

ASIA AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Bring Back the True Meaning of Christmas

Elder Ming-Shun Kuan

Of the Seventy



Elder Ming-Shun Kuan

Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. By learning of Him and obeying the commandments, all mankind can have eternal life with the grace of God and Jesus's redeeming sacrifice. Both the prophets and the scriptures have testified of this truth. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is the greatest gift of all and the ultimate purpose of our coming to earth and participating in the plan of salvation.

During His earthly life, the Savior taught us to love God, to love others as ourselves, and to serve others. He has taught by words and by actions, and has shown us the right way to return to our Father in Heaven. And because of Him, we are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:19–21).

Nevertheless, even as the Savior of the world, He was rejected and despised by the people. He came

among His own people, but they did not receive Him. They refused to accept the gospel truths of Heavenly Father as Jesus taught. At the end, people chose to release a murderous criminal but crucified the Savior, who was innocent and unblemished. And yet Jesus completed the most important mission in His life and redeemed all mankind, so that whosoever is willing to exercise faith and obey His teachings can return to Heavenly Father through the mighty power of the Savior's Atonement. We are forever grateful to this unparalleled gift. As we celebrate the Savior's birth every year,



we should, at the same time, take the opportunity to examine ourselves, to practice His teachings, and to magnify the discipleship of Jesus Christ.

In today's societies, especially in places where Christianity is not the mainstream, Christmas has become a fancily packaged commercial holiday as a result of people's lack of in-depth understanding of its true meaning. Thus its celebrations tend to be shallow and superficial. Merchants eagerly use Christmas as an opportunity to sell more goods to push sales to a higher level than their competitors. Young people see it as an opportunity to hold wild parties to indulge themselves. All the hustle and bustle has taken the center stage of this holiday, and sadly, the original meaning of Christmas and commemorating the birth of our Savior have been overlooked and lost. As Latter-day Saints and true disciples of Jesus Christ, we have the unshirkable responsibility to manifest the true doctrine of Jesus Christ's teaching by our actions and examples, especially on this significant day. Through the efforts of each Latter-day Saint, we can bring back the true spirit of Christmas.

Jesus Christ taught us to love God and to love our neighbors. When we

Christmas Traditions and Memories

By the Isaac family

Christmas is the season of humility, sharing of love, joyful families, reunions, and remembering our Savior's birth. As we celebrate Christmas, we have great memories, traditions, and love to share. We love the Lord and we are certain that God and His Son, Jesus Christ, love us very much.

Each family has a tradition on how they spend Christmas. The Isaac family of Chennai is no different. Their love for the Savior gives them another occasion to remember His birth, which in turn gives them great peace and happiness.

The Meaning of Christmas to Us

Christmas means many things to people around the world. To the Isaac family, Christmas means family gathering and sharing that special love with family members and the less fortunate. Christmas also means that Christ was born to save us from our sins; it means we show our love to one another; it means a time of great joy for our family.

Remembering Christ during Christmas

Christ is remembered during Christmas in many ways. Christmas

serve others, as selflessly and humbly as we would serve God, we are glorifying His name. The Savior expounded on this principle. "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

"When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

"Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?"

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

In the past, such charitable acts of service could be seen everywhere in Taiwan. On any given day, you could find pots of drinking water or tea politely labeled "奉茶" (Tea Serving) set up on street corners. They were voluntarily offered by kind and thoughtful people for any thirsty passersby to drink. It was just like what the scripture says, "thirsty, and gave thee drink." Old-fashioned kind deeds such as this may not be suitable anymore and are rare to be found in the modern societies. However, that spirit of charity is something we can all emulate. If we put our hearts to it, we can always sense or see the needs of those around us. When prompted by the Spirit, we can offer help at the time of need. Such service may include giving our time and talents,

providing substantial help instead of giving lip service, and solving others' problems. It could be offered by an understanding heart to listen, to praise, or to comfort.

