

ASIA AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Sabbath Day and Finding Joy with Lifelong Conversion

By Elder Fook Chuen Zeno Chow

Of the Seventy

One of my favorite activities is watching my grandchildren play or playing with them. As I watch them play, it brings back some childhood memories of mine. There is one game that had been my faithful companion during my teenage years. At that time, it seemed to be the most important thing to do. I realized that despite how fun the game was and how much I loved it, it had become a distraction for me. It was keeping me from focusing on more

important things, such as my studies.

In fact, there are many aspects of this mortality that are good and demand a lot of our time, talents, and energy in order to be successful. Such things could include our career, education, habits, sports, and hobbies, etc. They can all become distractions and divert us from achieving our most important goals in preparing ourselves and our families to return to our heavenly home above.

Elder Fook Chuen (Zeno) Chow

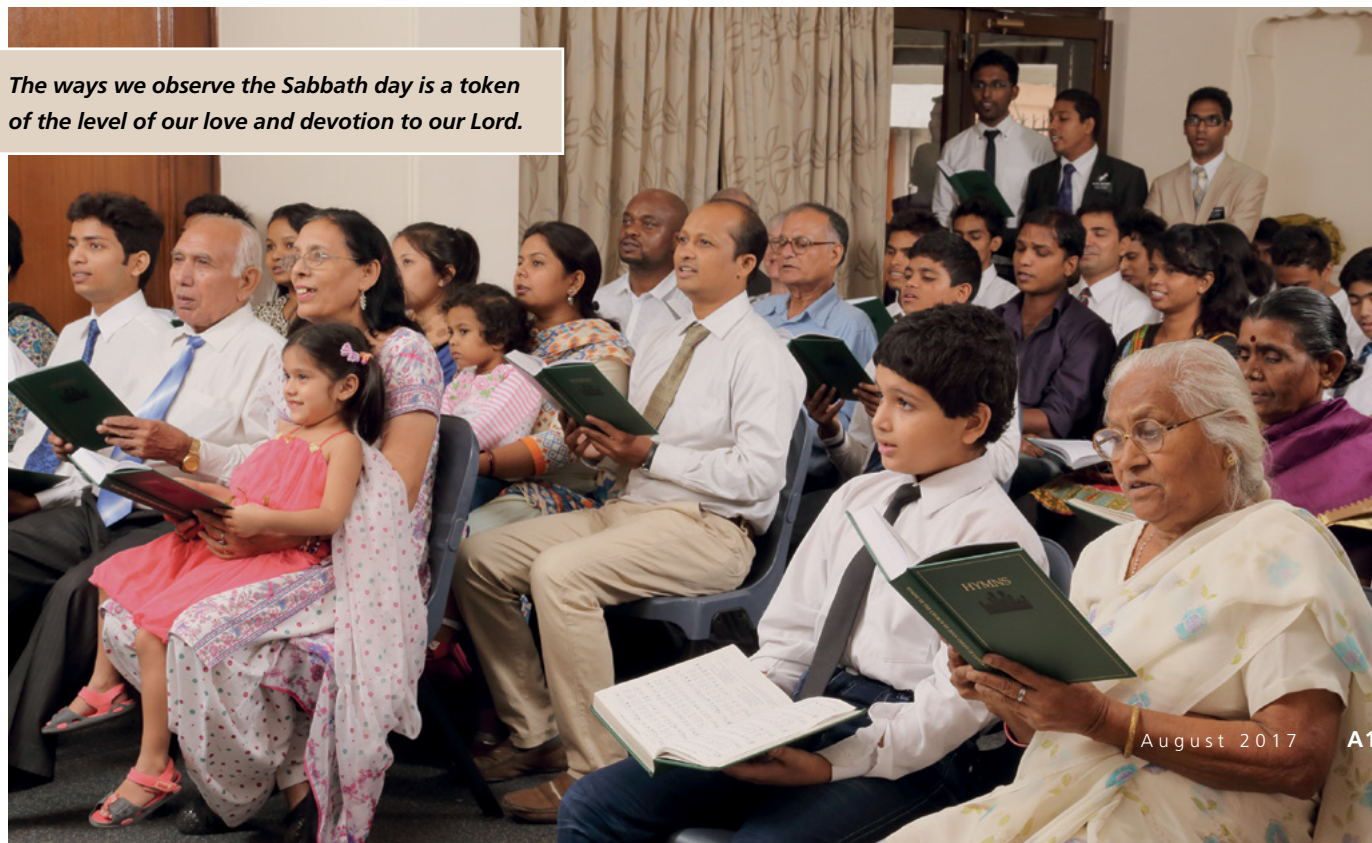


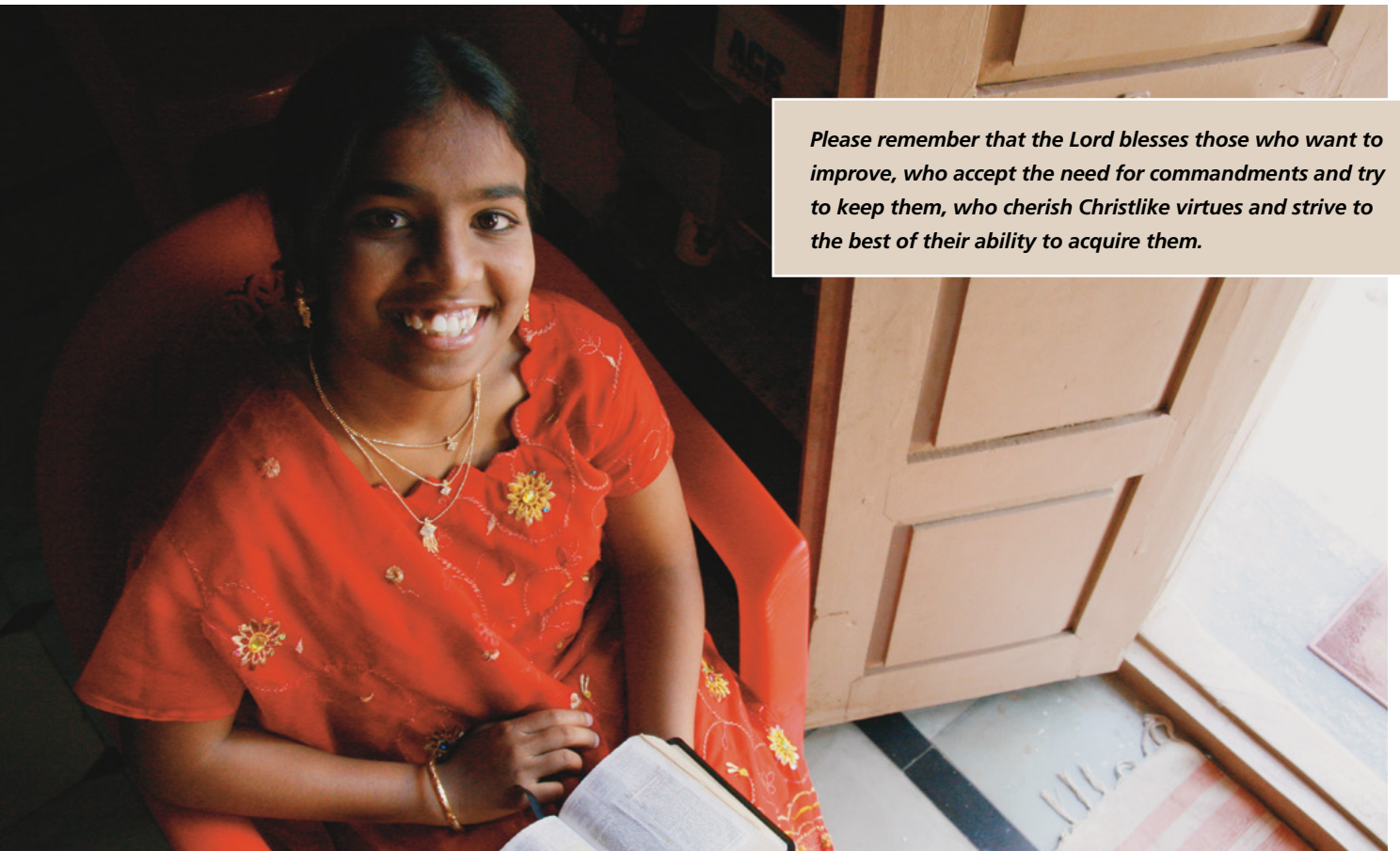
Sabbath Day

The Sabbath day is a gift from God. The ways we observe the Sabbath day is a token of the level of our love and devotion to our Lord.

