

# AFRICA SOUTHEAST LOCAL PAGES

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

### The Miraculous Birth and Priceless Gift of His Son

By Elder S. Mark Palmer

Second Counselor, Africa Southeast Area Presidency

Many years ago my wife, Jacqui, and I eagerly awaited the birth of our first child. The delivery became complicated and so an unexpected emergency C-section was required. I was concerned and anxious. Clothed in a green hospital gown, I nervously sat at my wife's side while the operation was performed. Soon we heard the cry of a newborn, and a bluish-gray baby boy was quickly whisked away by the nurse. After a short time the baby was brought in for Jacqui to hold. As we gazed at this beautiful baby boy, we were filled with wonder

and tender love at such a priceless gift from our Heavenly Father. He seemed so perfect in every way. We felt this overwhelming feeling of love that parents instinctively feel for an innocent and helpless newborn. We knew not only that he was a gift from our Eternal Father, but also that he had just come from being with our Heavenly Father. We offered a prayer of thanks and wondered what he would tell us if he could talk of the heavenly home he had just left.

The poet William Wordsworth penned these beautiful lines:

*Our birth is but a sleep and  
a forgetting;  
The Soul that rises with us, our  
life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:*

*Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do  
we come*

*From God, who is our home.*

(“Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” in *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250–1900*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch [1939], 628.)

Two thousand years ago, another firstborn son came into the world. He too was a priceless gift from the Eternal Father for us all. “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). Not only did He seem perfect, He was perfect and remained perfect as He grew and matured. His was a life without sin. He was born in the humblest circumstances and, as far as we know, never traveled more than 150 miles (241 km) from home and then only by foot. Yet no event in the history of the world has had a



Elder S. Mark Palmer



***“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)***

greater impact than the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Throughout our modern world, time itself is measured from this miraculous event.

With all of Christianity at this special time of year, we celebrate the joy that has come to the world through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We proclaim without reservation that He is literally the Son of God. While in the premortal existence, He volunteered to atone for our sins and be resurrected so that “for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Thus He became the Savior and Redeemer of all men and women. However, His selfless and supreme act of atonement for our sins will have power in our lives only if we have faith in Him, repent, are baptized and confirmed, and endure to the end. What a marvelous and awe-inspiring gift He has offered each of us. In modern scripture we read: “And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

Today, so much we hear of Christmas has to do with gifts. What kind of gifts will you give this year? The scriptural record makes no mention of Christ giving worldly gifts, but is full of examples of Christ giving the gift of self, service, love, healing, and testimony. His life was a life of lifting up the downtrodden, ministering to

the sick and afflicted, and teaching truth. In our families and communities, let us make this Christmas a time of Christlike giving. Resolve to give your families the gift of time, love, testimony, gospel truth, and, if needed, forgiveness. Teach your children the true significance of Christmas by sharing your love for the Savior and His teachings.

On a recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Elder David A.

Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that as we seek to follow the example of our Savior, we will turn outwards rather than inwards. Jesus Christ’s example was one of complete unselfishness and concern for others, even in the midst of His suffering. May we seek to follow His example as we celebrate His miraculous birth and give thanks to a loving Father in Heaven for the priceless gift of His Son. ■

#### LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADERS

## Seeking the Kingdom of God First

By Elder Walter Chatora

I have had the privilege for many years to serve in callings that have brought me closer to the Saints and more importantly to the Lord. Part of the knowledge I have gained is that no one is spared the trials and difficulties of mortality. I have prayed and fasted with young men struggling with the Word of Wisdom, with single adults striving to find an eternal companion, parents struggling with wayward children, couples facing divorce or shattered dreams, those dealing with the deaths of dear family members,



*Elder Walter Chatora*

and others suffering from a range of tribulations that are a part of this mortal probation.

