

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Are You Ready?

By Elder Kevin W. Pearson

As another Christmas season approaches, it's not uncommon to hear the question, "Are you ready for Christmas?" In modern times it is generally understood one is ready once shopping is completed and gifts are purchased and wrapped. A far better question we might ask ourselves is, "Are we any more prepared for the Saviour of the world as Christmas approaches?"

This past year the Pacific Area Presidency invited each of us to deepen our personal conversion unto the Lord by:

1. Increasing personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,
2. Recommitting to the law of the fast and paying a generous fast offering, and
3. Immersing ourselves in the Book of Mormon by reading it through twice in 2014.

We were promised that as we accepted this invitation, our individual lives, marriages, homes, wards and stakes would be strengthened and blessed with greater spiritual power,

peace, and joy. Those who have accepted that invitation have developed increased faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement, gained a deeper understanding of the principles and ordinances of the gospel, felt the witness of the Holy Ghost, experienced greater spiritual power, and become more deeply converted unto the Lord. In short, we are more prepared for the coming of Christ.

One of the tragic realities of the Book of Mormon is that after nearly six hundred years of prophetic preparation, most of the Nephites were utterly unprepared for His coming. Even though they had the scriptures and the words of living prophets, and countless examples of the Lord intervening to save their fathers, yet they were unprepared to meet the Saviour at His coming. In fact, only the more righteous among them were preserved at His coming, while the vast majority were destroyed. Notwithstanding all that the Lord had done for the Nephite people, they had been overpowered by the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary unto blindness and



Elder Kevin W. Pearson

led away to destruction (see 1 Nephi 15:24). At His coming, every word that He had caused to be spoken and written through His prophets was fulfilled. To those who survived the terrible destruction preceding His appearance in the Americas the Saviour promised, "O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart" (3 Nephi 10:6).

Full purpose of heart.
A mighty change of heart.

A broken heart and a contrite spirit. Deepening our conversion unto the Lord necessarily changes our hearts and our very natures. This can only happen as we yield our will to God and hearken unto the promptings of the Holy Ghost. The great prophet Nephi provided a powerful pattern for each of us as he concluded his inspired writing:

“Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. . . .

“ . . . [And] if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show you all things what ye should do. . . .

“ . . . For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray. . . .

“But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of

thy soul” (2 Nephi 32:3, 5, 8–9).

The Book of Mormon is a powerful tool in spiritual conversion through the Holy Ghost. Joseph Smith taught “the Book of Mormon was the most correct book on earth, and that a man would get closer to God by reading it and following its precepts than by any other book” (introduction to the Book of Mormon). He further stated: “Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations and where is our religion? We have none” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 196). The Book of Mormon is the keystone to our religion and our testimony, in four key ways:

1. It is the keystone to our witness that Jesus is the Christ.
2. It is the keystone to Joseph Smith and the Restoration.
3. It is the keystone to the doctrine of Christ and the restored gospel.
4. It is the keystone to personal testimony and spiritual protection.

To Laman and Lemuel, and to each of us, Nephi left a powerful testimony and promise.

Speaking of the iron rod from Lehi’s dream, Nephi taught, “I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24).

Each Christmas season reminds us Jesus Christ came to save each of us so we might have eternal life and a fullness of joy. Christmas is a reminder that Christ still lives, and someday soon He will come again, the second time. Christmas is a season to remember Him and to commit ourselves to be ready when He comes again. The Book of Mormon is a powerful gift to help us prepare for Christ. I bear witness that if we will continually hold fast (see 1 Nephi 8:30) to the Book of Mormon every day . . . every day . . . every day, we will be ready when He comes again. I know that He lives. I testify of Him. He is the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. ■

This Is Your Time

Mormon Newsroom

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Elder S. Gifford Nielsen, a member of the Pacific Area Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his wife, Sister Wendy Nielsen, met with new missionaries at the New Zealand Missionary Training Centre.

“This is your time,” he said. “Don’t waste a

minute. This is your time to develop a close relationship with the Saviour.”

Elder Nielsen asked the missionaries, “Why are you here?”

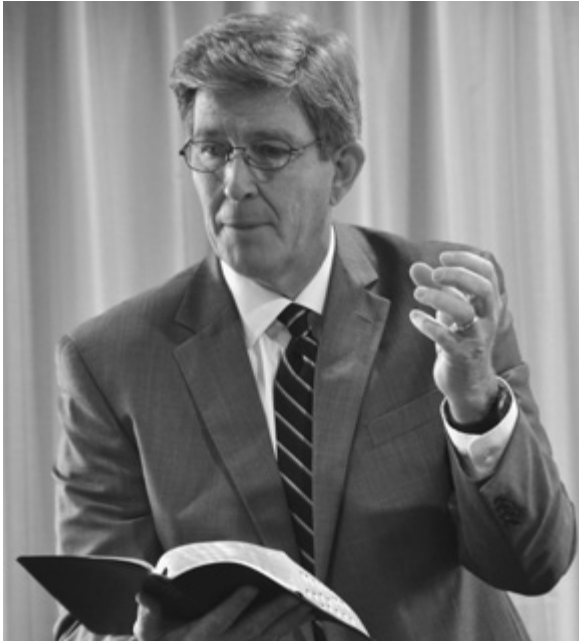
Their responses included, “To share the happiness of the gospel”; “To build a foundation in Christ”; and, “To help others understand the Saviour and His Atonement.”

