



Jane's Choice

By Jessica Larsen
Based on a true story

Connecticut, 1842

"The Lord my shepherd is . . ." Music swirled around Jane Elizabeth Manning, but she couldn't focus on the words. She was looking at her hands, deep in thought.

She had joined the Presbyterian church a year ago. But she still felt like something was missing. "I'm searching for something more," she thought. But what could that be?

After the church meeting ended, Jane drifted outside with the rest of the congregation. The leaves were beginning to turn red and gold. Sunlight glinted off the nearby Norwalk River.

"A traveling missionary has come to town," a man was saying.

"He's a Mormon, and he says God is speaking to prophets again."

Jane stopped to listen. Could this be what she was searching for?

"Prophets?" another man scoffed. "Like from the Bible? Who would go listen to such a message?"

"I would!" Jane blurted out. A few people turned to stare at her, including the pastor. Jane felt her cheeks grow warm.

The pastor frowned. "I don't think you should go hear him. It's foolishness, that's what. Do you understand?"

When she said nothing, he nodded and moved to speak

with someone else. Jane watched him leave and then hurried home.

Home wasn't where Mamma and her brothers and sisters lived. It was at the Fitches' farm. She had gone to live there as a servant when she was just six years old. Every day she worked hard, helping Mrs. Fitch with the washing, ironing, and cooking. She usually got up before the sun. She built the fire, kneaded bread, and churned the butter. Whenever she could, she went to visit her own family.

A few days later, Jane was still thinking about the missionary while she was hanging up Mr. Fitch's shirts to dry. The clothes flapped in the brisk breeze.

The pastor had told her not to go, and yet . . . she needed to. She needed to see if this Mormon could help her find the truth she was searching for. By the time she finished hanging the clothes, she had made up her mind. She would go to the meeting, no matter what anyone else said.

On Sunday, Jane woke at dawn, put on her nicest dress, and walked alone to the meeting hall. She quietly slipped onto a wooden bench at the back of the hall. Jane smiled when she saw how many people were there. It seemed she was not the only one looking for something more!

The room quieted when Elder Wandell stood. The next hour passed quickly as he spoke about the Book of Mormon and a prophet named Joseph. He said people could be baptized by immersion, just as Christ was. And he talked about the Saints gathering to a faraway city called Nauvoo. By the end of the meeting, Jane's heart felt so full she could hardly breathe.

That night, Jane visited her family.



"And what did you think of the missionary's message?" her mother asked when Jane explained how she had spent her Sunday.

"I am fully convinced he presented the true gospel," Jane said. "I must embrace it. I am going to be baptized next Sunday."

"Baptized? You're joining another church?" her brother, Isaac, asked, pulling up a chair.

"Yes! It's what I've been searching for. It's true."

Isaac could tell she was serious. "So what happens next?" he asked quietly. "What will you do after you're baptized?"

"I'll gather with the Saints," Jane said. "I'm going to Nauvoo."

To be continued . . . ■

The author lives in Texas, USA.