

ASIA LOCAL PAGES

ASIA AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Tithes and Offerings

By Elder Steven L. Toronto

Of the Seventy

We know that our Father in Heaven desires to bless us. He blesses us whenever we ask Him and whenever we are obedient to His laws and commandments (see Matthew 7:7–11; D&C 130:20–21). Like a beautiful firework which shoots out colorful sparks into the dark sky, delighting all who see, His blessings also shoot out in all directions and shower down upon us with remarkable beauty. His blessings come in many ways and in great abundance. However, blessings do not always come in the ways we specifically ask, at the time we think best, or in the form we expect. But, blessings always come.

Tithing is a commandment that brings great blessings but it is not always easy to obey. We all worry about having enough food to eat, a comfortable and safe home in which to live, and access to good health care and education. All of these needs seem to require us to have money and possessions. Obeying the law of tithing requires us to give up security and comfort that comes from having more physical possessions. It requires us to show that our hearts are not set on the things of this world but rather set on the treasures of heaven (see 3 Nephi 13:19–21; D&C 121:35). It requires us to trust in God and have faith that we will always be given “enough and to spare” (D&C 104:17).

The law of tithing is simple. It requires us to “pay one-tenth of all [our] interest annually” (D&C 119:4)—that means ten percent of our income. Tithing is a “standing law unto [us] forever” (D&C 119:4). Malachi states that if we obey the

law of tithing, the Lord will “open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). The blessings promised to us by obeying this law are significant and abundant—but not always obvious.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles notes that:

“Often as we teach and testify about the law of tithing, we emphasize the immediate, dramatic, and readily recognizable temporal blessings that we receive. And surely such blessings do occur. Yet some of the diverse blessings we obtain as we are obedient to this commandment are *significant but subtle*. Such blessings can be discerned only if we are both spiritually attentive and observant (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).”¹

To understand this principal, let us go back in time to 1845. At that time, the Church had only been established for 15 years. Most of the members had gathered to the city of Nauvoo, a beautiful city of almost 20,000 inhabitants built by the Saints. The Prophet Joseph Smith had already been martyred, and the Saints encountered great persecution. Enemies of the Church were burning homes, farms, and fields of the Saints and forcing them out of Nauvoo. Yet, in the midst of great hardship, the Saints had been commanded to build a temple. Work on the temple required great sacrifice. A young man learned of the difficulty the Church was having in completing the temple, came to Brigham Young on July 8, 1845, and gave him all of his life savings. This was an amount of \$2,500 in gold coin, a very large amount in that



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day. The money was to be used to help complete the temple.

All the Saints had been asked to pay tithing, one-tenth of their income, to build the temple. Great amounts of money were needed. The money came from people who were poor, destitute, under attack, struggling to provide for their families, and preparing to leave their homes to travel into a wilderness. In spite of this difficulty, by December 1845, the temple was ready. Then, two months later, during the coldest part of winter, the Saints were forced out of Nauvoo, leaving their beautiful city and sacred temple. Two years later the Nauvoo Temple was burned to the ground, leaving nothing but the foundation. The remains of the temple were sold for the price of \$2,000, a small fraction of its original cost.²

The Saints must have been very disappointed and sad. Perhaps some of them wondered why the Lord would do this. Why would they be required to sacrifice so much only to have the temple destroyed? What about the young man who gave \$2,500? He left Nauvoo with nothing. Where were the blessings promised by Malachi?

But in these wonderful examples of faith we see the “significant but subtle” blessings that come from tithing. During the period of two months before the Saints left Nauvoo, temple blessings were finally made available to faithful Saints. Five thousand were able to participate in temple ordinances and received their endowment. The temple was busy day and night. As the Saints departed Nauvoo over frozen rivers and into an unknown wilderness, they took with them “power from on high” (D&C 95:8) and the blessings of being sealed together as eternal families. These are treasures that could not be destroyed by man or corrupted by moths (see Matthew 6:19–20).

From these experiences, we also see the close

connection between temple blessings and tithing. The Lord commanded us to pay tithing “for the building of mine house”—that is, building temples (D&C 119:2). Our ability to build and operate temples depends on the tithes and offerings of the members of the Church. There is no other source. Approval to build temples is dependent on the tithing faithfulness of members, particularly holders of the priesthood. There must be many stakes of the Church in an area before a temple will be built. To establish a stake requires many active, full-tithe-paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Finally, any member who enters a temple must be worthy and spiritually prepared and, importantly, they must be a full-tithe payer.

President Thomas S. Monson reminds us that “some degree of sacrifice has ever been associated with temple building and with temple attendance.”³

As we desire to have easier access to the blessings of the temple in Asia, we too will need to sacrifice by paying a full tithe. We will also need to teach our children the principle of tithing and invite all members to faithfully observe this law. As we do this, great and wonderful blessings will come. Some blessings will be obvious; some will be subtle.

