

# AFRICA WEST AREA LOCAL PAGES

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

### Easter Can Teach Us and Change Us

By Elder Terence M. Vinson

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As the world contemplates Easter, I wonder how many really understand that this season is a celebration of our salvation. The Savior's Atonement is the means by which we are saved from the effects of both physical and spiritual death. This saving was an essential component of the plan that we all embraced prior to coming to this earth. But the Savior's Atonement which would provide this salvation would also provide an enabling power for us to develop, with God's help, beyond our own ability. "The Atonement is fundamentally a doctrine of human development, not a doctrine that simply erases black marks" (Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen, *Belonging Heart: The Atonement and Relationships with God and Family*, 79).

As all of the spirits of the sons and daughters of Heavenly Father were gathered together, our Father presented His plan. It was a plan for our progress, growth, and education. He saw that we needed experiences to enable us to reach our potential and so gave us the opportunity to accept or reject it. Lucifer opposed the plan and argued that we should be "acted upon" in our earthly experience in order to have us molded to the desired form, rather than to "act for [our]selves" and to develop according to our desires. God made it absolutely clear that it is a critical element of the plan that all people must "act for themselves and not be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:26). Lucifer's plan would not require a Savior, but rather a ruler to act upon us.

We, who have now received bodies, rejected Lucifer's plan. We determined that we would instead follow the plan of our loving Father. His Firstborn stepped forward and offered Himself as the one who would atone for our mistakes and

bear our sicknesses, our sufferings, our infirmities, and our disappointments in order to enable us to grow and to be reconciled to our Father. We knew then that there would be suffering in order for this to happen. For us, it was not to be an easy life where everything goes just the way we want. There would be opposition and hardship. But we also knew our Father's Firstborn. We knew His qualities; we knew His trustworthiness; we knew His love for us; we knew He would not fail us.

"There must be opposition, or opposites, in all things. Bad is the absence of good. Darkness is the absence of light. Sorrow is the absence of joy. How could we ever understand warmth if we never experienced cold? God is the author or provider of light, life, truth, joy, and good. The adversary can provide only the opposites because he takes away. He can provide darkness (the absence of light), death (the absence of life), falsehood (the absence of truth), misery (the absence of joy), and evil (the absence of good). The devil actually provides nothing; he just sees to it that all who cooperate with him are devoid of the blessings that God does provide. The unrighteous may not be miserable according to their perspective, but they do not know real happiness" (D. Kelly Ogden, Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Book of Mormon, Volume 1* [2011]).

Lehi taught his son, Jacob: "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness,



Elder Vinson

neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility. Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God” (2 Nephi 2:11–12).

So, knowing that we could not remain innocent and redeem ourselves in such an environment, the Savior offered Himself to save us because of His love for His Father and for us. It should not surprise us that these are, then, the two great commandments which He has taught us to follow, both by His precepts and His example, in order to be truly happy. Just as He did, we must love God and we must love our fellow man. His love for the Father is such that He endured even more than He thought He could, as implied in His self-introduction to the Nephites: “And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world,

in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11).

He then ministered in incredible love to the Nephites, blessing them and their children, healing their sick, and reaching out in absolute love to them. Indeed, there is no other who has loved God and others as the Savior did and does. His example brought about the true definition of the word *charity*, being the pure love of Christ.

Our responsibility, then, is to follow His example; it is to live our lives in such a way that we, too, can be reunited with our Heavenly Father and the Savior. Our celebration of Easter should not simply be a desire to have another holiday or to enjoy an Easter feast, but rather a vivid reminder that we are to learn more of the Savior and of our Heavenly Father’s plan which we embraced so confidently prior to coming to mortality. It should be a recommitment in our desire to both love God more and to love others more.

Our prime responsibility is to God and to the covenants and commandments He has given us. We should yearn to partake in His sacred ordinances. Our second responsibility is to help others in every way, but especially to assist them to know of God’s plan for them and us. Both we and they will then grow in joy, happiness, and confidence in the presence of God. ■

## OUR HERITAGE

### “You Have Come at Last!”

By Elizabeth Maki

When the first LDS missionaries arrived in Nigeria in 1978, there was very little need for proselytizing. For more than 30 years, Nigerians who

encountered the Church in one way or another had been writing Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, requesting literature and missionaries. When those

missionaries came, they found multiple congregations eager to be baptized virtually the day they arrived.