President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught that as members obey Sabbath day observance, they will be richly blessed and their individual capacity to keep all of the other commandments will be enhanced.¹

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Please remember that the Lord blesses those who want to improve, who accept the need for commandments and try to keep them, who cherish Christlike virtues and strive to the best of their ability to acquire them.

The Lord has given us the Sabbath day to keep us “unspotted from the world” (see D&C 59:9), or in other words, to keep us from all distractions, thus enabling us to focus on matters that have eternal significance.

Sacrament

We are commanded to partake of the sacrament each week. The sacrament is centered around the Atonement of our Savior. The only

offering that the Lord requires of us is “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (D&C 59:8). Our hearts are broken because of the great pain and suffering the Lord endured so that we “might not suffer if [we] would repent” (D&C 19:16). Our spirits are contrite because of our sins and weaknesses. This feeling of remorse, together with the love of God, will give us strength to overcome our sins and weaknesses.

When the sacrament is being administered, we can ask ourselves the question “What lack I yet?” (Matthew 19:20). If we are genuine and sincere, the Spirit will whisper to us the specific sin to repent of or weakness to improve upon.

Repentance—A Lifelong Quest

Repentance is not only reserved for those who have committed serious sins; it is also an improvement

and refinement process for us to become more like our Savior. President Hoggan of the San Jose California Stake reminded the Saints that we might not need to always make 180-degree changes, as we are repenting from serious sins; however, we could be making 10-degree, 3-degree or even 1-degree improvements constantly so that we can become more like Christ.²

The Lord commands us to “be perfect even as [He], or [our] Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48).

The Apostle Peter taught us that in order to become “partakers of the divine nature, . . . [we should be] giving all diligence” to acquire a number of virtuous qualities. Peter further taught, “he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off” (see 2 Peter 1:4–9). Without developing these virtuous qualities, we are not quite ready to return to our heavenly home above.

As we try to overcome our weaknesses and be more like Christ, we might feel discouraged and inadequate. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles encourages us that:

“Please remember . . . that the Lord blesses those who *want* to improve, who accept the need for commandments and *try* to keep them, who

cherish Christlike virtues and *strive* to the best of their ability to acquire them. If you stumble in that pursuit, so does everyone; the Savior is there to help you keep going. If you fall, summon His strength. Call out like Alma, ‘O Jesus, . . . have mercy on me’ [Alma 36:18]. He will help you get back up. He will help you repent, repair, fix whatever you have to fix, and keep going. Soon enough you will have the success you seek.”³

With this assurance, we should follow the advice of Elder Yoon Hwan Choi of the Seventy to “look up” to the Lord for the strength in overcoming our weaknesses instead of “look[ing] around”⁴ on the weaknesses of the others. With humility and meekness, the Lord will “make weak things become strong unto [us]” (Ether 12:27).

I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that His grace is sufficient to all who come unto Him. May we all embark on this quest of becoming more like our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ. In the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Strengthen the Shepherds,” general conference leadership meeting, Sept. 28, 2016.
2. William Hoggan, Willow Glen Ward conference, Mar. 26, 2017.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Tomorrow the Lord Will Do Wonders among You,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 126.
4. Yoon Hwan Choi, “Don’t Look Around, Look Up!” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 90–92.