Our sacrifice may not immediately result in a temple in our country, but if we look with an eye of faith, we may see the “significant but subtle” blessings that Elder Bednar describes. We may find we have greater gratitude for the possessions we have been given. We may learn greater thriftiness. We may be led to the right employment. We may find motivation to seek after our ancestors and complete family histories. We may find the strength to carry heavy burdens. We may develop a greater ability to understand and follow the direction of the Spirit. We may find the faith to clearly see the

love of our Heavenly Father. Even if we do not see blessings in our lifetime, perhaps our grandchildren and great grandchildren will be blessed because of our examples of faithfulness. The young man who gave the \$2,500 was my great-grandfather. He probably did not see how his act of faith would inspire me and be an example to his posterity.

As we obey the law of tithing, we will bring the blessings of the temple closer to us and closer to

our posterity. Whether we are able to see all of the blessings or not, we can be certain that blessings, both obvious and subtle, will shower down upon us in abundance and great beauty—like the sparks of a beautiful firework. ■

NOTES

1. David A. Bednar, “The Windows of Heaven,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 17–18; emphasis added.
2. See Glen M. Leonard, *Nauwoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (2002), 629.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “The Holy Temple—A Beacon to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2011, 92.

LOCAL PAGES

Christmas Memories

By Samson Raj

Backwards in time

Chennai: There were two elders who had come a month before and were trained by the couple missionaries. In days of old (the beginning of missionary work in India) missionaries were trained by the couple missionaries in Chennai, India. Elder Kandavalli and I were serving in Chennai. We were trainers for these two elders. We were assigned to be trainers for these two elders, Elder Abel and Elder Samuel. We four stayed in the apartment. It was Christmastime. The day before Christmas, we went off to do missionary work and visit members. There were mixed feelings among all of us, as this was the last week we

were going to be in Chennai. All of us were to be transferred. So it was a sort of sadness for us to all leave but we also looked forward with anticipated hope to serve in new areas.

It was Christmas day, my first away from my family. As usual, I was the first to awake. I opened the door to go to the rooftop to exercise. My feet hit something and I had to quickly bow down

to see what my feet had struck. My eyes rolled down to see plastic bags. They were filled with gifts that I could tell even without touching them. There were not one but four bags. Curious to know what they were, I closely examined the bags. There were names on each one. I did not see mine immediately, so in frantic excitement I looked for the bag with my name on it. Excitement



soared on seeing a bag with my name on it: “Elder Raj,” written at the top. My heart beat a hundred times faster than usual. Delightful feelings of untold joy, unfelt happiness surfaced, thrilling me. These uplifting emotions flooded into my mind and body. I lifted it carefully and examined the contents to see what gifts I had received. I was grateful and happy. I immediately wanted to go wake up my companions and announce that Christmas gifts were at the door for them. I then thought of the excitement I had in finding the gifts myself, and I wanted my companions to have the same excitement. I went up to see the couple missionaries who lived above us. I rang the bell and Sister Frances opened the door. I wished her a merry Christmas and told her about the gifts placed in front of the door. I thanked her for them. She, happily as ever, brushed it off.

It has been many years since this happened, but the memory of it is fresh in my mind. I still remember because of the love the couple missionaries exhibited and because they did it in secret. I had read many stories of gifts given secretly but to experience it was altogether thrilling. They did not say “We are going to do it,” but just as the scripture says, “But when thou doest alms, let

not thine left hand know what thine right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:3–4). That is what they did.

Present Time

There is another Christmas I remember. It was recent. I had lost my job and was without work. Times were tough. Interviews were not getting me jobs. My own self-confidence had been shattered. Money was scarce. I was distraught as Christmas was approaching. We had no new clothes for the kids. We had no decorations adorning the house. We had no plans for Christmas day. During this tumultuous time of my life, carolers from the Church came to sing. The carolers sang with gusto, wished us a merry Christmas, and left. We did not give them any snacks, as we did not have any. After they left, I saw an envelope under the mattress. I opened it and saw some money inside. The carolers were still going down the stairs when I called to them and said somebody had left an envelope with money. No one took responsibility for it, and they all left.

Here was a secret stranger who did not know what I was going through. He wanted to succor somebody in need at

Christmastime. He had a desire to help, and Heavenly Father guided him to our family. This again reiterated my testimony that Heavenly Father knows and watches over His children. He will come to our aid. God was mindful of our poor circumstances and inspired someone to render help. I was grateful to Heavenly Father for remembering us during this time. Heavenly Father was showing He *cared* during this season of care and love.

