



AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

## The Gift inside the Box

**M**y wife Marcia and I have six children. When they were very small we noticed something each Christmas day that caught our attention. As we would give these tiny children a gift in a beautifully wrapped box, with colorful paper and ribbons, they were distracted so much by the wrapping paper and box that they were not interested in the gift inside. They would play with the paper and ribbons and enjoy the box, never understanding that the actual gift was inside the box. As they became older and more mature, when they received a gift for Christmas, they quickly cast aside the wrapping paper, ribbons and box to get to the actual gift. They understood through

experience that the most precious and valuable gift was inside the box.

As I watch the Christian nations of the world celebrate Christmas with the beautiful lights, brightly colored packaging, endless shopping and the rush of the Christmas season, I think of my children when they were small. There seems to be a tendency to be distracted by the colorful wrapping paper, lights, ribbons and the box, sometimes ignoring the precious gift inside--the very reason that we celebrate Christmas.

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we understand that the precious gift inside the box is described best in John 3:16 in the New Testament, "For God so loved the world



By Elder  
Brent H. Nelson  
Area President





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*Just as my children matured and gained understanding that the real gift was inside the box, as we mature in the gospel and gain understanding, we know that beautiful lights and brightly colored packaging bring color and excitement to the Christmas season, but the precious gift in the box is the Son, Jesus Christ and His Atonement.*

that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The gift that was given to us by the Father is His Son.

Just as my children matured and gained understanding that the real gift was inside the box, as we mature in the gospel and gain understanding, we know that beautiful lights and brightly colored packaging bring color and excitement to the Christmas season, but the precious gift in the box is the Son, Jesus Christ and His Atonement.

I bear witness that Jesus Christ is our Savior and our Redeemer. There is no way back to the Father, but by Him. (John 14:6) He was with us in the pre-mortal life and when the Father presented His Plan of Salvation to us, it became very evident to us that we would sin during our time on this earth. We also learned that no unclean thing can enter back into the presence of the Father. (3 Nephi 27:19) It seemed that we were in an impossible situation. We wanted to come and obtain a body. We wanted to become like our Father, but if we were sure to sin, how could we make it back to His presence? The Father taught us that he would provide

a Savior who would pay for our sins. To our great joy, the Savior stepped forward and said “here am I send me ” (Abraham 3:27) He agreed to come and pay the price for us.

Through His Infinite Atonement and His Crucifixion, He has opened the way for all of us to be cleansed from our sins and be healed. In order for His Atonement to work for us, there are certain steps we must take. The Savior describes those steps as, “the Doctrine of Christ.” (3 Nephi 11:31-39) We must first exercise faith in Jesus Christ. We must repent, be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once we have fulfilled those steps and entered in by the way, then we must endure to the end. (2 Nephi 31:17-21)



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At this Christmas season, may we understand that the Savior’s invitation is to come. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

May we each look beyond the wrapping paper, ribbons and bows this year and see the gift inside the box, the Savior, Jesus Christ and his invitation to come and partake of His Atonement. ■



# Do Not Delay: Young Single Adults Heed the Call to Hasten to the Temple

By Eda Brojan Calimlim

**F**rom February to July 2013, nine young single adults (YSAs) from the Quezon City First Ward, Quezon City Stake have married in the temple.

## A TIMELY MESSAGE

During the Area Broadcast last January, one of the goals focused on was increasing the number of young single adults (YSA) marrying in the temple. Bishop Febian Cacho of the Quezon City First Ward, Quezon City Philippines Stake noticed that their ward had an increasing number of single adults. Granted, they occasionally had transient single adults who stayed with the ward while enrolled at the nearby university or elsewhere. At one point they had 43 YSAs in attendance.

"We are happy to have these single adult members in our ward but we do not want them to remain in the single adult class. It was very timely to hear Elder Michael John U. Teh's message last January and to have an increase in YSAs marrying in the temple as part of the area goals this year," according to Bishop Cacho.

## GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Inspired by the increasing number of single adults in the ward, Bishop Cacho began regularly visiting the young single adults in class. He spent time attending a portion of the class or conversing with the YSAs before class started. He would informally ask why those of missionary age were not yet actively preparing for their missions or

why those who are couples have not yet talked to him about their goal dates for temple marriage. He invited them individually for interviews and during the interview he would encourage those who are already in a relationship to set a specific date on when they would be married in the temple. Some of them would often be wary about setting a specific date because of fears about present circumstances and concerns about the future. For the YSA sisters who had doubts about getting married, Bishop Cacho felt inspired to ask his wife to be open to talk about their love story to single adults.

"Hearing our leaders talk about the importance of not delaying marriage assured me that we were on the right course in encouraging our YSA to not delay marriage. Elder Teh's counsel helped our YSA to focus on not delaying their temple marriage and for me to be better equipped to address the concerns of our YSA who came to me for counsel," Bishop Cacho added.