To put Savior's teaching into practice and to render Christlike service, we should first prepare ourselves, not just around the Christmas season, but every day in our lives. Our morning and evening prayers can help us commit to following Christ's example and seeking His help. Studying the gospel and the scriptures can help us understand God's will and gain spiritual nourishment through the words of God. Weekly Sabbath-day worship gives us opportunities to partake of the sacrament, to remember Jesus Christ, and to renew the sacred covenants we have made with Him, and in the meantime, to receive strength and grace to advance on the Lord's path. We should practice these things daily, so "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:17).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We have been given one of the most precious gifts by our Heavenly Father, which is the Savior Jesus Christ! As we gratefully celebrate His birth, let us signify and glorify the divine meaning of this special day with actions that fit our identity as Christians. ■

week is spent reading scriptures about the Savior's birth and singing hymns and carols. We also watch Christmas devotionals from the First Presidency.

Christmas Traditions

We have a family Christmas tradition that we follow. We include our little children in all things. We set the Christmas tree together. We then have our children enact the nativity scene. They all dress up as different characters from the Bible. We watch movies together.

Amidst all this festivity we do not forget Jesus and His teachings. We try to emulate our Lord's saying, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). In accordance with this scripture and the Lord's desire, we have developed the practice of visiting an orphanage during the Christmas week to reach out to those who are less fortunate.

All the siblings, including the married ones, who live away from our home, gather together for this special occasion. We prepare food and have Christmas dinner or lunch together. We remember the sweet memory of our mother making special food and cookies for the children by cooking biriyani, brownies, murukku, rose



The Isaac family

cookies, and walnut cake. This is not just limited to us only, but we joyfully share with our friends and neighbors. The special invitees during this feast are the full-time missionaries. We share the Christmas food with them generously. We have done this as our family tradition for every Christmas so far. We would like to continue this tradition as long as missionaries are serving in our area. We also follow the tradition of buying new clothes for everyone in the family.

The Christmas season brings in new levels of joy and happiness in our family every year. It is our fervent prayer that this special season of Jesus's love for mankind would last forever.

Remembering Others at Christmas

During Christmas, we visit an orphanage and spend quality time with

them by singing, playing games, and serving food.

We also remember the single members and widows in our branch to share small gifts with them.

We seek all the opportunities to help those who are in need in this special season. We have developed an attribute of charity as we remember the Savior's birth as a family. We have firm faith that our children will also learn to be charitable from these activities

during Christmas as they grow up in the gospel.

Our Earliest Memories of Christmas

Our family's Christmas memories are deep. It is steeped with love of our Father in Heaven, Jesus Christ, and our earthly father. Our best memory of Christmas was to be with our father. He was a loving and faithful father who taught us, his children, by his example to be cheerful of our Savior's birth. Our father and mother would always make sure that all the five children would receive new clothing to wear on Christmas day. We remember when our family was in a difficult financial situation, but still Dad and Mom would pledge their jewels to get us new clothes. Although the clothes were very inexpensive for the family

of five children, they were the best clothes ever and everyone would compliment us about those clothes. In fact, we even had new clothes for the Christmas right after our father passed away, because our father had told Mom to make sure that the children have new clothes for every Christmas, even if he had left his mortal life. This is a good lesson for all of his children from a faithful father to be cheerful in the birth of the Savior. We have learned that we all can be cheerful even in times of difficulty because the Savior has given all of us eternal life.

Our Testimony of Jesus Christ

We became members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1992. From the day of our baptism until today we have come to church. As a family, we feel the love of Christ when we come to church. This is the only place where we feel the absolute love of our beloved God.

We know with all our heart that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Comforter, and we know that He died for our sins. He always guides us, protects us, and will never forsake us. We love Him so dearly with all our hearts. We believe every Sabbath day is like a Christmas for our family because not only on Christmas but on every day we remember Him, especially when we go to church. This is our testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

The Isaac's live in Chennai, India

Christmas—What does Christmas mean to me?

By Brother Navin Massey

Christmas is a time to reflect on the Savior's message to human family. I often think that even though it is the Savior's birth, He offered himself a gift to humanity. I evaluate myself during Christmas, asking myself questions like "What have I done to contribute in his world the past year?" Christmas is a time to excel service to human beings. Christmas to me is giving selfless service to others without judging them.