The couple missionaries and this stranger both did these acts of giving secretly. That is the reason I think of these experiences even now. They cannot be erased from my memory. One was given for the first time secretly. The other in time of my difficulty. I know if we can give secretly during this season of Christmas to those less fortunate than ourselves, we will be blessed and those who receive will know that they are not forgotten by God. We can become a means to help them know God cares. They are not forgotten to Him. Just have a desire, and Heavenly Father will guide you.

Let us open our hearts and purses to those in need during Christmastime. Let us gladden someone. When gifts are shared in secret they sweeten and multiply the joys of the giver and receiver. ■

My Family's Christmas Tradition

By Judy Nesam Samson

I look forward to Christmastime as it is a joyous time to *reminisce* on the birth of our Savior. How grateful I am to be a believer of Christ and celebrate His birth with family. The spirit of Christmas gives us a desire to give joy to others. We have built a family Christmastime tradition which has united our families. Each family member has supported one other in times of need. Each one takes time to be grateful for the blessings they have received.

Two months to Christmas

The tradition begins two months before Christmas. All are invited for a family gathering. The family include my husband's four sisters and my family. At this gathering, slips of paper are passed to everyone. Each one picks one slip. Each of these papers contain a family member's name.

They are to keep this name a secret. They become the secret Santa for another family member. Each one is a Santa who brings a simple not expensive secret gift to another family member. These gifts are secretly placed under the Christmas tree.

One month to Christmas

On the first family home evening in December, we take out the tree and prepare to decorate it with Christmas ornaments and decorations. Our kids are excited to participate in this activity of erecting the tree. They help in putting the angels, Santa, and stars of different shapes on the branches. The last are the colorful lights cast all over the tree. One of our kids turns on the lights and it's a spectacular view. The lights are kept on all night, every night until the tree is taken down.



JUDY SAMSON

Family and relatives



**Children enact
the Christmas
story.**

Christmas Eve

All members of our family meet in our home. No one would miss this Christmas Eve, no matter how far away they live. Wherever they may be, they make it a point to come for this gathering. The simple but special meal we have is rice, sambar, and fish fried with masalas. Everyone asks for second and third helpings. At the end of the meal, we gather for the special spiritual part. We begin by singing Christmas songs. Prayer of gratitude for the blessings received are offered. After the prayer, a Christmas message is shared.

All of the children act out a Christmas skit. It is so peaceful to see children reenact the story of Christ's birth.

After that, Santa enters the house with gifts in the

bag. Santa wears his attire and comes in singing and dancing. He calls every child, asks them if they have been good, and gives them a gift. Christmas music is played and Santa dances with the children and sometimes pulls the older ones to join him in merriment.

It's then time to give our gifts. The gifts under the tree are secret Santa gifts as well as parents' gifts for their children. My mother-in-law is invited to distribute them. She is an older person, and receiving from a older person is good for all of us. Everyone is excited to open their gifts to see what they have received.

Christmas Day

The whole family is invited to a restaurant for the Christmas meal. I realized that cooking takes times



and everyone has to help. To have the spirit of good feelings, we decided to have lunch in a restaurant. Each year a different restaurant is chosen, usually where a buffet is served. After lunch we all go to a park and spend time there. Once we had a cricket match. Once we had mind games.

In the evening, we watch a homemade movie that has pictures of family members collected throughout the year. Funny captions are inserted. Everyone has a big laugh seeing the pictures, and reading the captions that go with them creates ripples of laughter.

For me, the important thing among all this is that we as a family join together and spend time with each other. Moreover, the occasion is made joyous by sharing the birth of Jesus with the

family. Even though each of my sisters-in-law and their families belong to different churches, we are all united to remember our Savior's birth. Each one of us has found strength from these gatherings. No one wants to miss it.

We have had challenges like job losses, and sometimes we have not held the gathering or have instead given to an orphanage rather than spend money at a restaurant. Other family members have insisted that we keep holding our family gathering and not put it off. They have taken the responsibility to continue it when we could not. My husband said, "Christmas comes only once a year, and we have been asked to spend time with our families. This is what we are doing. We have 11 other months to visit orphanages or do charity

The family opens their gifts.



JUDY SAMSON

Judy Samson

work.” It made sense to me to continue to hold these Christmas gatherings.

The counsel of Elder Tom L. Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles helped me: “Be certain you are creating a rich environment in which your family can look forward to special times of the year when traditions hold you together as a great eternal family unit. . . . Family traditions can offer basic and lasting support, but there’s a lot that must be built around them. Perhaps family traditions work only when they create a role for every member of the family and when there is united effort to build them. This means family members need to spend time together and learn how to work together. When it comes to families, there is no such thing as quality time without a certain quantity of time” (L. Tom Perry, “Tradition of Light and Testimony,” *Liahona*, Dec. 2012, 13). ■

