

ASIA AREA LEADER MESSAGE

“Tidings of Great Joy”

By Elder David P. Homer

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Thousands of years ago in a land far away, Caesar Augustus commanded that his subjects return to their ancestral hometowns. In response, many traveled long distances to where they would be registered. Among the travelers was a young man named Joseph, who traveled with his espoused wife, Mary, who was pregnant.

They traveled to Bethlehem, where they found no place to stay. With no other alternative, Joseph arranged for them to lodge in a stable where, among the animals, Mary gave birth to the child and lay Him in a manger.¹ For those who watched, signs appeared in the heavens the night He was born.² To shepherds in the field, an angel announced, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”³

Good tidings. Great joy. All people. A Saviour. Christ the Lord.

Many lived in the area where Jesus was born, but few noticed what had occurred. In our day, it is much the same. Many go busily about their daily lives without stopping to ponder the message of the season. But, for those of us who believe, we know the season has great meaning. We know our lives are better, our families happier and our futures brighter because of the birth of that baby boy. He was the Son of God. He lived. He taught. He set a perfect example. He atoned. And, after dying on the cross, He arose on the third day bringing to all of God’s children the opportunity for immortality and eternal life.

Christmas is celebrated in some parts of Asia, but not in others. In some countries it is known as the “Big Day,” in others, celebrants decorate

banana and mango trees. In still others, happy participants gather in celebrations where they wear “Santa” hats, eat cake and give gifts. In other parts of the world, Christmas is dominated by commercial activities with people rushing from store to store anxious to buy the next thing. Gifts can be a wonderful part of Christmas. However, if we are not careful, they can divert our attention from the message the season brings. This, we cannot allow.

I have learned that the best gifts remind us of the Saviour—they come from the heart and often involve sacrifice. When I returned from serving my mission in Hong Kong, I was so busy with school and work, that I did not notice the preparations my parents made for Christmas. When the time came to open presents, I received a great surprise—nearly all of them were for me.

My parents smiled as I opened the gifts; they seemed happy to have so little for themselves. I was humbled by their sacrifice. They had given up much so that I might have clothes for my schooling and work. Their kindness reminded me of the reason for the season.

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*Good tidings. Great joy.
All people. A Saviour.
Christ the Lord.*



Jesus once taught: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”⁴ Each Christmas gives us the opportunity to bring His light to the world. This is especially true in countries where Christianity is not the most popular religion. By following His teachings, we let His light shine—in our lives and in the lives of others.

Once again, this year the Church is sponsoring a worldwide invitation

to “Light the World.” Beginning December 1 and continuing through Christmas Day, you can get inspiration for how to light the way for others by visiting your country website (e.g. lds.org.sg for Singapore). During the month, many of our missionaries will be telling people of this initiative and so can you. Guide them to this site so they can learn more about Jesus Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We can then join with the many who

will do good during this special time.

As this Christmas season approaches, let us not be one who is too busy to ponder the message of this special time of year. Instead, let us remember Him and what He did for us. As we do, we will find joy in serving and feel the special spirit that service can bring. ■

NOTES

1. See Luke 2:7.
2. See Matthew 2:1–2.
3. Luke 2:10–11.
4. John 8:12.

LOCAL PAGES

We Love the Birth of Jesus Christ

Ramamurthy Nagar Ward, Bengaluru Stake Primary children share their love for Christ at His birth.

Christmas is the season of joy. It is celebrated in the month of December.

—*Darwin, age 11*

We celebrate Christmas to rejoice in the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is a festival of joy and happiness. I have seen my parents and my relatives sharing gifts and helping others in fabulous ways. Christmas is so much fun. It is a day of service and the Spirit.

—*Ruthwick, age 11*

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. In this season we share our joys and we will be happy. On Christmas, me and my family think about Jesus’s birth and His sacrifice. In the Church we have Christmas programs that help us know more about Christ.

—*Kavya, age 12*

Christmas brings a lot of happiness to me. I celebrate Christmas with fervor. My mother gives me new clothes to wear.

—*Tharun A, age 12*

Christmas is celebrated for the birth of Jesus Christ. During Christmas I will serve the poor.

—*Miriam, age 6*

During Christmas people come to my house. Mother makes sweets and cakes and buy new clothes for us. We exchange gifts and decorate the house. I love Christmas. I am so happy during Christmas season.

—*Sharisha, age 8*

I love Heavenly Father. He gave us this earth to live on it. He has given so many things, like Jesus Christ, prophets, and

apostles. He also gave us temples and churches to worship in. I am very lucky to have my family, Jesus Christ, and Heavenly Father.

