

Christmas Fireside 12-26-21

Hello Saints

I am Antonia Marie Cavazos and I'm from a South Texas Border Town, named McAllen, Texas. Today my Husband Oscar and I are celebrating 13 years of marriage. We are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints. I did not mention in my testimony in previous fireside about how we came to know Micah and Ashley English. I have been on a "serious" truth discovery journey for years and The Lord has tenderly guided me through the years and I say tenderly because honestly if it was me or probably someone else. I'd be whipped left and right. I'm not a technology fanatic so my search was tedious and slow. I used have an active FB account and thru a friend of a friend a scant message about a paper and "the II". So I found his FB page and asked about his paper. He directed me to his website and he had a couple of papers and had just started posting his videos on YOUTUBE. THE REST is history, He couldn't post them quick enough. I would quickly print them, study them and place in clear sheet protector and in binder. Now as you can guess I have binders, and binders full. And my library of "good books". Btw Thanks again Micah.

So let's Get started.

As I foolishly (lol) threw my name in the hat to help with firesides. Micah placed me together with Tamra to do a "Christmas Fireside". She promptly contacted me about what she envisioned for the fireside and I'm going with that. THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR, WHO WAS MARY? WHO WAS JOSEPH? WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WISE MEN? WHY THE SHEPARDS? Tamra I hope you are healing quickly and we love you and will keep you in our prayers, I'm sorry you weren't able to participate but in future I'm sure you will get another opportunity.

Who is Joseph, "Step Father to Jesus" and what was his mission?

What do we know?

1. Descendant of David (Matt 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38)
2. Lived in Nazereth
3. "espoused" to Mary
4. received revelation of The Divine Birth (Matt: 1-20-25)
5. received revelation to preserve the life of The Savior and them by Fleeing
6. received revelation to return home/Nazareth.
7. took The Savior to the Temple to present his offering
8. took The Savior to the Temple at age 12 and lost him
9. had other children with Mary

FROM this we can speculate that:

He WAS a believer ie Jewish

knew Mosaic Law

knew that The Messiah would be coming

THOUGHTS/COMMENTARY

## Mary and Joseph

By Robert J. Matthews

Just as Jesus was selected for his redeeming mission in the premortal world, his prophets were also preappointed for their earthly missions, according to their faithfulness. (See Abr. 3:22–23; Alma 13:2–10.) There is no impropriety, then, in believing that Mary and Joseph were selected in those ancient councils by the Father to be the earthly guardians of Jesus.

And what of Joseph? What kind of a person would the Father select as the husband of Mary and the guardian and earthly model for Jesus? The scriptures are not entirely silent, although direct references are few. Because the father is to teach correct principles by precept and example and be a counselor, we must conclude that our Heavenly Father made careful selection in his choice of Joseph. That Joseph was spiritually sensitive and of a kindly disposition is reflected in the scriptural record. He was susceptible to divine guidance through the ministrations of angels and by dreams (see Matt. 1:20; Matt. 2:13, 19, 23); he wished not to bring embarrassment upon Mary nor to “make her a publick example” (Matt. 1:19). In addition, we would expect to find in Joseph certain moral, intellectual, and social qualities befitting his important assignment.

Mary and Joseph were careful to observe all the commandments that had been given them. The law of Moses required many performances and ordinances, including the rule that male children were to be circumcised when eight days of age as a token of the covenant the Lord made with Abraham. Furthermore, 40 days after the birth of a son (80 days in the case of a daughter), the mother was to offer a special sacrifice—a lamb or two turtledoves or pigeons. The law also stipulated that firstborn male children were sanctified to the Lord and were to be presented to him, not in sacrifice, but to his service. (See Ex. 13:1–2, 11–15.) Another stipulation was that every man was to go frequently to the place of the temple to bring sacrifices and offerings and to worship the Lord. (See Deut. 12:5–7, 11–14.) The New Testament indicates that Joseph and Mary attended to all of these things. They circumcised Jesus at the age of eight days, “And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord.” (Luke 2:22.) That Mary offered turtledoves instead of the lamb is indicative of her meager financial status and “low estate.” And we read further: “Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.” (Luke 2:41.) Thus we gain an impression of the obedient and spiritual disposition of Jesus’ earthly parents and guardians.

That Joseph also was descended from David is likewise set forth in the New Testament, which states that Joseph was of Bethlehem and “of the house and lineage of David.” (Luke 2:4. See also Luke 1:27; Matt. 1:16, 20; Luke 3:23–31.) So Jesus, though not a blood descendant of Joseph, inherited legal status as a son of David through [Joseph].

At that time, the Jews were ruled by Rome, and the rights of the royal Davidic family were not recognized. Herod, king of the Jews by Roman appointment, was not even an Israelite.

“Had Judah been a free and independent nation, ruled by her rightful sovereign, Joseph the carpenter would have been her crowned king; and his lawful successor to the throne would have been Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 87.)

Why is this important? It was prophesied by Isaiah:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” (Isa. 9:6–7. See also Isa. 11:1; D&C 113:1–2.)