Rajahmundry Stake Formation

Rajahmundry is a wonderful city with the Godavari River passing through it. The beginning of the Church there was in the early 1980s. It has many firsts to its credit:

1. The first native elders, Elder Suvarna Kumar Katuka and Elder Emmanuel Kandavalli, from Rajahmundry, serve in India under the Singapore Mission in 1985.
2. The first native sister missionaries, Sister Jemema, Sister Baby Rani, and Sister Katuka, from Rajahmundry, serve in Philippines in the mid-1980s.
3. A young couple, the Augustuses, from Rajahmundry, become the first native couple to serve a mission.
4. Rajahmundry became the first place in India to have a chapel built and dedicated in 2002.

Rajahmundry was reopened to missionary work in 1993 after a three-year closure. In 1993, President Gill, president of the India Bangalore Mission, started working with some closed branches and also opened new branches. Full-time missionaries came to the town. After this inspired initiative of President Gill, there was no turning back for Rajahmundry as

successive full-time missionaries had lots of success with the young people of Rajahmundry.

President Randy D. Funk, Asia Area President, presided over the formation of the Rajahmundry Stake on December 18, 2016.


The following are experiences from members of the Church in Rajahmundry who witnessed the formation of the stake.

Guided by the Hand of God

It was a great opportunity to be a part of the stake formation. When we were waiting for the stake formation, I did not understand why it was not happening soon. A month before the stake was created, I was called to be a member of the branch presidency and had the privilege of serving under the leadership of President Badireddy. I have learned to be patient and even

more faithful. Later it was a surprise as my branch president was called as the stake president.

Though there were many speculations about the callings, I felt the formation of the stake meeting went exceptionally well by calling the right people as the leaders of the newly created stake. What a wonderful moment it was! The Spirit was so strong when the stake president's



Rajahmundry was reopened to missionary work in 1993 after a three-year closure.

wife bore her testimony. The following week after the creation of the stake, I was called into the bishopric. Overall it was a wonderful experience to be a part of the stake formation.

—*Sampara Prudhvi Siddartha, Rajahmundry First Ward*

Being of One Heart and One Mind!

The first blessing I received was my mother's baptism, which I had



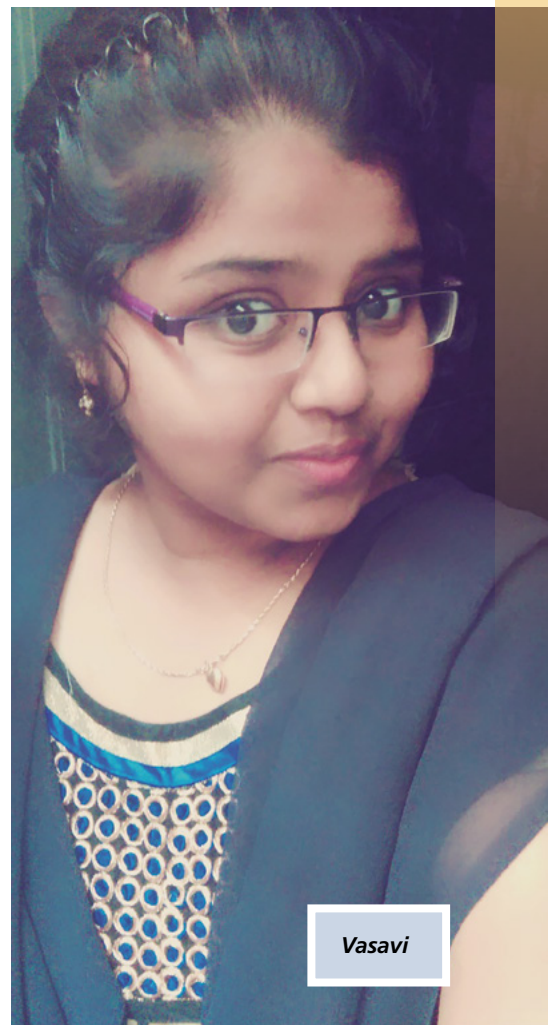
Prudhvi

been waiting more than 19 years for. I am really happy that Zion is established in Rajahmundry, where we could pour out our spirits to the Lord, and I truly believe that God will help us. He will really help us in whatever situation we may be in. He will hold us tight and will never let us face trials alone!

I strongly felt the Spirit guiding me during the stake formation. When I entered the stake center, the Holy Spirit reminded me of the love that my Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, have toward me, and it felt like being in heaven for sure!