My earliest memories of Christmas contain a bouquet of memories. I remember Christmas of my childhood. It was the only time of the year when I get to wear new clothes (as we were a large family and my parents had limited income), so I was excited about wearing new clothes and of course having good food to eat with all my extended family members. What I liked the best during my childhood years was the togetherness that we shared with other family members which has diminished over the years. As a matter of fact, Christmas day was the only time of the year that my family attended church, and then we visited our relatives in their homes with homemade delicacies. We also exchanged gifts with other families.

During Christmas, I have made a few traditions now in my own nuclear family. We bake Christmas cakes, nicely wrap them up with some other delicacies, and then distribute them to our family members. We put up the Christmas tree at least 15 days prior to Christmas as a family activity. As the father in home, I place the star on top of the tree and then I share some chocolates. The children prepare wish lists for Santa and in the night when they fall asleep, we place their gifts under the Christmas tree from us as well as from Santa. On Christmas Eve, my wife and I prepare the meal. After the meal is prepared, we gather the children and narrate the story of Jesus's birth and help them understand how they can follow His teachings and offer their obedience to the commandments as gift to the Savior. We always make it a point that on Christmas day we visit an orphanage and spend time with underprivileged children. This experience humbles us always, fills our hearts with gratitude, and makes a big impact of our Savior's love for us.

With holidays, food, clothes, and family gatherings, remembering Jesus always is a challenge. To overcome

this, I remember Christ through my personal communication with Him in prayer. I also remember Him by helping those who are in need, by bringing smile to someone's face through small efforts, and by making my best efforts to reach to our home teaching and visiting teaching families. We often think about individuals and families who are less fortunate during Christmas season and reach out to them.

I have a firm belief that whatever I have belongs to the Lord, even my very life. The world is full of people who need our care and attention, and if we keep our heart, eyes, and ears open for them, we will have hundreds of opportunities. That is what I personally do to keep my heart, mind, and eyes open for such experiences. And there is no better time to do that than during Christmas, as it is a special time and season.

I did not know the true meaning of Christmas until I became a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My visit to the temple has strengthened my testimony of the Savior. Christ chose to be the Savior of the world even though He knew what treatment He would have to undergo in order to take our sins upon Himself. His humble birth is always a reminder to me personally that no wealth can be traded for eternal life. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

Brother Navin Massey lives in New Delhi, India

Christmas is Sharing

By **Samson Putturaj**

Content Editor, India pages

The following five articles were chosen from the lives of prophets and General Authorities and their Christmas experiences. It is my sincere hope that you may learn much from their experiences.

In the first article I learned that Christmas spirit needs to be in our hearts.

In the second and third articles, I learned how President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) and President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945) valued family during their difficulties. I learned how family is more important than money from Joseph F. Smith's experience. I remember myself in those Christmas situations.

In the fourth, I learned how you can share what you have. It is a beautiful story of sacrifice without getting into debt.

In the fifth, I learned how families are important. As a youth Elder Pinnock could have gone to spend time with his friends, but he chose to spend time with his family. I hope all youth and single adults will choose to spend time with their families over others.



Samson Putturaj



I also hope this collection of articles will soothe your spirit, give hope to the poor, recognize sacrifices, encourage spending time with family, and help you think of someone to share your Christmas with.

It is Christ's birth! Enjoy the season. Merry Christmas to you. ■

What Is Christmas?

By President Thomas S. Monson

This is a glorious time of the year, simple in origin, deep in meaning, beautiful in tradition and custom, rich in memories, and charitable in spirit. It has an attraction to which our hearts are readily drawn. This joyful season brings to each of us a measure of happiness that corresponds to the degree in which we have turned our mind, feelings, and actions to the spirit of Christmas.



*There's Christmas in the home
and church,
There's Christmas in the mart;
But you'll not know what Christmas is
Unless it's in your heart.*

*The bells may call across the snow,
And carols search the air;
But, oh, the heart will miss the thrill
Unless it's Christmas there.*

As a young elder, I had been called to the old Primary Children's Hospital that once stood on North Temple Street in Salt Lake City. There were children to be blessed. It was the Christmas season. I had never been in a children's hospital before.

As our group entered the foyer, we noticed an attractively decorated

Christmas tree, with beautifully wrapped gifts beneath its boughs.

A feeling of sympathy welled up within me as I noticed these tiny children, many with legs or arms in large plaster casts. Some were ever so weak and pale.