Elder Nielsen discussed the sacred responsibility to serve. He reminded the missionaries they are here because the Lord has called them here.



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Elder S. Gifford Nielsen and Sister Wendy Nielsen with two young missionaries from the New Zealand Missionary Training Centre.



Elder S. Gifford Nielsen of the Pacific Area Presidency teaches new missionaries at the New Zealand Missionary Training Centre.

Looking further ahead to life after their missions, Elder Nielsen said, “You are here to prepare yourself to lead your posterity in righteousness.”

“It is important,” he continued, “to gain an unwavering testimony and to learn how to love others. By appreciating the differences in others we become better companions, better mothers and better fathers.”

Referring to Joshua in the Old Testament, he repeated, “This is your time. ‘Be strong and of a good courage.’ Don’t waste a minute. Become great ambassadors of Jesus Christ.”

Sister Wendy Nielsen said she and her husband shared things in common with the missionaries—such as the gospel, the Church, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the fact that they are all embarking in the service of the Lord.

Referencing the fact that she and Elder Nielsen arrived in New Zealand earlier this year, Sister Nielsen said, “We are all beginning a new adventure.”

Sister Nielsen encouraged the missionaries to think about the Saviour, follow His example, maintain an attitude of forgiveness, and commit their will to the Saviour. “Turn to God, follow Him, serve Him. Give and radiate your testimony to others,” she said. ■

Christmas with Simon

By Theresa Dewsbury

Like children all over the world, both of mine looked forward to Christmas Day growing up in South Africa. They knew there would be wonderfully wrapped gifts under the six-foot pine tree on Christmas morning; and they also knew we’d eat a scrumptious midday meal.

It was also the day when I’d bundle one of them—or one of their cousins, or one of their visiting friends—into my car. They would “help” me deliver a specially arranged food tray with turkey and ham and all the traditional trimmings, complete with Christmas pudding, hat and cracker, to the lone security guard who worked on-site at the company where I was employed for seventeen years.

Simon was his name. He had no family in the region with which to spend this special religious holiday, so he always volunteered to work the twelve-hour day shift each year.

Our meal offering was always horribly cold by the time we’d travelled the 15 km to deliver it, but fortunately Simon’s security

building housed a small microwave oven. He was very appreciative of the Christmas Day feast, for he knew how far we had to travel to get it to him.

Of course I could have delivered the tray on my own, but I wanted those children to have the experience of seeing Simon’s eyes as he gratefully accepted our gift. I wanted them to understand that sometimes it’s good to put others before ourselves—we’d always deliver Simon’s food before we ate our own meal—and I wanted them to understand that little acts of kindness go much further than we can sometimes possibly imagine. Our Christmas Day visit to Simon was his only human contact during his long, lonely shift.

Did those children learn anything from their visits with Simon? Absolutely! They learned that “charity is the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47).

Today my own children and their cousins go out of their way to brighten other peoples’ lives . . . even when it’s not convenient, or the Christmas season.

They learned that sacrificing time to serve others can bring immense joy to their own lives . . . and they also learned to be gracious receivers of people's small acts of kindness, and to express verbal and written thanks to them.

All those children are now grown and some have little ones of their own. It's going to be fascinating to watch them

teach *their* children to care for others.

I do love Christmas! It's a time when I get to thank my Father in Heaven for the gift of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. It's a time when I think of ways I can try to be more Christlike, more generous, more grateful, and . . . kinder. Indeed, for me, it *is* the most wonderful time of the year. ■

Love Stories

By Elder Randy Olsen

Mosese Muti and his wife, Salavia, lived in the village of 'Uiha on the island Ha'apai. Brother Muti and his wife were extraordinarily faithful members of the Church who were called to serve a mission in Niue, despite having children at home and almost no money to support themselves. They experienced many miracles as missionaries, but this story isn't about their mission. It's about what happened afterward.

When Brother and Sister Muti returned home from their mission, they met a young elder named Charles, or Chuck, Woodworth. Elder Woodworth had been raised in the United States by a single mother. He and his brother discovered early in life that they had talent for boxing and spent much of their time training for the ring. By the time Chuck was ready for college he was good enough to be offered scholarships to several prestigious universities, but he chose instead to go to BYU, even though the Church school didn't have a boxing program. Chuck paid his way through BYU by boxing at local clubs, usually earning just \$10 or \$20 a match.