Through all these experiences I have come to realize and understand that those who remain steadfast and embrace the gospel fully will be conquerors. If they set their priorities correctly and put the Lord first, they will overcome their problems. The scriptures are a source of truth and light for all. In them, the Lord tells us, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all

***“In all [his afflictions] Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly”  
(Job 1:22)***



these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

In the Old Testament we learn of Job, who was rich but extremely righteous. “There [was] none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8). We know that tragedy struck this perfect man in unprecedented ways and that he was left with nothing. Instead of questioning God, using words such as “Why me?” or “Why has thou forsaken me?” or having feelings of abandonment and being heartbroken, “in all [his afflictions] Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:22). It is imperative to note the attitude that Job had throughout all of this as attested in Job 1:21: “And [he] said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Job kept the faith. The big challenge for us is to be like Job as we face the challenges of mortality. Can we keep the faith and trust in God even if it seems the whole world is crumbling down on us? After Job lost all his riches and was smote “with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown” (Job 2:7), his wife could not take it anymore and said to him, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die” (Job 2:9).

We know that the Lord blessed the latter end of Job’s life even more than

He had in the beginning. Job had thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, asses, and a wonderful posterity. This happened because even though he lost possessions and was scorned by his friends, afflicted by his suffering, and shattered by the loss of his family, he trusted in God.

If we seek the kingdom of God first, wonderful things happen. In December 2015, I was assigned to preside at the Blantyre Malawi District conference. As the time for the conference approached, I received my examination timetable and discovered that the following Monday morning I was due to sit for one of the exams. I thought to myself that this would



***The Lord blessed the latter end of Job’s life even more than He had in the beginning because he remained faithful.***

not be an ideal preparation. I also found out that I could not get a flight back to Johannesburg on Sunday evening. When this became a reality, I counseled with a few people and I received advice ranging from “ask for a postponement” or “ask them to assign someone else.”

In my mind I knew I needed to accept the assignment. There was no doubt that the Lord wanted me to be with the beautiful Saints in Blantyre for that weekend. So I went ahead, working hard throughout the weekend without overly thinking about the pending exam. The conference was successful! Sunday evening I flew to Ethiopia and connected to Johannesburg, where I arrived in the early hours of the morning, rushed home to get ready, then dashed to the exam center having gotten no sleep at all. I was calm and relaxed as I wrote. When the results came I had comfortably passed! My testimony of seeking the kingdom first was strengthened. Again the scripture in Matthew came to mind: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

When I enrolled for my MBA program, I was still serving as a stake president and full-time temple recorder. Some people were skeptical with the decision I had made to advance my education. I heard sentiments such as, “How can you possibly do this with your extremely busy schedule,

your life is so busy and demanding, you cannot crack it.” None of this deterred me. I persevered, seeking God first, fulfilling all my priesthood assignments and then finding time for my studies, and now I am on the verge of graduating.

The Lord has promised that He will not fail us, neither will He forsake us (see Joshua 1:5). This is a wonderful, priceless comfort that He gives us if we put Him first in our lives. I am grateful for the challenges of mortality; I do not despair as long as I

know that my relationship with my Heavenly Father is sound. I continue to learn and grow and become stronger as I face trials, knowing that I can overcome them inasmuch as I trust my Maker and seek His kingdom first. ■

## LOCAL PAGES

# Christmas Traditions in the Africa Southeast Area

President Thomas S. Monson said: “When we keep the spirit of Christmas, we keep the spirit of Christ, for the Christmas spirit is the Christ Spirit” (2011 First Presidency Christmas Devotional). Here in the Africa Southeast Area, each country has different ways of celebrating the birth of our Savior. Read below to see some of the customs we practice.



### Democratic Republic of the Congo

When I was growing up and even now, I love Christmastime because it represents a time of joy. In our Congolese culture the Christmas celebration is a time of family and kindness, without forgetting gifts. There are various way to celebrate Christmas. Some take their children to parks for fun. Others cook special meals using cassava leaves and

roots transformed in a compacted and soft paste with rice, chicken, or fish to share with family. Others sit around a fire at night sharing stories of wisdom and expressing gratitude for the divine gift of the Son of God.