Anthony Obinna had been writing Church headquarters for several years by the time Rendell and Rachel Mabey and Edwin



***Some of the early members of the church in Nigeria***

and Janath Cannon sought him out a week after their arrival in Nigeria in November 1978. The two senior missionary couples set off in a cab from Port Harcourt with only a general idea of their destination. Like many in Nigeria, Obinna lived in a numberless house on a nameless street, but the missionaries knew his village, county, and state from the letters he had written. After a three-hour ride including several stops to ask for help, they turned down a road lined with banana and palm trees that ended at a small church.

“Near the roof in blue letters were painted the words, ‘Nigerian Latter-Day Saints,’” Rendell

Mabey later wrote. He found one set of doors labeled “LDS” and another labeled “Missionary Home.” “It was a curious experience encountering the name of our own Church,” wrote Mabey, “where no missionary had ever before set foot.”

The missionaries found the area filled with people, but not Obinna. Upon learning who their visitors were, Obinna’s son went in search of his father while the missionaries explored the church.

The Mabeys admired the small chapel with its neat blue door and shutters, then explored the classroom which doubled as an office in the other half of the building. In the classroom, the

program for the next day’s services was already carefully written up on a blackboard. A copy of the Doctrine and Covenants and several copies of the Book of Mormon were available for student use, and shelves were stacked with old issues of the *Ensign* and *Church News*.

It took a couple of hours for Obinna, who had built up this place over 13 years of waiting, to arrive and finally shake hands with someone prepared to bring him The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in full.

### **An astonishing discovery**

More than a decade earlier, Obinna had had a dream in

which a man appeared to him and took him to a beautiful building he had never seen before. Obinna was taken inside and shown everything there. Later, the same dream came again.

Then, a few years later, during the Nigerian civil war, Obinna was confined to his home for safety. He picked up an old copy of *Reader's Digest* and was stunned to see the very building from his dream as the centerpiece of an article about the LDS Church.

"I had never before heard the word *Mormons*," Obinna wrote. "From the time I finished reading the story, I had no rest of mind any longer. My whole attention was focused on my new discovery. I rushed out immediately to tell my brothers, who were all amazed and astonished to hear the story."

It would be another year before the political situation in Nigeria allowed Obinna to get a letter out to the headquarters of the Church, so it wasn't until 1971 that Obinna wrote for instructions. He received several pamphlets and a Book of Mormon but was told the Church was not organized in Nigeria and that, as of that time, there were not yet plans to do so.

"I was totally disappointed," Obinna recalled, "but the Holy

Spirit moved me to continue writing. Many a time in dreams I saw some of the missionaries of the Church discussing matters about the Church."

He continued to write, and while his patience was sometimes tried, he didn't give up on the testimony that had been kindled inside him.

"We are not discouraged anyhow but shall continue to pursue the practice of our faith which we have found to be true," he wrote in 1976 in response to another letter urging Obinna to do the best he could on his own for the time being. "We are very optimistic that our Lord Jesus Christ will make it possible in the future for the Church to take more direct action. We are well aware that our faith is being tried. We are doing everything we can to establish the truth among so many of our Heavenly Father's children in this part of the world."

Indeed, Obinna taught the gospel to his family and had amassed a congregation of 71 members by the time the Mabeys and the Cannons arrived five months after President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) announced a revelation removing the priesthood restriction that had long been an impediment to missionary work in West Africa.

### **Patience rewarded**

When Anthony Obinna arrived to greet the missionaries on that November day in 1978, his demeanor was serious, even thoughtful. Elder Mabey was struck by how "solemn, gentle, and dignified" Obinna was as he entered the small church, "as though an overt display of enthusiasm at such a moment might be almost sacrilegious. Our eyes, however, were moist. We all felt movingly the richness of God's Spirit."

Said Obinna, "It has been a long, difficult wait, but that doesn't matter now. You have come at last."

Yet even Obinna's patience had its limits; when Elder Mabey told him there were other congregations the missionaries needed to visit and estimated that it would be six weeks before they could return to perform baptisms, Obinna's waiting was done.

"No, please," he said quietly, Mabey later wrote. "I know that there are many others, but we have been waiting for 13 years." His eyes were filled with longing. "Please, if it is humanly possible—go ahead with the baptisms now!" Elder Maybe recounts, "For a few seconds we merely sat there looking into each other's eyes. 'Are most of your people ready?' I asked at

last. Anthony nodded emphatically. ‘Yes—absolutely yes! They know, as I do, that the gospel has been restored, but we must have guidance and direction. Let us baptize those strongest in the faith now and teach the others further.’ The Spirit was very strong, the man’s goodness and testimony clearly evident. ‘In that case,’ I said, ‘we will conduct the baptism as soon as possible.’

