

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

### Our Christmas Gift

By Elder Stanley G. Ellis

First Counselor, Africa Southeast Area Presidency

Elder Stanley G. Ellis



Giving gifts has been part of Christmas since that very first Christmas when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. These are some of those original gifts:

**1) Mary**—When the angel Gabriel visited her and told her that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, she willingly responded: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). She did not focus on the dangers and the difficulty but freely gave her willingness.



**2) Wise Men**—They knew the prophecies, had watched for the signs and prepared themselves, journeyed to find Him, and were guided by God. When they found the young child, they took from their treasures to give Him their best gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (see Matthew 2:11).



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**3) Heavenly Father**—He had already given us the plan and our agency, and now He gave us “his only begotten Son” to be our Savior and Redeemer (John 3:16; see also verse 17).



**4) Jesus Christ**—He loved us enough to offer Himself to be our Savior and to atone for us—there would be no Christmas if not for Easter (see John 15:13).



So what will be our gift to the Lord this Christmas season?

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) taught us that the submission of our will to God “is the only possession which is truly ours to give!” (“Swallowed up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, pg. 22).

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First

Presidency, and Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded us in last year’s Africa stake conference broadcast that as we become disciples of Jesus Christ, we should be new creatures and leave our old things behind (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

May we give to our Heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ this

Christmas season our gift of repentance and submission:

*I’ll go where you want me to go,  
dear Lord, . . .  
I’ll say what you want me to say, . . .  
I’ll do thy will with a heart sincere:  
I’ll be what you want me to be.*

(“I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go,” *Hymns*, no. 270) ■

THE ANNUNCIATION, BY JOHN SCOTT

THE FIRST VISION, BY DEL PARSON

“THE WISE MEN SEEK JESUS,” IMAGE TAKEN FROM BIBLE VIDEOS ON LDS.ORG

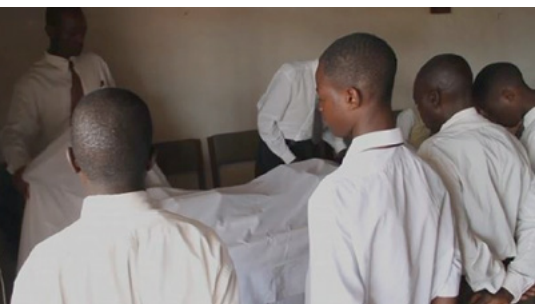
CHRIST IN GETHSEMANE, BY HARRY ANDERSON

# The Significance of Sacrament Meetings

By Elder Walter Chatora



Elder Walter Chatora



Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “the ordinance of the sacrament makes the sacrament meeting the most sacred and important meeting in the Church.”<sup>1</sup> The Savior Himself instituted the sacrament. We learn in the book of Luke that when the hour was come, He sat with the Twelve Apostles, “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19–20). When the resurrected Savior appeared to the Nephites, He again instituted the ordinance of the sacrament, emphasizing that this shall be done in remembrance of His body and His blood. He promised that by remembering Him always, there shall be the great

blessing of having His Spirit with us. (See 3 Nephi 18:7.)

President Joseph Fielding Smith said of sacrament meetings: “This is an occasion when *the gospel should be presented*, when *we should be called upon to exercise faith*, and to *reflect on the mission of our Redeemer*, and to *spend time in the consideration of saving principles of the gospel*, and not for other purposes. Amusement, laughter, light-mindedness, are all out of place in the sacrament meetings of the Latter-day Saints. We should assemble in the spirit of prayer, of meekness, with devotion in our hearts.”<sup>2</sup>

I concur with the teachings of our leaders, and I would like to ask the following question:

What can we do to enjoy the blessings of the sacrament and have greater spiritual experiences in each sacrament meeting?

I suggest the following:

1. **Punctuality**—Being on time for sacrament meetings helps set the tone for a worshipful experience. Allow yourself adequate time for prayerful meditation. Arriving early and listening to subdued prelude music attunes you to the Spirit of the Lord. If you arrive late or at the very start of the

meeting, chances are that the whole essence of the meeting will be lost.

Over the years, I have observed as I visit many wards and branches that many of our Saints do not really understand the significance of sacrament meetings and the difference it makes when they arrive early. Quite often I see people rushing through the door at exactly the starting moment or even later, often failing to partake of the sacrament at all. This is quite sad, as the significance of the meeting is reduced.