Chuck roomed at BYU with a young man from Idaho named John Groberg. John wanted to serve a mission and received his call to Tonga. Inspired by his friend, Chuck hoped to serve a mission in Tonga too, and when his call came in 1955, sure enough it was to the Tonga Nuku'alofa Mission. As a missionary, Chuck completely gave up boxing and threw himself into the work, neglecting even the most basic training during his two and a half years of service. Toward the end of his mission, however, he had a unique opportunity to re-enter the boxing ring.



THE WISE MEN GUIDED BY THE STAR, BY PAUL GUSTAVE DORE

On his mission, Chuck met Branch President Mosese Muti, who told him of a blessing he had received some 20 years earlier by then-Apostle George Albert Smith. In the blessing, Mosese was promised that if he was faithful in keeping the commandments and paid his tithes and offerings, someday he would be able to take his wife and family to the temple—“at no cost to them.” Years passed by without this promise being realized. The nearest temple was in Laie, Hawaii, nearly 5,000 kilometres away. Then in 1958 a new temple was dedicated in Hamilton, New Zealand, by President David O. McKay. Even though it was much closer, travelling to New Zealand was still far beyond the means of the Muti family. Then the Lord opened a door.

In 1958, the 8th-ranked heavyweight boxing champion of the world was a Tongan named Kitione Lave. Nicknamed the “Tongan Torpedo” and “Tongan Terror”, Kitione had just returned home from a successful tour of Europe, during which he knocked out the 3rd-ranked heavyweight boxer in the world, a fighter from Britain. After that victory, other boxers were reluctant to accept a match with Kitione, so the fighter’s promoter was desperate to line up another contest. Then the promoter heard about Chuck Woodworth, a Mormon missionary in Tonga who was also a qualified boxer. The promoter proposed the fight, and Elder Woodworth’s mission president endorsed the match, even helping negotiate the deal. Obviously, mission rules were different in those days.

With the winner’s purse set at \$1,200, Elder Woodworth jumped at the chance, not to box, but to help the Muti family get to the temple. On the day of the match, Woodworth weighed 187 pounds to Lave’s 207 pounds. Woodworth hadn’t trained for over two

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MUTI FAMILY



The Muti family were able to be sealed in the New Zealand temple, as promised in a blessing decades earlier.

years, and his only conditioning was digging the foundation for a chapel on Niue. Kitione was in top shape, having just returned from his European tour. The fight was held in a New Zealand rugby stadium, Carlaw Park, where 15,000 fans watched a young Mormon missionary go up against one of the best boxers in the world. Within the first 30 seconds of the fight Kitione knocked Woodworth to the mat. Woodworth managed to get to his feet by the count of eight, but for the rest of that round and the next three he survived only by backpedaling, dodging, and evading Kitione. By the fifth round, however, Kitione had spent his strength and Woodworth began to show his boxing skills. Kitione made a desperate attempt to knock Woodworth out in the 12th round but to no avail. In the end, the judges awarded the victory to Woodworth on points. With his winnings, Woodworth bought a new pair of trousers to wear home on his flight to the U.S. He sent the rest of the money to the Muti family. Mosese and his family made the long-awaited journey to New Zealand to be sealed in the temple without spending a penny of their own money, just as Mosese had been promised twenty years earlier in a blessing from the Lord. ■

Loving as the Saviour Loves

By Catherine Vaughan

As the Christmas season approaches, I am reminded of a lesson I learnt on my mission many years ago. As a new convert, I had only been baptised 17 months when I entered the mission field, and I was still gaining an understanding of the gospel and our Heavenly Father's love for each one of us.

In my first area in the south of France, we were teaching a young family who lived in an apartment block across the road from the building we used for our Sunday meetings. This family consisted of a young mother and 5 children. They were immigrants, and following the custom of her country, she was married at the age of 13 to her cousin, and had her first child while she was still 13 years old. She was now a single mother.

We did not seem to be making much progress with the lessons we were teaching them, but the oldest daughter attended our Church meetings every week and enjoyed being with the missionaries. Being

young, she didn't really understand a lot of the talks, so she usually excused herself to go to the bathroom and then wandered around the other rooms of the chapel. However, after several weeks we began to notice that items were missing from the classrooms and auxiliary cupboards. They were random items of not much value, but gradually it became obvious that more and more things were going missing. We suspected

this twelve-year-old girl was the culprit.