A young lad called out to us, "Will you give me a blessing?" Of course the blessing was given. I shall ever remember placing my hands on the tousled head of that faithful boy who was desperately ill. As we left his side, he looked up into my eyes and said, "Thank you, Brother Monson."

We walked away, only to hear him call out, "Oh, Brother Monson, merry

Christmas to you." I could scarcely see him for the tears in my eyes. He had that glow about him that comes only at Christmastime. That boy trusted in his Heavenly Father. He acknowledged the priesthood of God. His faith was unwavering. I felt I was on holy ground.

What made the glow emanate from the presence of this faithful boy? It was the Christmas spirit. Why does peace come closer to reality at this season than at any other? Why is it that more friends are remembered and more enemies forgiven at the Christmas season than at any other time? It is the Christmas spirit. ■

—From the article "What Is Christmas?"
Ensign, Dec. 1998, 2.

From the life of Joseph F. Smith

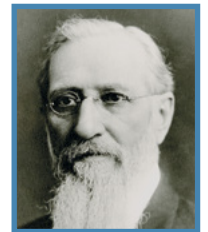
In 1918 Joseph F. Smith wrote a letter to his son in which he recalled Christmas experiences from his own youth when he was "always penniless." He said about his early married life: "I owed no man through all those days, and I *had* to work—I could not be idle." He said that he and his family labored "tugging away with all our mights to keep soul and body together." It was under these conditions that he went out just before Christmas with the intent of doing something special for his children. He said, "I wanted something to please them, and to mark the Christmas day from all other days—but not a cent to do it with! I walked up

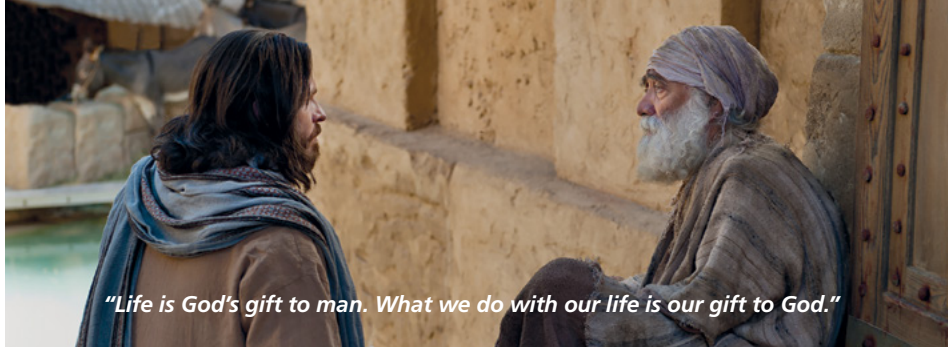
and down Main Street, looking into the shop windows . . . and then slunk

out of sight of humanity and sat down and wept like a child, until my poured-out grief relieved my aching heart; and after awhile returned home, as empty as when I left, and played with my children, grateful and happy only for them. . . .

"After these trials, my pathway became more smooth. I began to pick up; by hard work, rigid economy, self-denial, and the love of God, I prospered." ■

—Teachings of Presidents of the Church:
Joseph F. Smith (2011), 163–72.

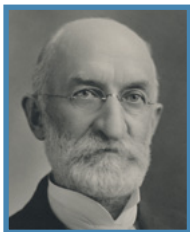




"Life is God's gift to man. What we do with our life is our gift to God."

From the life of Heber J. Grant

Heber learned from his mother that the Lord would bless them if they had faith, worked hard, and kept the commandments. As a boy he knew times of scarcity. "There were blustery nights with no fire and a meager diet that allowed only several pounds of butter and sugar for an entire year. One Christmas [Rachel Grant] wept because she lacked a dime to buy a stick of candy for [Heber's] holiday". ■



—Ronald W. Walker, "Heber J. Grant," in *The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington (1986), 218.

From Thomas S. Monson

Then there is the remembered Christmas tale of O. Henry about a young husband and wife who lived in abject poverty yet who wanted to give one another a special gift. But they had nothing to give. Then the husband had a ray of inspiration: "I shall provide my dear wife a beautiful ornamental comb to adorn her magnificent long black hair." The wife also received an idea: "I shall obtain a lovely chain for my husband's prized watch which he values so highly."