2. **Reverence**—President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught that “reverence invites revelation.”<sup>3</sup> Participating in sacrament meeting reverently will help us to receive inspiration. I remember sacrament meetings where tears flowed as hearts were poured out and serious concerns shared and addressed. This confirms to me that those who attend sacrament meetings seeking solace, comfort, and the will of the Lord will definitely receive the spiritual nourishment they desire.

It is important that we avoid all manner of distraction both for ourselves and other worshippers. We should concentrate on worship, remembering

the Savior and refraining from activities that interfere with this sacred moment. Otherwise we just violate the covenant we are participating in. The chapel is a place of worship, and His presence is felt in abundance as we show reverence to Him. This is one day of the week that that we can free ourselves from the noise and pressure of the world. We go to sacrament meetings to lay down our burdens and seek answers. The Lord can only reveal those things that we need to know when we engage ourselves and tune our minds to Him in an atmosphere of quiet reverence.

President Russell M. Nelson,  
President of the Quorum of the

Twelve Apostles, taught: “We commemorate His Atonement in a very personal way. We bring a broken heart and contrite spirit to our sacrament. It is the highlight of our Sabbath-day observance.”<sup>4</sup>

**3. Dress**—Our manner of dress indicates the degree to which we understand and honor the ordinance of the sacrament. We should always dress for sacrament meetings like we are going to the temple. How we dress and groom ourselves for this special day reflects our attitude towards the Savior. Sadly, these days we see so many of our Saints, of all age groups, dressing for sacrament meeting as

it were a fashion parade. Revealing clothes, short skirts, extreme hairstyles, and very tight clothing have no place in a spiritual setting like a sacrament meeting. We should be well-groomed and modestly dressed and ask ourselves if we would be comfortable in the presence of the Savior.

Mothers and fathers play a pivotal role in ensuring that youth and young adults comply with our dress standards. Parents should lead by example. Our children may not fully understand the need for dressing modestly as they are bombarded with magazines, newspapers, billboards, TV ads, and a plethora of media showing celebrities who



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## "I Never Thought Twice"

Submitted by Lovemore Katandika

Sometimes when life becomes especially difficult, we wonder if our Heavenly Father has forgotten us. We begin to doubt whether He really is aware of our needs and will help us overcome our problems. But it is when we move forward in faith that we see His hand in our lives, leading us toward Him as He gives us strength and guidance.

In 2005 Brother Lovemore Katandika and his wife moved from Zimbabwe to Cape Town, South Africa, with their three-year-old son. It was difficult to find work, and at first he had to stand on the streets waiting for manual labor jobs. Because of his faith in the teachings of the gospel, he knew that the Lord watches over us. So he prayed for assistance and was willing to take any work he could get.

A friend of his told him of a security job available at an amusement park, so he went for an interview and was given the job. However, when he went for training, he discovered that he was required to work seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. till 6:00 p.m., which didn't allow him to attend church at all. At the time he was a seminary teacher, so if he took the job, he wouldn't be able to teach his class either.

have little or no regard for the sanctity of their bodies. But at church, our full focus and attention should be on our Redeemer and the covenants we are making. There should be no distraction by how someone is dressed. We go to sacrament meeting to be spiritually fed and to commune with our Heavenly Father; we should leave the things of the world where they belong—in the world!

4. **Sacrament Prayers**—Listening intently to the sacrament prayers as the emblems are blessed helps us to remember the Savior's great Atonement. We should be fully engaged and not just go through the motions. Reflecting on the purpose of the ordinance, renewing and making

covenants, and examining our worthiness to partake of the emblems draw us closer to the Savior. We should ponder the meaning and significance of the emblems as a representation of the Lord's body and blood.

The Lord promises us His Spirit if we live up to our promise to always remember Him. What a blessing! Our lives will be transformed if we properly prepare and make the sacrament the center of our worship. ■

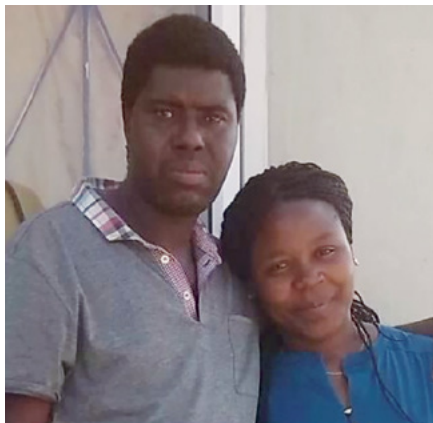
### NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 17.
2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:342.
3. Boyd K. Packer, "Reverence Invites Revelation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 22.
4. Russell M. Nelson, "Worshipping at Sacrament Meeting," *Liahona*, Aug. 2004, 12.