In all these celebrations, most people go to church, listen to preaching, and consider the opportunity to make a new commitment in life to be better and do better.

—Noel Gandou (see “Christmas in the Republic of the Congo,” [africase.lds.org/christmas-in-the-republic-of-the-congo](http://africase.lds.org/christmas-in-the-republic-of-the-congo).)



### Burundi

I was born in Bujumbura, the capital city of Burundi, where 90 percent of the population is Christian. I was lucky that I grew up in Nyakabiga, a suburb surrounded by hills and forests where Christmas trees were within a 30 minutes' walking distance. A week



before Christmas, most teenagers of this neighborhood would go to fetch Christmas trees, and I remember it would often rain because Christmas in Burundi happens during the rainy season. Christmas is our most important holiday.

On Christmas Eve my mother would cook a special meal, then the whole family would be woken up an hour before midnight. We would sing Christmas hymns until midnight, when food would be served. She would give thanks to Heavenly Father for sending us His Only Begotten Son to redeem us. On Christmas day everyone would go to church, where choirs would sing. Christmas day is spent with family and friends enjoying good things to eat and drink.

“He was born so I will be free.”

—*Freddy Niranyibagira* (see “Christmas in Burundi,” [africase.lds.org/christmas-in-burundi](http://africase.lds.org/christmas-in-burundi).)



### Mauritius

Mauritius has a diversified population, with only 30 percent being Christian. However, Christmas is celebrated by almost everyone, with Christian and non-Christian alike getting together as families and exchanging gifts. Many non-Christian homes will even boast a Christmas tree.

One of the natural symbols of Christmas in Mauritius is the Flamboyant tree, which flowers every year at Christmastime. In Mauritius we associate the flowering of the Flamboyant with Christmas, just like people in the northern hemisphere associate snow with Christmas.

It is traditionally a time when all Mauritians spring clean their homes, and some will even put up new curtains



and paint their houses. Often a new outfit is made or bought, thus ensuring that everything and everyone is ready to celebrate the birth of our Savior.

It is a special season for families to spend time together, share meals of chicken curry and rice, seafood and turkey, or even gather on a beach for a barbecue. Many attend Christmas church services and read the Christmas story from the scriptures together on Christmas morning.

—*Gayle Caine* (see “Christmas in Mauritius,” [africase.lds.org/christmas-in-mauritius](http://africase.lds.org/christmas-in-mauritius).)



### Uganda

Christmas in central Uganda is called *Sekukkulu*, meaning the birth of Jesus Christ. It begins on December 24th with a “watch night” service. Christmas carols and church bells can be heard all across the country. Churches are well lit with Christmas lights and all kinds of decorations. The rural areas where there is no electricity do their best to make the event colorful in their own special way.

The real Christmas cooking starts on the night of December 24th after the church service. I remember that my mother would do most of the cooking on Christmas Eve and then wake up at 4:00 a.m. on Christmas morning to finish. When we woke at 7:00 a.m., she

would mash the *matooke*—a special kind of banana and a staple in central Uganda—and then move on to grilling the chicken or meat for the special feast.

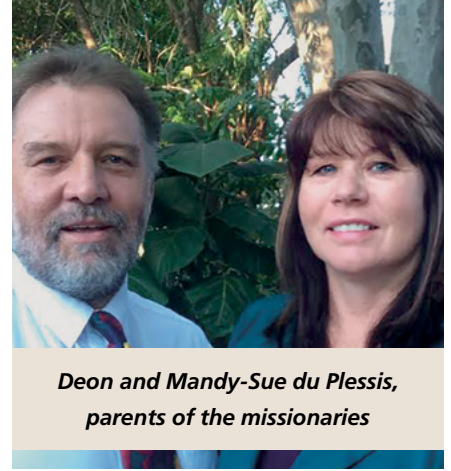
On the morning of *Sekukkulu*, the church is filled to capacity; even people who never go to church attend on this day. Most women wear their traditional dresses in rich colors with matching turbans. An incredible feast follows the church service. Most Ugandans can’t often afford a feast like this, so it is like no other.