It was just before Christmas, and all of the missionaries in our zone were scheduled to have a zone conference in another town. The zone leaders collected money from each of us to pay for our train fares to the conference. This lump sum was tucked into an inside jacket pocket by one of the zone leaders. Without thinking, he left his jacket in the foyer of the

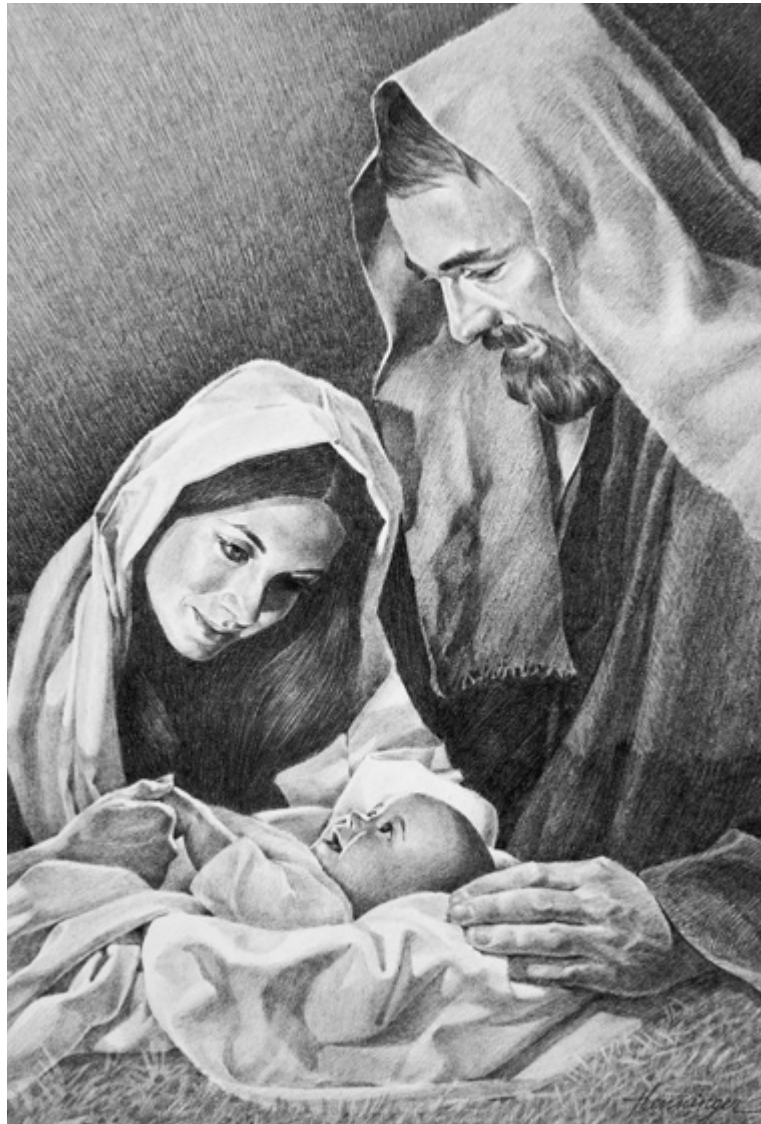


CHRIST WITH THE CHILDREN, BY HARRY ANDERSON

chapel. Later, to our dismay, we discovered the entire amount was missing.

I was angry. A crippling exchange rate made it difficult to survive on the money I had saved for my mission, and coming from a nonmember family, I couldn't rely on them for financial support. Now, right before Christmas, we had to find enough money to once again pay for the train ticket to conference. We were almost certain who had taken the money, but had no firm proof.

The following Sunday, as sacrament meeting progressed, our little investigator once again said she needed to go to the bathroom and went to leave the room. Determined that she would not have the opportunity to go on another thieving spree, I put my arm around her and suggested that she wait until after the meeting and stay and listen to the speaker. She struggled a bit and said she wanted to go into the other room. The more she struggled, the tighter I held her, until I had both arms wrapped tightly around her, and I pulled her close to me, in a big hug, determined she wasn't going anywhere. It was a battle of wills, and I was not about to let her out of my sight.



THE NATIVITY, BY TED HENNINGER

All of a sudden the struggling stopped. I turned to look at her. To my surprise she gazed at me with total trust and happiness on her face. As I looked into her eyes, my heart melted.

In that moment I realised that she was not used to being shown any positive contact, and she was responding to my "hug". As I looked down into her eyes, for the first time I saw her for who she really was, a daughter of God. I had been "hugging" her for all the wrong reasons, judging her for something I had no proof she had done and attempting

to enforce my will upon her. As she snuggled closer to me and hugged me tight, I closed my eyes and gave thanks for the unexpected lesson I had just been taught, to love as the Saviour loves. I was grateful for an insight into the scripture found in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." And I was grateful for the reminder that we are all children of God and that He loves each one of us equally and unconditionally, regardless of our circumstances. ■