. As he wrote to his father, Bryant S. Hinckley, Gordon was in a contemplative and appreciative mood:

Dear Dad. This is the first time in all my life that I have not been home for Christmas. While sitting before a boarding house fire and watching the flames go up the chimney, pictures pass by in memories of other Christmas days. There is the morning when, pajama-clad, we hurried downstairs long before the rooster in the back yard was awake. Such excitement—bulging socks, games, horns, a bright sweater, candy and nuts and fruit. Then we ran back upstairs blowing harmonicas to show all those wonderful things to you and mother. You were tired out but you played with us, and kissed us before sending us back to bed before daylight. During the day you pulled us up and down the street on our new sled, and we knew you were the biggest, strongest man in all the world. . . . Last night I missed the thrill of expecting Santa Claus. You have not come around this morning. I miss you. [But] with distance
between us, I begin to see in your life the spirit of Christmas beyond the magic of Santa Claus. . . . There is a deep and silent expression of the virtues of Him whose birth we honor on this day. God bless you, dad, and keep you ever wonderful to me.\textsuperscript{104}

**Sister Hinckley’s Love of Christmas**

Christmas has always been a festive time in the Hinckley household. Over the years, Marjorie Pay Hinckley, wife of Gordon B. Hinckley, has held “Grandchildren’s Christmas Parties” or “Cousins’ Christmas Parties” for the younger generation. These Christmas celebrations include a personalized invitation to each child, a gift of a Christmas tree ornament from some foreign country for everyone, decorative tables with delectable food, games, and grandmother’s “wonderful Christmas stories,” such as her favorite, *The Little Match Girl*.\textsuperscript{105} Sister Hinckley shared her love of the Christmas season with Janet Lee, wife of Rex E. Lee, former president of Brigham Young University. Sister Lee recalled,

Several years ago, during the Christmas season, President and Sister Hinckley came to BYU for a musical event. Before the program, there was a buffet dinner, and at one point while the men were away from our table, the women began to talk about the frustrations of getting ready for Christmas. Our conversation focused on the fact that everything about the season was becoming a burden for women. We bear the responsibility of selecting gifts, organizing social events, preparing everyone’s favorite food, and making certain that family, guests, and even the less fortunate have a merry Christmas. We felt overwhelmed if not resentful.

Sister Hinckley listened patiently, and then without the slightest edge of criticism in her voice said, “I love Christmas. It is the most joyful of all seasons. I love seeing the eyes of little children light up on Christmas morning. I love giving gifts. I love being with my family. We just need to simplify and remember what we are celebrating.”

After she had spoken, something magical happened. Our attitudes shifted, and we began to talk about the birth of our Savior and the spirit of giving. In the years that have passed since those words were spoken, a burden has been lifted for me during the holidays. As I shop, prepare food, and join with friends and family to celebrate the birth of our Savior, her words nurture and calm me. “I love Christmas,” I hear her say, and I let her teach me to relax and enjoy the season.\textsuperscript{106}

**A Christmas Message**

President Gordon B. Hinckley was ordained and set apart as the fifteenth President of the Church by Thomas S. Monson on March 12, 1995.
His 1997 message to the Saints, “A Season for Gratitude,” bespeaks the nature of giving and gratitude that marks the Christmastide celebration:

This is a season for giving and a time for gratitude. We remember with appreciation the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, which is celebrated this same month of December, two days before Christmas.

How great indeed is our debt to him. His life began in Vermont and ended in Illinois, and marvelous were the things that happened between that simple beginning and tragic ending. It was he who brought us a true knowledge of God, the Eternal Father, and His Risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. During the short time of his great vision he learned more concerning the nature of Deity than all of those who through centuries had argued the matter in learned councils and scholarly forums. . . .

We stand in reverence before him. He is the great prophet of this dispensation. He stands at the head of this great and mighty work which is spreading across the earth. He is our prophet, our revelator, our seer, our friend. Let us not forget him. Let not his memory be forgotten in the celebration of Christmas. God be thanked for the Prophet Joseph.

Now, what a wonderful season this is, this Christmas season. All of the Christian world, while not understanding the things that we understand, pauses for a moment and remembers with gratitude the birth of the Son of God. . . .

In that spirit we reach out to embrace one and all with that love which is the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We Latter-day Saints are a vast concourse of people bound together in a oneness of love and faith. Our blessing is great, as a people and as individuals. We carry in our hearts a firm and unshakable conviction of the divine mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Creator who, under the direction of His Father, made all things, “and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). He was the promised Messiah, who came with healing in His wings. He was the worker of miracles, the great healer, the resurrection and the life. His is the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved.

He was with His father in the beginning. He was made flesh and dwelt among us, “and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). . . .

He came as a gift of His Eternal Father. “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).

He condescended to leave His throne on high and come to earth to be born in a manger, in a conquered nation. He walked the dusty roads of Palestine, healing the sick, teaching the doctrine, blessing all who would accept Him.
He came “into the world [not] to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). . . .