## GETTING TO THE TEMPLE

Titus and April Dagny Beriong Literatus and Mar Andres III and Alvionne Sebastian Baquiran are two of those YSA couples from Quezon City First Ward who have decided to follow to the counsel to not delay marrying in the temple.

Mar and Alvionne Baquiran met as high school students in Isabela. They had always been special friends







and both went on to study engineering in college. Mar subsequently left for his mission and Alvionne, despite invitations to attend Church, was not yet a member when he left. She eventually found her way to Church, gained a testimony and was baptized by Mar upon his return. Having known and liked each other for a long time, marriage was part of their plans but was not a priority. Mar was currently under petition for immigration and that meant delaying any marriage plans. Meanwhile, Alvionne's family felt that she was too young for marriage. After hearing the messages at a recent YSA conference, they individually had impressions that it was time to get married. According to them, the recent counsel from Church leaders to not delay temple marriage played a significant role in their decision to get married at this time and also helped them overcome any apprehensions they had. When asked why they had decided to get married considering possible consequences, Mar simply said that it was the right thing to do. Despite initial opposition and challenges, they were married at the Manila Philippines Temple last May 31. Mar and Alvionne Baquiran have this to say to those who think they got married in a rush, "Looking back now at seeing how happy and blessed we have been since we got married, we wish we had gotten married sooner."

On June 1, the day after Mar and Alvionne were married; Titus Literatus and April Dagny Beriong also made their way to temple. They had been introduced by the latter's brother last year and officially became a couple a few months after. Titus is still finishing college, having stopped to

serve a mission. Meanwhile, Dagny was just getting started in her teaching profession. They initially encountered opposition when they announced their plans to get married, especially since Titus is still in school. The couple was offered support for their wedding as well as significant assistance to get started in exchange for postponing their marriage plans until Titus graduated. The couple stood their ground and decided to get married before the start of the school year. Dagny got hired as a teacher in a public school, a feat made remarkable by the fact that it is not easy to get a permanent teaching job in a public school in such a short period of time and after being previously told that slots were already filled. She was guided to a person who knew that a slot was still unfilled. According to the couple, blessings come when we take the first step and stand our ground to do what the Lord and His servants ask.

In August, Bishop Cacho is happy to have two more YSAs from the ward scheduled for temple marriage. After them, two more single adults are scheduled to be married in December.

### **THE WORK MOVES FORWARD**

In the same way that the Lord is hastening missionary work, His servants have counseled YSAs to hasten to the temple. As YSAs in the Philippines heed their counsel and exercise their faith despite opposition and challenges, the work of the Lord moves forward and they are blessed in turn. And as any of these newlyweds can attest, getting married in the temple is one of the greatest blessings they have received; they only wished they did it sooner. ■



# “He Will Soften Their Hearts”

By Deo M. Divinagracia

**T**omas dela Cruz, 67, is the elders quorum president of the San Jose 4th Ward in the San Jose Nueva Ecija Philippines Stake. He actively fulfills his responsibilities and attends meetings, baptisms and training workshops without fail. He also goes the extra mile by helping members in the welfare program and in home teaching. Watching him go about his busy life as a faithful Latter-day Saint, one could easily surmise that he has always been that active. It comes as a pleasant surprise that his Church attendance one Sunday in May of 2012 was the first time for him in 26 years!

Baptized in 1985 with four of his five children, Tomas dela Cruz soon fell into inactivity due to a construction job that required him to travel a lot and stay onsite for long periods of time. His children also stopped going to church and his wife Ligaya was too busy being both father and mother to further investigate the Church. He tried to sustain his newfound faith by reading the Book of Mormon and other Church materials he brought with him, but the lack of interaction with fellow Latter-day Saints soon took its toll and he drifted away for almost three decades.

Through all those years of inactivity, members and priesthood leaders continued to reach out to the dela Cruz family. Patriarch Romeo Aguinaldo, who was formerly the ward bishop, remembers visiting Tomas whenever he was home and in between jobs. “I always knew he had a strong testimony of the Church so I kept visiting him even if he still did not go back to Church.”

San Jose 4th Ward Bishop Genaro

Salamanca acknowledges the important role of friends and fellowshippers.

“Aside from Patriarch Aguinaldo, other members like Manuel Venturina and Rodolfo Nicolas were instrumental in rekindling the testimony of Tomas. After attending Church services in May, he worked with his priesthood leaders and was able to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood on August 25. He also went into the temple for his endowments on that same day. He is hoping his wife and children would soon join him in Church.

“I realized that I found the truth in this Church... I am ready to sacrifice for the Lord and I am dedicated to serve others,” affirmed Tomas dela Cruz after recalling how glorious he felt performing ordinances in the temple. In his conversations with Bishop Salamanca, he recounted how he was able to stay away from vices and other bad habits while yet inactive. He remembered the gospel standards; all he needed was the love and care of Church members to serve as the catalyst for his spiritual renewal.