Brother Katandika remembers, “Life was difficult, and I needed the job, but I never thought twice. I knew I could not take the job.” When he told his wife, she was understanding. He said: “I felt blessed that my wife knew the importance of keeping the Lord’s commandments. She had faith in me as a husband and father. She knew that the Lord would provide for us, and I knew that too.”

Not long after turning down the Sunday job, the ward employment specialist phoned him to ask if he would be interested in a job that provided learning opportunities. Naturally the answer was yes. He fasted before going to the interview. He reflected, “Having served a mission gave me a testimony of fasting, and I knew that I would get what I needed through fasting.” A few days later, he was given the job and began working as a cleaner. Within a short time, however, he was given the opportunity to get a driver’s licence so he could become the company messenger. After a few years, everyone at the company was re-trenched except him. Instead, Brother Katandika was assigned to do administrative work. The company even paid for him to attend computer courses so he could work as a receptionist.

He says: “My not working on Sunday has helped my son understand the importance of keeping the Sabbath day holy. He knows it is a special day and that we need to attend church.”



*Lovemore Katandika and his wife*

Brother Katandika believes that the Holy Ghost inspired him and helped him choose the right path. He knows

that the Lord loves him and will, as he says, “always provide a way and help whenever we are faithful to His commandments.” He testifies, “I am eternally grateful to my Heavenly Father for sending loving people who helped me find better employment.”

Even though Heavenly Father allows us to endure trials so we can progress, He helps and blesses us when we are determined to obey His commandments, even at great personal sacrifice. As we make those sacrifices and receive the subsequent blessings, our testimonies are strengthened, and we are able to strengthen those around us. ■

*Excerpted by Collette Burgoyne*

## Where Is the Blue Book?

Submitted by Gregorio Tchicanda

When people have studied the Bible, they often yearn for further truths. Their gospel studies

help them understand the Savior and know how His church should function. When these people are introduced to



*Sister and Brother Tchicanda*



the gospel, they recognize the Church and see that it is indeed the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

Gregorio Tchicanda grew up in an interior province of Angola and was raised in a religious family. However, when he was nearly 40 years old, he was visited by a spirit personage. Gregorio recounts, "The personage asked me to leave the world because He needed me to serve Him."

A few years later, he decided to attend theological seminary and eventually became a pastor. He rose quickly in the church hierarchy and was soon assigned to be the regional supervisor

of four provinces. But in May of 2009, his life changed forever when he had a dream. In this dream, he was called by name and told that he should leave his religion because it was not the true church. He was shown a white man who would give him a blue book that contained the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In August of that same year, he was at his home when a man drove up. After the man got out of his car, Gregorio recognized him as the man he had seen in his dream. So, after the man introduced himself as Celestine Marques, Gregorio asked, "Where is

the blue book?" Since Celestine was a member of the Church, he knew which book Gregorio was talking about. He opened the trunk of his car and took out a blue Book of Mormon that he kept there just so he could give it to people interested in the Church.

Together the two men shared ideas about religion and Gregorio began to discover that the Church of Jesus Christ had indeed been restored to the earth. However, after Brother Marques left, Gregorio began to fear he had been deceived. He was filled with fears and decided to pray about the Church and the Book of Mormon.

As Gregorio remembers, "When I prayed to the Lord, it was revealed to me that the Church was true. At that point, I went to find Mr. Marques, and we began to meet in his house in Lubango. I was baptized on May 30, 2010. Today I am grateful to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to hold the holy Melchizedek Priesthood."

In November 2014, Brother and Sister Tchicanda traveled from Angola to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple. He proudly reports, "On November 18, I made covenants with my Lord and was sealed to my wife with whom I have lived more than 43 years. I am the father of 13 children, 36 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren. I testify that Jesus Christ lives and that the Church is true." ■

*Excerpted by Marnae Wilson*



***From left to right: Brother and Sister Tchiana and Brother and Sister Caximuata from Angola***

# Mission or Education First?

By Elder Khumbulani Mdletshe

I was attending stake conference in October 1984 when the stake president stopped me and asked me if I would visit with him after the meeting. I had recently been ordained an elder and was faithful in my calling as a counselor in the branch presidency. *What could he want with me?* I wondered.

Later that day I headed to the stake president's office, where I was invited in. He politely yet quickly came to the point. "Why aren't you planning on serving a mission?" he asked.