I am really grateful for the opportunity to lead the choir during the Rajahmundry Stake formation, and I sensed a strong feeling of the Spirit entering my heart when the dedication of the new chapel took place. I am really grateful for every General Authority and every leader who helped in every aspect of the establishment of the stake. I really felt the love of Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in every second life during the stake formation.

I am sure that being a virtuous daughter will bless not only me but also my family. I saw a tremendous increase in the number of people attending the wards after the stake formation. They are trying to become more perfect and are really striving



Vasavi

hard to fulfill their callings. I even see love toward people increase and missionary work growing. Blessings are truly flowing.

What could be a greater blessing in my life than to be a daughter of God who stands as a witness of Him? I am grateful to be a Mormon!

—*Pravalli Vasavi, Rajahmundry Third Ward*

Stake Formation— Prayers Answered

I was part of the ushering committee. Our task was to help members who came for the stake formation feel comfortable.

I prayed, asking the Lord to have a leader for the stake who can lead Zion according to Church standards and accomplish the things that the Lord had prepared and for the leader to have good counselors who can counsel in any situation.

I had a personal revelation of two members giving talks: Badireddy Prasad and Murapaka Naveen. When Elder Randy D. Funk was ready to announce the new stake leaders, I was busy ushering. He had extended the callings and I missed hearing them. I asked the members next to me who had been called as the stake president. They replied, “Badireddy, and counselors Brother Pinipe and Brother Murapaka. Tears gushed out of my eyes and I felt a burst of glad tidings in my heart. I was thankful to Heavenly Father and surprised to know that I too can have personal revelation concerning the new stake leaders. That moment was memorable to me. It strengthened my faith and testimony.

After the meeting was over, it was time to set apart the new stake presidency. I was busy arranging the food

for the leaders and afterward I was waiting outside the high council room. Elder Funk came out of the room and called me by name, “Brother Nelli, come and join with us to see the setting apart of the presidency.”

I felt happy. I am just a common man. God loves me and trusts me to work and assist the stake presidency. I marveled at the thought of how God sees me.

—Nelli Ananth Padmanabha Swami (stake executive secretary), Rajahmundry First Ward

Experiencing God’s Love

When Rajahmundry was a district, I attended the district conference. I had heard that the stake was going to be announced at this meeting, but I felt disappointed when the announcement did not happen. Elder Robert K. William, who spoke at this meeting, said, “We still need to prepare to become a stake. Getting a stake is significant for the blessings it could bring into our lives.” He pointed out that although we had the numbers that qualify us to be a stake, were we really ready to be like a stake and act like a stake? He urged us to sincerely prepare. I went home and pondered this in my heart. I thought how much we should still work to really be a stake, not just in membership but also in being one and working together. I prayed to Heavenly Father that



Keerthi

He would help us live and act like a stake.

On the other hand, we had been waiting almost two and half years to move to the newly constructed chapel. So when it was announced that soon we were going to move to the new chapel, I felt very anxious, and great hopes and expectations filled my mind. I thought that with the stake formation, we were going to see the work gaining momentum and that not only would Heavenly

Father bless our stake but that we were also going to see more things happen in Rajahmundry.

I experienced hard times from my family days before the stake formation. As I am in a part-member family, I always face opposition from them. But this time they became intense. I felt very discouraged and disappointed. It was a feeling of hopelessness. My family wanted me to quit church from the new year onward. I wondered why I had to face this when I was trying to be strong and move forward. It was really a faith-testing period for me. I felt weak, and it was not easy to hold on and endure. Nevertheless, I looked forward to attending the meeting, despite my trials.

The moment I entered the chapel on the day of the stake formation, I felt at peace. I felt a feeling of reverence and holiness. It was so sublime that I really wanted to stay calm to enjoy the beautiful feelings without talking to anyone. I silently went into the sacrament hall and I felt the Spirit (I thought this is how one feels when one enters the temple). I participated in the choir on the day of stake formation. When Elder William was talking, he stressed the importance of faith and how remaining faithful will help us to endure the trials and do better. At that moment, I felt that Heavenly Father knew my situation and it was

like a word of counsel through Elder William that I need to stay faithful. I didn't fully understand the importance of faith until that moment. It sounded more meaningful to me at that point in time. I realized that we can live only by faith and that when we stay faithful we will be able to see wonderful things happen in the future.