Patriarch Aguinaldo encourages home teachers and visiting teachers not to get discouraged if the persons or families they are trying to reach out to still do not go back to Church despite all their efforts. “You really have to persevere and spend a lot of time with them. Show your love for them,” he explained. Bishop Salamanca counsels us to be constant in our efforts to visit our fellow Latter-day Saints. “Do not hesitate or be embarrassed because we are engaged in the Lord’s work. If we do our part, He will soften their hearts and lead them back to Church.” ■



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# Local **LDS Voices**

## Christmas for You and Me

By Ma. Teresa Canadalla-Pangilinan

Christmas carols; greeting cards; festivities and gifts; beautiful than traditions and customs, Christmas has its deeper meaning to every single member of our family.

### LET US HEAR WHAT MEMBERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT CHRISTMAS.

**A**s a child, I loved Christmas time because everyone is in a festive mood. It is the time when people want to be happy and want to reconcile with enemies. And it is the time of sharing and receiving gifts.



**Mia Felyn V.**  
Catarman Philippines Stake

**A**s a father, Christmas season is a time to celebrate the priceless gift of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What is special about Christmas is that this is the time I can teach my family the true meaning of the spirit of Christmas. Celebrating is not just about giving gifts or the food we have on our table but the true spirit of Christmas is the pure and unconditional love of Christ for us, our family and everyone.



**Nino Gilberto M. Materdo**  
Makati Philippines Stake

**A**s a future full-time missionary, Christmas reminds me of the Savior Jesus Christ. I remember Him and His gospel. Christmas and missionary work are both special to me because it is

about our Savior and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is all about Him—His sacrifice and love.



**Abby M. Melosantos**  
Gapan Philippines Stake

**I**t is a special time of the year for me because it is when people celebrate and remember the symbol of Heavenly Father's unconditional love for us by bringing His Only Begotten Son here upon the earth to be our Savior and Redeemer. It is also a symbol of Christ's love for us all when He offered Himself to come and save all mankind from their sins. Christmas is even more special to me when I get to witness how we, as sons and daughters of God, give back our love to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ by showing our love to our friends and family, and by sharing the gift of God's love to all.



**Myca Michelle L. Lamoglia**  
Quezon City Philippines South Stake

**A**s a mother, Christmas is the time when I can teach my children the principle of giving. It helps impress upon the minds of my children that Jesus Christ was born and lived on earth to atone for our sins. It is a special time





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because we are given the chance to reunite with our relatives. It is a time of giving thanks to Heavenly Father for all the great blessings He bestowed upon my family.

**Rosalyn S. Jaranta**  
Naic Philippines District



**A**s a returning member, Christmas gives me hope that my family will

remain strong and continue our activity in the Church. We put garlands and decorations in our home for our son to feel the special joy the season brings. But most of all I want my son to feel that true happiness can be found in the true church of Jesus Christ.

**Mark Anthony M. Manaloto**  
Balanga Philippines Stake

## How Can I Make Christmas More Meaningful this Year?

**T**his is a wonderful season for our family because we are celebrating the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. During this time, we are more inspired to give ourselves to others through rescuing those who need to be rescued spiritually, emotionally and physically. We both plan to fill this time of the year with service to the Lord through our callings in the Church.



**Regim and Temple Joy Daguplo**  
Gingooog Philippines District

**I**ntend to make this yuletide season full of love for all my children and grandchildren. I will shower them with

gifts and prayers for their temporal and spiritual success. I will also ponder the First Presidency Christmas message to inspire me to press forward with faith. I will be more diligent in my calling in the Relief Society Organization. I intend to make this season full of smiles and gratitude to the Lord for all He has blessed me with and we will gather in prayer on Christmas Eve.



**Isabel B. Juele**  
Gingooog Philippines District

**M**y mom usually prepares a sumptuous dinner for Christmas



and then we read from the scriptures about the birth of Jesus Christ. Gospel study is already a family tradition and we do it every Sunday night. Then we close our gospel study with a prayer.



**Bentley Naire Luyong**  
Consolacion Philippines Stake

“I can make Christmas more meaningful by spending time

with my loved ones. I have been away for two Christmases because I served a mission. Visiting my grandparents, spending time with my nephews and nieces, and expressing my love to my parents are some of the ways I can make my Christmas more meaningful. Our gift of time is the best present we can give this yuletide season.”

**Aika Aquino**  
Davao Buhangin Philippines Stake

## Trying to **Be Like Jesus**

“It is special for me because we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. During Christmas, my family and I gather together to learn and to enjoy. I am also happy because I receive presents during Christmas. We will not have Christmas if we do not have Christ.”



**Angela C., 11,**  
Bacolod Stake

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