I love Christmas as it is the birth of Jesus Christ. I know He loves me.

—*Suprathik, age 9*

Christmas means Jesus Christ’s birth. We share with others His birthday.

—*Yashmitha, age 8*

We celebrate Christmas on December 25. It is the birth of Jesus Christ. ■

—*Rishon, age 5*



How many miles do we walk each day?

By Bhaviya M.

How often do we, as modern-day pioneers, honor the sacrifice of the pioneers of the early days? Brother David George, the ward mission leader, announced that there will be a pioneer activity for all ward members on July 24, 2018. Every member of the ward was really excited and eagerly waited for the big day to arrive.

Finally, the day arrived!

Just like the early-day pioneers who travelled across the plains and deserts to reach their destination, the volunteers of the Indiranagar Ward put great effort in decorating the venue. They made an arch out of bamboo with many colorful balloons tied onto it. The handcrafts made by the volunteers were displayed at the entrance. The ward looked so beautiful, and it was decorated very creatively. A collage of early-day pioneers was made and displayed as a source of information for the members. It was a perfect moment to cherish beyond what any words could describe.

On July 24th at 5:30 p.m., all members were seated in the sacrament hall, and they all looked very elegant in their costumes and bonnets, which resembled the clothes worn during the 19th century. This gesture reflected their determination to follow the footsteps of the early pioneers. It demonstrated the pioneering values of ingenuity and commitment and a vision for living their lives to benefit the present and future generations.



The meeting was started with an opening prayer and a hymn. Later on, two ward members, who had dressed like Joseph Smith and Emma Smith, volunteered to showcase their attire, and the crowd cheered for them. One of the senior members was invited to share the testimony of the Church and his personal experience as a follower of Jesus Christ. After this, one of the members concluded the meeting with a closing prayer.

After a few announcements, coupons were distributed to members in every family in order to participate in the games. A handcart, buffalo chips, a basket, a candle, and the golden plates were displayed for the members. Members also had the opportunity to see the covered wagon, which was the mode of transportation during the days of the early pioneers. Two ward missionaries volunteered to describe life during the period, and everyone witnessed the history and spiritual teachings of the gospel on the golden plates.

Two activities were organized for the members to understand the hardships suffered by the pioneers for the Lord's work. The activities planned were games, namely a stick-pull activity and walking on two wooden



boards through the mud. These games showed how each one's faith could conquer their fear. It helped the members to marvel at the determination of the early-day pioneers who were undeterred by their blistered feet and hands, the sore muscles, or the dust and grit. Such activities help members to realize the painstaking effort put in by the pioneers.

Another activity organized was the food and fun time with family. In addition to this, carnival games were also organized. Members were overjoyed to win prizes by utilizing their talents and to achieve small victories by putting in their efforts, and others cheered for the participants.

It was a wonderful evening, and all the members who had volunteered to cook for the activity presented their dishes. It showed how a successful group effort could work wonders. Every member seemed to have enjoyed the delicious food and hospitality of those who served the food. Everyone enjoyed the activities and the meeting, which had transformed into a unified space by creating an atmosphere of trust. Members were delighted to hear from others about pioneers' ways of life and their lifetime.

What an amazing evening it was! It made every member realize that being a pioneer is about paving the way for others and also building a lasting heritage of faithfulness for future generations by claiming the legacies of today's modern-day Church pioneers. ■



Rebecca

Sister Rebekah William's testimony

I went to FSJ with the intention of trying to strengthen my testimony. I wanted to gain a strong testimony of the Church and the gospel. I have been going to this church for a very long time with my family, ever since I was a little kid, and there have definitely been times where I did question if this was truly the right church. Was it just like every other church or was it different?

Attending FSJ was one of the best decisions I had ever made. It felt amazing to be surrounded with people who have the same standards and goals as me. I felt the Spirit so strong during every single one of the Natarajans' workshops. I had the greatest feeling of comfort and peace every second I was there.

During Elder Bednar's visit, in the middle of the Q&A session, a strong feeling came over me and I heard a voice say, "This is the true Church" over and over again. My eyes were filled with tears and I had never felt so strong about the gospel before. I was filled with assurance and comfort that this is the true Church.

I did get what I was looking for at FSJ. I got my answer about the Church and I really do know that this is the true Church and that the Book of Mormon is the true word of God. I can feel it each time I read the Book of Mormon. I love this gospel and I am truly blessed to have it in my life. ■