Christmas day came; the treasured gifts were exchanged. Then the surprise ending, so typical of O. Henry's

short stories: The wife had shorn her long hair and sold it to obtain funds to purchase the watch chain, only to discover that her husband had sold his watch that he might purchase the comb to adorn her beautiful long hair, which now she did not have. . . .

I close with the words of a revered prophet, even President Harold B. Lee: "Life is God's gift to man. What we do with our life is our gift to God."

May we give generously to Him, as He has so abundantly given to us, by living and loving as He and His Son have so patiently taught, is my earnest prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

—Thomas S. Monson, "Gifts," *Ensign*, May 1993, 59.

Who Needs Christmas?

By Elder Hugh W. Pinnock

In a crowded department store one December afternoon, I watched a salesclerk become frustrated as customers besieged her with requests. Finally she turned with a gasp of irritation and said, "Christmas! Who needs it?"



The question and the surroundings took me back to my senior year in high school. I was also a

salesclerk, selling men's clothing part-time.

It was Christmas Eve day. Snow was falling gently, and there seemed to be more shoppers than usual. They were weaving in and out of the displays, picking up last-minute gifts.

A few days earlier, several friends had called me asking, "Could you come to a party on Christmas Eve? We're planning to meet up the canyon. It will be beautiful. Get a date and be with us."

I was delighted with the prospect of being with a group of friends and enthusiastically looked forward to

that social event. I had asked a lovely young woman to go with me, and she seemed to be as excited as I was.

As the time approached for the store to close and for me to leave for the party, a subtle uneasiness disturbed my positive feelings.

"What's wrong?" I asked myself. Then reality struck. I did not want to be with my friends on this special night. I wanted to be with my family as I had been for the previous 16 or 17 Christmas Eves. Even though there were still customers shuffling about, I hurried to the telephone and called my friend.

“Don, I, er . . . well, I don’t know how to say this, but don’t count on me this evening. I’m going to spend Christmas Eve with my family.” I think he understood.

I quickly called my date. We agreed to spend time together during the holidays but not on that particular evening.

Suddenly a burden had been lifted. I had made the right decision.

Christmas is for families. It is their love that makes the season so bright. They fill us with gratitude for the Redeemer, who made it possible for us to live with them forever.

And yet, while we enjoy Christmas in the warmth of our families, we should remember that many are not so fortunate. Homeless men and women walk the streets of our cities, far from

family ties. Someone we know has lost a loved one to death this year. Another cannot afford the travel expense to join his family. Some are too ill to take part in the festivities. For these people, Christmas is not always a “season to be jolly.” It can be a time of depression and loneliness.

Surely these people have a right to ask, along with that frustrated salesclerk, “Who needs Christmas?” . . .

I firmly believe that the *only* way to make Christmas real is to imitate the Master. We need to form living links with people everywhere whose loneliness needs brothering or sistering, whose hurts, physical and emotional, need healing, whose poverty cries out for bread and understanding. Jesus spent his life rescuing us all from

ourselves. Shouldn’t we rescue others from loneliness and discouragement? Several teenage friends of our family have lost a parent this past year. A death of someone close always makes Christmas more difficult. They are on our list of holiday party guests. For a few hours we hope to lift some anxiety or pain from these good people. On the other hand, if we wish to make Christmas no more than a winter holiday or a week-long celebration, we can sit on our hands and do nothing.

And let’s be sure that our reaching out is not marked with any feelings of superiority. I will always remember the first time I went subbing for Santa. We had collected a number of toys, small Christmas trees, and baskets of fruit. Being high school seniors, we felt we finally understood the importance of giving at Christmas. . . .

Is there any better way of inviting Christ into our lives than by helping our fellowmen?

You and I can make our Christmas joy filled and meaningful by reaching into the life of another whose heart may be aching, whose body may be tired or filled with disease, or someone who is confused and misdirected. Shouldn’t we, who have been blessed with the fullness of the gospel, share our joy? Shouldn’t we stop asking, “Who needs Christmas?” and start asking “Who needs my help?” ■

—From Hugh W. Pinnock, “Who Needs Christmas?” *New Era*, Dec. 1987, 4–7.