As a Latter-day Saint, I have the opportunity to partake of the sacrament every week in remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. I don’t remember Him only at Christmastime.

“He was born so I can have an Advocate, a Redeemer, and a Savior to redeem me from my sinful state. ‘I know that my Redeemer lives. . . . He lives to plead for me above’ (“I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” *Hymns*, no. 136).”

—*Larry Kasaija* (see “Christmas in Uganda,” [africase.lds.org/christmas-in-uganda](http://africase.lds.org/christmas-in-uganda).)

“I loved and still love Christmas,” said Noel Gandou from DRC. “It is a period of hope and all good efforts to try to be like Him who is our perfect example. This is so in all cultures, countries, and places where Christmas is celebrated.” ■



# The Sons (and Daughter) of Mosiah: Four Siblings on Missions

By Mandy-Sue du Plessis, Polokwane, Limpopo, South Africa

“Sacrifice is giving up something good for something better.” Just as we read about the four sons of Mosiah who left their homes to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Alma 17–27), so it is with my husband and myself, because we have our *four* children serving missions in various parts of the world.

Sister Monique-Sue du Plessis (22) is serving in London South England; Elder Charl du Plessis (21) is serving in Cape Town, South Africa; Elder Warwick du Plessis (19) is serving in Birmingham, England; and Elder Dante du Plessis (18) is currently in the Provo, Utah, missionary training center learning Korean to serve in Seoul, South Korea.

What a blessing it has been to have all of our children serve missions willingly. Their testimonies strengthen us

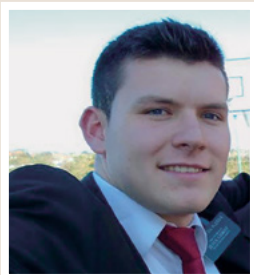
and their spiritual growth is evident in every email we receive. We are grateful for the gospel in our lives, which has enabled us to raise our children in a Christ-centered home. Members who have said good-bye to their missionaries know how hard it is, yet the good-byes have increased our faith as we know that we have placed our children in Heavenly Father’s hands and that He will keep them safe as they serve Him.

All of our children have expressed gratitude for their home to the many members and families they meet who have less than we have regarding family love and closeness. Our children have set such a good example to the young men and young women in Polokwane Branch which we attend, and we are grateful to the members for their love and support. In 1 Timothy 4:12 we read, “Let no man despise thy youth;

but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

We have seen the Light of Christ in each one of our missionaries’ eyes and we are constantly uplifted by their testimonies, which continue to grow stronger. They have met wonderful missionary companions and have made lifelong friends. As parents, we are very grateful for all the blessings we receive from Heavenly Father. We are also so grateful to family members who have been kind and generous, even to unknown members.

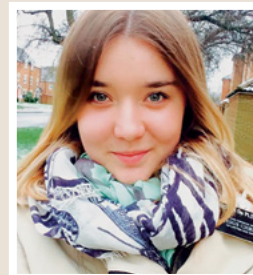
We are grateful for all full-time missionaries who have left their comfort zones and consecrated two years or 18 months of their lives to serve their Father in Heaven. Like the four sons of Mosiah, once we have been healed by the Savior, our desire for others to receive that same joy motivates our actions. ■



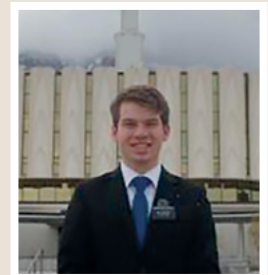
*Elder Charl du Plessis,  
Cape Town, Africa*



*Elder Warwick du Plessis,  
Birmingham, England*



*Sister Monique-Sue du Plessis,  
London South, England*



*Elder Dante du Plessis,  
Seoul, Korea*



*Sifelani Mananga  
with his wife*

## The Blessings of Paying Tithing

By Sifelani Mananga

*“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10).*

I am grateful for this opportunity to share my experiences of the blessing of paying an honest tithe. I am grateful to all those who taught me to understand this commandment. I now realize and reap the fruit of my efforts.