It was a difficult question. My parents were not members and were very poor. But more than that, they had always dreamed of having one of their children receive a university education, and I was the only one of their four boys to graduate from high school. I had worked hard to get good grades, and if I could work a year and save enough money to finance my university expenses, I would be able to make this dream come true.

Hedging, I replied, "My parents won't let me go."

"But if they were to allow you to go, would you be willing to serve?" he asked me.

"No." I had to be honest with him.

"Why not?" he gently probed.

"Because my education is important to me. But I promise that I will serve a mission once I complete my university degree."

"If I understand you correctly, Khumbulani, what you are saying is 'university first and mission later.'"

Quietly I replied, "Yes, President."

There was a minute of silence. Then he reached for his scriptures. "I want you to listen carefully to what the Savior teaches us: 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you'



(Matthew 6:33). What a simple blessing with a promise from the Savior himself." I had read that scripture many times, but that day it penetrated my heart. I felt as if I were hearing it for the first time.

My stake president looked me squarely in the eye. "Khumbulani, I challenge you to put this scripture promise to the test by serving your mission now. I know Heavenly Father will bless you if you seek His kingdom

first. And at this time He wants you to serve a mission."

We stood and shook hands, and I promised him I would think deeply about what he said. As I walked down the hall, his voice followed me. "Khumbulani, Heavenly Father would like to hear from you!"

When I reached home, I went to my bedroom and offered a prayer. I asked for strength and courage to do what I felt was now required of me. Immediately I had a strong feeling I should go and discuss my desire to serve a mission with my parents. So I rose from my knees and went to the living room, where I found my parents.

"Mom, Dad, I have decided not to attend the university but to serve a mission for my church. I would like your permission to do so." My parents were shocked. I went on to explain what a mission was and what it would mean to me to go. After a long discussion, my father surprised me by saying, "My son, I trust your judgment. I will let you go if you promise to return and attend the university afterward." I gave him my promise.

Four months later I received my mission call to the England London South Mission.

It has now been more than 10 years since my stake president



Elder Khumbulani  
Desmond Mdletshe

promised me that if I would seek first the kingdom of God, other things would work out for the best. And indeed they have. After my mission I earned my master's degree in

education. I now know that if we put our trust in the promises given us in the scriptures and seek to do all we can to serve faithfully, resultant blessings will flow into our lives. ■

*Khumbulani Mdelethe now serves as an Area Seventy in the Africa Southeast Area.*

*See [www.lds.org/ensign/1997/04/mormon-journal/blessing-with-a-promise?lang=eng&query=africa](http://www.lds.org/ensign/1997/04/mormon-journal/blessing-with-a-promise?lang=eng&query=africa), or "Blessing with a Promise," Ensign, April 1997.*

## Wearing Two Names

By Jean Lagoua

A year after I joined the Church, I had a desire to serve a full-time mission. During my interview with the bishop to fill out my application, he asked me, "Do you have any problems with anyone that you have not yet resolved?" I answered no because I told myself that I didn't, ignoring the bad feelings between me and my father. I declared myself worthy and ready to serve.

The days that followed were extremely painful. The idea that I would have to reconcile with my father bitterly invaded my soul. My father never worried about his children. We had all reached the point where we no longer spoke to him.

One evening I went to visit him. He lived 224 miles (360 km) away. The first hour of our conversation was filled with words that truly hurt. In spite of our angry words, my intention to reconcile was strong. With the help of the Spirit of God, we managed, after five hours,

to end with positive feelings. After many tears were shed, my father and I were able to embrace, happy to finally understand the core of the problem that had kept us so angry at each other for so long.

Before I left, my father took a container of warm water and, while speaking, slowly poured out its contents, as we do in Africa to represent a reconciliation. He then gave me his blessing after reviewing all that had happened in the past.

I am so grateful to Heavenly Father, who inspired me to seek such a meeting that gave way to mutual repentance. As a missionary in the Ivory Coast Abidjan Mission, I was happy to wear a badge on which was inscribed two names: Lagoua, my father's name, and Jesus Christ, my Savior's name.

We needed to forgive each other so that we could receive forgiveness for our own sins. "For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you;

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (3 Nephi 13:14–15). ■

*See [www.lds.org/new-era/2006/06/wearing-two-names?lang=eng&query=africa](http://www.lds.org/new-era/2006/06/wearing-two-names?lang=eng&query=africa) or "Wearing Two Names," New Era, June 2006.*