I felt strengthened and I made a strong resolution to give my best to hasten the work in Rajahmundry. By becoming a stake, I can see more of God's hand in our efforts and our lives. Personally, I felt the still, small voice witnessing to me that this is Heavenly Father's work. I know that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are real and that we are God's children. We shall see Them one day and know that They are, if we do God's will and follow our Savior. I strongly believe that They live and that we will one day go back to Them. I know that Heavenly Father always answers our prayers at the right time and that He is mindful of us. I am hopeful that this true gospel reaches the entire earth and that we will see our Heavenly Father again. I know that this is His work and that it is true.

— *Keerthi Badugu, Rajahmundry First Ward*

Happiness I'd Never Felt Before

My name is Manju Shivanandan. I'm from the Rajahmundry Third Ward.

I'm very thankful to God that I got a chance to share my testimony about the stake formation with you.

I felt in my heart that our Heavenly Father knows every one of us. He has heard all of our prayers. If we wait patiently and put our faith in God, one day He will answer all our questions. This made me happy and comfortable.

I'm from Vizag. I waited for many years to be baptized. At that time, I felt very sad in my heart and I prayed



Manju

to God with my tears about my baptism. Eventually I was baptized in the Rajahmundry Third Ward, becoming a member of the Church, and I felt happy because God answered my prayers.

When I learned about the Rajahmundry Stake formation, I felt that God heard my prayers.

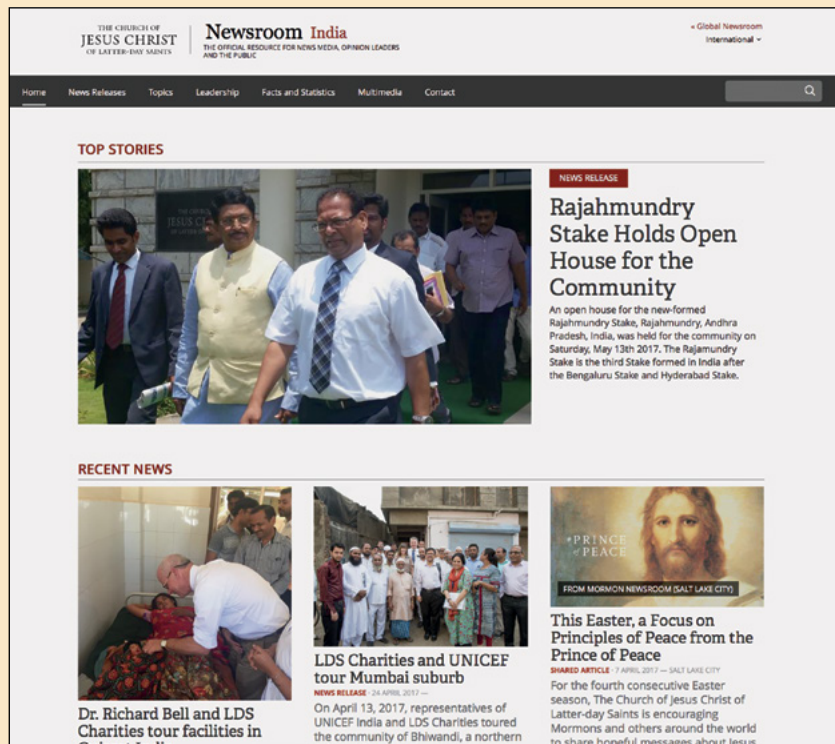
I was a member of the choir group who sang at the stake formation conference. When I was singing in the choir, I saw and felt blessings from my Father in Heaven. I felt a happiness in my heart that I had never felt before.

God blessed all of us in the formation of the stake. I am so thankful to God.

I share all these things in the name of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, amen. ■

—Manju Shivanandan, Rajahmundry Third Ward

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