I have seen an abundance of blessings in my life and in the lives of those who are near and dear to me. I can trace the origins of these blessings to only one source—obedience to commandments, especially the commandment to pay an honest tithe.

In my immediate family, my wife and I are gainfully employed. My children attend school and they are doing their best. We have most of what we need—a roof over our heads, food on the table, decent clothing, and more importantly, we are happy and joyful as a family. Paying an honest tithe has been the catalyst for us to be able to live other commandments with ease. Paying tithing is not about money—it is a matter of faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Paying tithing has helped us increase faith in the Lord and our Heavenly Father.

My extended family is also blessed. My sister-in-law and her family recently joined the Church. She too is making remarkable progress in her personal life. I consider that my blessing because the choices my wife and I have made and continue to make influenced her to want to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of course she used her agency, but I have no doubt that the example we set and the blessings of our obedience had an impact. I know that obedience to God’s commandments blesses those close to us.

The windows of heaven continue to open for us. My wife is currently a beneficiary of the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) and is studying to improve her job opportunities, which I know will help us be able to take care of our family’s temporal needs better. I too benefited from the PEF program. One of the requirements to qualify for PEF is to pay an honest tithe. My wife always encourages me to put the Lord first, especially regarding tithing. Now it has become part of me to give unto the Lord what is His. ■

## 75 Kilometers to Listen to an Apostle of the Lord

By Mbidi K. Ilunga

Who can imagine two young people, Pierre (16) and Roger (17), of the new branch of Fungurume in Katanga in DR Congo, traveling 47 miles (75 km) on foot for the first time in their lives, to listen to Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles speak in Likasi.

“I’ve always loved the talks from Elder Bednar. He is one of the Church leaders who inspires me the most,” said Roger. “When I learned that he would be in Likasi to speak to members of the Church, I said to myself

*Pierre Mubinga Bikon, President Mwanza Mambwe Fidele, and Roger Kazumba Ngudia*





*The room was full of members coming to hear from an Apostle of the Lord.*



that I would give anything in the world for this opportunity to see and hear him speak in person.” Roger and his friend Pierre decided to go to Likasi.

Before leaving, Pierre said, “I had just 1,000 Congolese Francs (about U.S. \$1) for the ration during this long trip on foot. My aunt, who is not a member of the Church, gave me 500 CF to add to what I had. It was all she had. She asked me if we would be safe while traveling such a long distance just to listen to a servant of God, and I assured her that we would.”

Pierre’s mother said that his father would give him the money for transport before Saturday, but that did not happen. So the boys decided to leave

on foot early the day before Elder Bednar was to speak, to avoid the risk of missing this unique opportunity that presented itself to them.

The teenagers walked 12 ½ hours that day. Peter said, “As we were traveling we were very tired. A pick-up truck suffered a flat tire just a few meters from us, and we offered to help with the repairs. After we helped, the driver proposed to take us up to Likasi, which shortened our trip. Since we were exhausted, it was as if an angel was sent to succor us.”

When they arrived in Likasi, a member of the stake presidency offered them food and a place to rest. The next day, the young men

were able to attend the meeting. It was a very special occasion for them. “After the meeting, we were very blessed to hear the questions and answers between Elder Bednar and the members. That gave us personal answers to some of our daily concerns,” said Roger.

Another Church member, who became aware of their long journey, chartered his car to bring these two young men home to Fungurume, which saved them many hours of walking. They were grateful for the ride home, but even more thankful for the experience that they had to be in the presence of an Apostle of the Lord. ■