The men decided on a date just three days away, and on Tuesday, November 21, 1978, 19 Nigerians were baptized in the Ekeonumiri River. Anthony Obinna was the first.

A branch was soon organized for the new converts, with Anthony Obinna as its president, his brothers Francis and Raymond as his counselors, and his wife, Fidelia, as Relief Society president.

After many years of waiting and hoping, Obinna penned a different sort of letter to Salt Lake soon after his baptism.

*“The entire members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in this part of Nigeria have the pleasure to thank you and the Latter Day Saints throughout the world for opening the door for the Gospel to come to our people in its fullness,” he wrote. “We are happy for the many hours in*

*the Upper Room of the temple you spent supplicating the Lord to bring us into the fold. We thank our Heavenly Father for hearing your prayers and ours and by revelation has confirmed the long promised day, and has granted the holy priesthood to us, with the power to exercise its diving authority and enjoy every blessings of the temple... There is no doubt that the Church here will grow and become a mighty centre for the Saints and bring progress enough to the people of Nigeria as it is doing all over the world.”*

### Several years later

Obinna served faithfully in the Church for many years, and in 1989 was sealed to Fidelia in the temple during a visit to Logan, Utah, where their son was living. Brother Obinna died in 1995, leaving a legacy that was not limited to the dozens of family members to whom he had brought the gospel.

“The seed of the gospel which you sowed will grow into a giant tree,” he wrote to Rendell Mabey when his time in Nigeria was nearing its end. “The Church in Nigeria will surprise the world in its growth. The number of baptisms, confirmations, and ordinations you performed in this country show only a beginning.” ■

## Have Miracles Ceased?

By C. Terry and Susan L. Warner

**A**n elderly gentleman, more than 80 years old, came to the Accra Ghana Temple with a group of Saints from Nkawkaw where he lives alone. The group spent the night in the temple ancillary building, in the rooms available to temple patrons so that they could spend two day serving in the temple.

On the morning of April 27, 2012, the elderly man was sitting on a bench inside the men’s dressing room in the temple, waiting to do initiatory ordinances.

In a few minutes another man, 54 years old, came and sat down by him. The younger man had planned to attend the endowment session that morning with his wife and the other members of his ward but had arrived at the temple too late. He decided to do initiatory ordinances instead.

The older man asked the younger one where he was from.

“Sekondi,” came the answer.

“Where in Sekondi?” The elderly one asked.

“In Ketan.”

“What part of Ketan?”

”Where the public schools are.”

“I have children living there,” the older man said.

With a growing sense of recognition, the younger one looked at him intently and said, “You are my father.”

Just then an ordinance worker approached to invite the elderly man into the initiatory booth. About 15 minutes later, when he had completed the ordinance work, the older one returned and immediately asked, “What is your name?”

“John Ekow-Mensah,” the younger man said.

“That is my name, too. You are my son.”

The younger John Ekow-Mensah had been named after both his father and his grandfather;



**John Ekow-  
Mensah Jr.  
& Sr.**

fathers and sons for three generations in a row had borne the same name. When the boy was very young, his parents' marriage dissolved and his father left. The boy was four or five years old at that time. He and his three younger sisters were raised by his mother and her family. John never saw his father again until that day in the temple. But sometimes his mother, when he was misbehaving, told him that he was "a carbon copy" of his father.

The younger John grew up and married. He and his wife, Deborah, decided to find a church that they could join together. John was away at school at the University of Ghana in Accra when he saw a *Liahona* magazine on a shelf. He found himself interested in what it had to say and noticed the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the publisher.

When John came back from school to his home in Sekondi, his wife was anxious to tell him of a church she had learned about from one of her friends. She said it was called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. John told her that this was the church he had read about in a magazine at the university.

John and Deborah were taught the gospel and baptized in 1999. In 2009 they were sealed together with the three youngest of their five children in the Accra Ghana Temple. John works

with the national Council for Civic Education, and Deborah runs a shop.

Unbeknownst to the younger John, his father had made his living mostly as a painter. He had lived in Mankesim from about 1983 to 1989 and operated a little shop. From there he had moved to Ada, near Tema, close to the salt mines. While in Ada, he met a woman who was living in a building he was painting. She was a member of the Church and she introduced him to the gospel. He was baptized a Latter-day Saint in Asunafu, Ghana, in 1991.

Though their paths in life had separated, the father and his son had both found the gospel. Twenty-one years after the father's baptism and 13 years after the son's, they were reunited in a miraculous meeting in the temple. After that encounter, they attended a temple session together and then sat in the celestial room together, reconnected their lives, and rekindled their love.