On Calvary’s hill He gave His life for each of us. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

We honor His birth. But without His death that birth would have been but one more birth. It was the redemption which He worked out in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross of Calvary which made His gift immortal, universal, and everlasting. His was a great Atonement for the sins of all mankind. He was the resurrection and the life, “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor 15:20). Because of Him all men will be raised from the grave.

But beyond this He taught us the way, the truth, and the life. He gave the keys through which we may go on to immortality and eternal life. . . .

We testify of His living reality. We testify of the divinity of His nature. In our times of grateful meditation, we acknowledge His priceless gift to us and pledge our love and faith. This is what Christmas is really about.

To each of you we extend our love and blessing. May you, wherever you may be across the world, have a wonderful Christmas. May there be peace and love and kindness in your homes. May you husbands smile with love upon your wives. May you wives know the sweet joy of being loved and honored and respected and looked up to. May your children be happy and filled with that indescribable magic which is the spirit of Christmas. May those of you who are single find sweet companionship in the knowledge that you are not alone, that Jesus stands as your friend. He came “to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

To each of you we extend our love and blessing. May it be a happy and wonderful season. We leave a blessing upon you, a blessing of Christmas, that you may be happy. May even those whose hearts are heavy rise with the healing which comes alone from Him who comforts and reassures. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1).

So said He in His hour of great tribulation: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

In the spirit of that great promise and gift, may we all rejoice this blessed Christmas season.107
CONCLUSION

Christ’s peace is the essence of the Christmas season. The Presidents of the Church have sought, by their example and their words, to emulate the teachings of the Savior. In their Christmas celebrations and activities, we can see the recurring themes of Church service and missionary work; the importance of family, friends, and children; and the spirit of service and giving. In those unfortunate times of war, the prophets have reminded us that peace lies in correctly answering the question “What think ye of Christ?”\(^1\) As special witnesses of Jesus Christ, the Church Presidents testify of Christ’s birth and divinity and have asked us to live in accordance with his teachings. In addition, many have asked us to commemorate the birth and life of the Prophet Joseph Smith. For Latter-day Saints, then, Christmas is double celebration: it is a time to celebrate our Lord and Savior and a time to remember the Prophet Joseph Smith.

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6. Joseph Smith Jr., History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:301–2 (hereafter cited as History of the Church). The History of the Church records that the revelation was received on “Christmas day [1832].” In Section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants Joseph Smith uses the date: “While I was praying earnestly on the subject, December 25th, 1832” (D&C 130:73).
7. "A Biographical Sketch: The Life of John Crosby, Written by Himself," typescript, 7–8, Jonathan and Caroline Barnes Crosby Papers, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah. The author would like to thank Richard Ian Kimball for bringing this story to his attention.
10. Jessee, Papers of Joseph Smith, 2:120.
11. The national financial panic of that year had helped cause the crash of the Saints’ own banking institution, the Kirtland Safety Society. A series of lawsuits, implicating the Prophet, arose from the demise of that institution. Many members, some in high places, turned against the Church. Brigham Young was forced to flee from Kirtland on December 22, “in consequence of the fury of the mob spirit that prevailed in the apostates who had threatened to destroy him because he would proclaim publicly and privately that he knew by the power of the Holy Ghost that [Joseph] was a Prophet of the Most High God.” History of the Church, 2:529. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, fearing for their lives, escaped from Kirtland on January 12, 1838, and took refuge among the Saints at Far West, Missouri. History of the Church, 3:1, 8–9.


15. History of the Church, 3:227.

16. A dauntless Emma Smith returned to Liberty on January 21, 1839, with Mary Fielding Smith, Mercy Fielding Thompson, and their little infants. They had been driven the distance by Don Carlos Smith, Joseph’s brother. Of these moments in prison Mercy said:

We arrived at the prison in the evening. We were admitted and the doors closed upon us. A night never to be forgotten. A sleepless night. I nursed the darling babes and in the morning prepared to start for home with my afflicted sister, and as long as memory lasts will remain in my recollection the squeaking hinges of that door which closed upon the noblest men on earth. Who can imagine our feelings as we traveled homeward, but would I sell that honor bestowed upon me of being locked up in jail with such characters for good? No! No! (Thompson, Mercy Rachel, Centennial Jubilee letter, December 20, 1880, deposited in the Relief Society Jubilee box, Salt Lake City, Utah, for opening April 1, 1930, in Don C. Corbett, Mary Fielding Smith: Daughter of Britain [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966], 86)


17. History of the Church, 4:239.


19. Lettie Rushton’s husband, Richard Rushton, had just passed away in Nauvoo on October 4, 1843. This must have been a particularly poignant time for her. See The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ancestral File (TM)-ver 4.19.

20. History of the Church, 6:134–35; for the circumstances of Orrin Porter Rockwell’s harrowing imprisonment and release, see History of the Church, 6:135–42.

21. History of the Church, 6:143.

22. History of the Church, 7:328, emphasis added.


24. History of Brigham Young, December 25, 1846, Manuscript History of the Church, 1839–1882, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

25. Richard E. Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852: “And Should We Die” (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 199, 212–13; Richard E. Bennett, We’ll

26. History of Brigham Young, December 25, 27, 1847, Church Archives.


34. B. H. Roberts, The Life of John Taylor (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1892), 408–9. The home of Thomas F. Rouche still stands on the southwest side of Kaysville, Utah with appropriate historical marker.


40. Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 8:215, December 25, 1883, emphasis added.

41. Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 8:350, December 25, 1885.

42. Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 8:414, December 25, 1886.


44. Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 9:73, December 25, 1889.

45. Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 9:231, December 26, 1892.


47. On October 15, 1872, President George A. Smith received an injunction from President Brigham Young stating, “when you go to the Land of Palestine, we wish you to dedicate and consecrate that land to the Lord, that it may be blessed with fruitfulness, preparatory to the return of the Jews in fulfillment of prophecy, and the accomplishment of the purposes of our Heavenly Father.” Correspondence of Palestine Tourists: Comprising a Series of Letters By George A. Smith, Lorenzo Snow, Paul A. Schettler, and Eliza R. Snow, of Utah (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1897) 1–2.

48. George A. Smith, Journal, December 25, 1872, George A. Smith Papers, Church Archives. The company continued their journey to Jerusalem, and on Sunday, March 2, 1872, the male portion of the company and Eliza R. Snow entered a tent that had been pitched on the Mount of Olives by previous arrangement. Here President George A. Smith led “in humble, fervent supplication, dedicating the land of Palestine for the gathering of the Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and returning heartfelt thanks and gratitude to God for the fulness of the Gospel and the blessings bestowed on the Latter-day Saints.” Correspondence of Palestine Tourists: Comprising a Series of Letters By George A. Smith, Lorenzo Snow, Paul A. Schettler, and Eliza R. Snow, of Utah, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News), 260.


50. Correspondence of Palestine Tourists, 260.
58. Proceedings at the Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument at Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, December 23rd, 1905, Introduction, 5.
59. Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument, 22. Similarly the Deseret Sunday School Union Board invited all Sunday Schools of the Church to conduct special commemorative services on Sunday, December 24, 1905, honoring the life and work of the Prophet Joseph Smith. As an added feature, the board recommended that “brethren and sisters who reside[d] in the ward or neighborhood who knew the Prophet be invited to take part in the proceedings and speak of their experiences in the early days of the Church when Joseph was alive.” “The Centenary of the Prophet’s Birth,” Juvenile Instructor 40 (December 1, 1905): 721.
60. Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument, 53–88.
63. David A. Smith to Joseph F. Smith, letter, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, 1854–1918, Church Archives.
70. Letter of Heber J. Grant to Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Nystrom, December 31, 1936, in Heber Jedy Grant Collection, letterbook; see also Heber J. Grant, Journal, December 25, 1936.
71. George Albert Smith, Journal, December 25, 1905, typescript, George Albert Smith Papers, Church Archives. A jumping jack is “a toy figure of a man jointed and made to jump or dance by means of strings or a sliding stick.” Babcock, Dictionary, s.v. “jumping jack.”
73. George Albert Smith, Diaries, December 25, 1937, Church Archives.
74. George Albert Smith, Journal, December 25, 1940.
75. George Albert Smith, “To the Latter-day Saints Everywhere,” Improvement Era 50 (December 1947): 797.
81. Amelia Smith McConkie, interview by Brenda K. McConkie, tape recording, Salt Lake City, October 10, 2000, transcript in possession of author. Paragraph break inserted to increase readability.
82. Amelia Smith McConkie, interview.
83. Amelia Smith McConkie, interview.
84. Joseph Fielding McConkie, interview by author, Provo, Utah, October 18, 2000, transcript in possession of author.
87. L. Brent Goates to Larry C. Porter, letter, September 27, 2001, Salt Lake City, copy in author’s possession.
88. In correspondence to his children and loved ones at home President Kimball wrote of their presence in Israel:

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1961, HOLY LAND; December 25, 1961.

Dear Ones:

Christmas in Jerusalem! What an experience! CHRISTMAS EVE IN BETHLEHEM! We shall tell you a little about it all if you will forgive the carbon copy. We arrived here after dark last night [Jerusalem, December 24th]. Here at this hotel the carols were being blatantly played over loud speakers. We caught a taxi and hurried over to Bethlehem. The milling thousands crowded every nook and corner. People had to take turns getting into the sacred places. We waited for some time before we could get into the crypts where the Lord was thought to have been born. There are two rival spots in the cave underneath the Church—the two are rivals, two religions, in dispute as to where the sacred spot was. So there are two spots a few feet apart and each of the rival organizations makes its own claims. One is the place where he was born, they say, and the other where the cradle was. This part was frustrating but when we went to Shepherds Field we had it alone in the dark. We quietly sang “Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains, shepherds of old heard the glorious strains, Glory to God in the Highest.” Letter in Spencer W. Kimball, Journal, December 24–25, 1961, courtesy Edward J. Kimball.

90. Edward J. Kimball to Jack W. Welch, October 24, 2000, Provo, Utah, copy in author’s possession.
96. Benson, President Ezra Taft Benson Remembers, 6–7.
98. Personal interview, Larry C. Porter with Reed A. Benson, October 14, 2000, Provo, Utah.
100. Benson, President Ezra Taft Benson Remembers, 10–13.