What took the older man away from his family, and why hadn't he tried to get back with or at least contact them? The day after the father and son were reunited, we interviewed the two men again and, while we listened, the son learned for the first time why his father had left. In fact, though the son's elation upon finding his father had been obvious—according to Sister Gaye Briellatt, the temple matron, tears were shed—his joy did not seem quite complete. Though everything he said and did

was respectful and proper, he seemed to us not quite ready to embrace his father wholeheartedly. We wondered if he might still be harboring some resentment over his father's unexplained disappearance from his life.

But then, as we talked to them both on Saturday, the father explained to his son what had happened. Among their tribe, the oldest matriarch held a sovereign power. Whatever she required, everyone in the larger family was compelled to do. In this case, that matriarch was the grandmother of the elder John Ekow-Mensah's wife, and she was violently opposed to his marriage to her granddaughter. It was her insistence that forced separation upon this couple and made it hopeless for John to attempt continued contact with his family. Besides, he had to go wherever he could get work, sometimes far away. Telephones were not available in their time and place, nor was mail service. In that culture, expulsion from the family severed all ties. The younger John had known his great-grandmother as a strong, hardworking woman, but not as the power that had deprived him of all association with his natural father for nearly 50 years.

We watched and listened as the revelation of the true story brought the father's and the son's rediscovery of each other to a fullness. The happiness in their eyes seemed brighter than the West African sunlight that bathed the green foliage surrounding us that morning as we stood together outside of the temple.

Though some would call the Ekow-Mensahs' meeting a coincidence, we wondered. What if the older John had not moved to a town and painted a house where one of the few Church members in Ghana lived? What if someone in a Ghanaian university had not left a copy of the *Liahona* in a study room? What if one ward and one branch in Ghana, six or seven hours drive from one another, had not planned their temple trip on the same

day? What if the younger John had not missed his endowment session? What if he had not decided to do initiatory work?

Observing the radiant faces of the father and son on that Saturday morning, we remembered these words of Moroni, which on this occasion seemed almost audible: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven . . . ? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men" (Moroni 7:27, 29). ■

#### YOUTH & YOUNG SINGLE ADULTS

## What the Atonement means to me



**Mary Nwanganga U.,  
age 15, Ikenebu Ward,  
Owerri Nigeria Stake**

Thanks to my young women teachers, I have come to know that the Atonement is the supreme sacrifice our Savior made for us to overcome Death, Adversity and Trials.

Knowing how many times I have sinned and being assured I can repent when I make a mistake makes me a lot grateful to my Father in Heaven. Heavenly Father loves us so much that He provided a way for us to come back to Him. For that I am grateful!



**Spencer N. Myers, Ntranoa  
Branch, Cape Coast Ghana  
Stake**

As I consider the comprehensiveness of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and His willingness to suffer for my sins and

the sins of the world, I come to understand how much He truly loves me and because of that love, He freely gave His life for me so that I can live again when I die. Also the gift of immortality and eternal life that the Atonement offers me really makes me understand the purpose and goal of my Father in Heaven, which is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life man.

Also as I reflect on my own life, I can truly testify that I will forever be grateful for the miracle of the Atonement, which brings healing power to my soul.

No matter what I have done wrong, I can be made clean through the power of the Atonement when I truly repent of my sins. With the healing power of the Atonement, there is no sin or transgression, pain or sorrow, which cannot be healed.

With this I have come to cherish that sacred and holy offering of my Savior, Jesus Christ. I least understand how the Lord has been so merciful to me such that my yesterdays no longer hold my tomorrows hostage. All this is possible because of the Atonement. ■

PRIMARY

## My favorite scripture on the Atonement



**Calvin B. A., age 10, Baatsona Ward, Tema Ghana Stake**

My favorite scripture on the Atonement is John 15:13–14: “Greater

love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

The Atonement is the sacrifice that Christ made for us. I love this scripture because it talks about the love that Jesus Christ has for us. It amazes and humbles me to think about this sacrifice He made for us. It also tells me to obey all the commandments so that we can also benefit from His love and be part of His eternal family. Amen.

**Maame Afia F., age 11, Kasoa Ward 1, Kasoa Ghana Stake**

My favorite scripture on the Atonement is Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19:

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.”

I love this scripture because it tells me that the Savior has already borne all my pains and paid the debt for my sins. All I need to do is to repent and endure to the end, and I will not have to go through that pain and anguish that He went through. ■



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**[www.mormonnewsroom.org.ng](http://www.mormonnewsroom.org.ng)** ■