Who were the WISE MEN?

Traditionally, it is spoken that there are 3 wise men, but was it three?

It may have been but it would be purely speculative.

By Wendy Kennedy

## How Many Wise Men?

Tradition holds that there were three men who visited the Christ child, a belief that comes from the fact that there were three gifts given: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Presumably, each man brought one gift. Some scholars, however, believe there could have been many more Wise Men, perhaps as many as 12.<sup>1</sup> The Bible Dictionary indicates that since the Wise Men were essentially witnesses of the Savior’s birth, there would have been at least two or three (see [Deuteronomy 19:15](#); [2 Corinthians 13:1](#); [D&C 6:28](#)).<sup>2</sup>

The belief that the Wise Men were kings comes from passages in the Old Testament that foretell of kings visiting the Lord. [Isaiah 49:7](#) says, “Kings shall see and arise,” and [Isaiah 60:10](#) records, “Their kings shall minister unto thee.” (See also [Psalm 72:10](#).)

Scholars have found other records that refer to the Wise Men as kings. The 13th-century writings of Marco Polo contain a report from the town of Saba in Persia about three kings who took gold, frankincense, and myrrh with them on a journey to visit a newborn prophet. According to Marco Polo’s record, the men were named Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, the names usually associated with the Wise Men today.<sup>3</sup>

## Origin of the Term *Wise Men*

The term *Wise Men*, as used in the King James Version of the Bible, is translated from the Greek word *magoi*. *Magoi*, usually rendered as *magi* in English, is actually Persian in origin and refers to priests in Persia’s ancient religion. Given this use of the word *magi*, some scholars think the Wise Men were likely priests in a Persian religious sect. However, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated in his *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*: “To suppose

they were members of the apostate religious cult of the *Magi* of ancient Media and Persia is probably false. Rather, it would appear they were true prophets, righteous persons like Simeon, Anna, and the shepherds, to whom Deity revealed that the promised Messiah had been born among men.”<sup>4</sup>

## Of the Orient?

Were the Wise Men from the Orient, as the Christmas carol “We Three Kings of Orient Are” claims?<sup>5</sup> The author of the song likely used the term *Orient* to replace the common word *east* used in Matthew’s account. Anything east of Palestine was somewhat exotically referred to as the Orient. Matthew’s use of the generic locality “the east” could simply indicate that no one knew for sure where the Wise Men came from.<sup>6</sup>

Some scholars cite [Psalm 72:10](#) as evidence that the men were from regions in present-day Spain, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia: “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.” Others believe the Wise Men were from Persia (modern-day Iran) and may have been Jewish, since there were many people of Jewish descent living in that region at the time.<sup>7</sup>

## When Did the Wise Men Visit Jesus?

Artistic renderings of the Nativity typically depict the Wise Men worshipping a *newborn*, as if their visit occurred shortly after the Savior’s birth. The scriptures, however, reveal that the Wise Men were not present at Jesus’s birth in the stable or anytime during His infancy. The Wise Men actually visited the *child* Jesus with His mother, Mary. “When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and ... presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” ([Matthew 2:11](#)).

## The Wise Men’s Gifts

Why did the Wise Men bring Jesus such rare gifts? Most scholars agree that the gifts were symbolic. The gold symbolized Jesus’s kingship, frankincense His divinity, and myrrh His suffering and death, since myrrh was a substance used to perfume dead bodies before burial.<sup>8</sup>

## Warned of God

When Herod directed the Wise Men to Bethlehem, he told them, “When ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also” ([Matthew 2:8](#)). However, according to Matthew’s account, the Wise Men were “warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod,” so, after visiting the Christ child, the Wise Men bypassed Herod and “departed into their own country another way” ([Matthew 2:12](#)). Herod was furious, not only because the Wise Men had ignored his

order but also because there was apparently now a child residing in Bethlehem who would one day rule the nation.

## On the Lord's Errand

The Bible Dictionary effectively summarizes our beliefs about the Wise Men: “They were righteous men sent on an errand to witness the presence of the Son of God on the earth. . . . It seems likely that they were representatives of a branch of the Lord’s people somewhere from east of Palestine, who had come, led by the Spirit, to behold the Son of God, and who returned to their people to bear witness that the King Immanuel had indeed been born in the flesh<sup>9</sup>

What do we know?

1. Righteous men? Academics?
2. Identified the signs
3. knew to ask “Where is he that is born King of the Jew?” and knew who and where to ask
4. wealthy
5. knew to give gifts
6. knew to worship The Savior
7. received revelation
8. spread the news

### THOUGHTS/COMMENTARY

#### The Gifts and Their Connection to the Temple

Trying to figure out exactly who the wise men were is mostly conjecture. The most fascinating part of the story is the nature of their gifts and their relationship to the temple. *That* tells you plenty about who they were.

#### Gold

**Gold** is for Kings, and in ancient Israel often connotes the heavenly presence. The founder of the LDS faith, Joseph Smith, had a vision in the Kirtland Temple with his scribe Oliver Cowdery. In it, they saw the streets of the kingdom of God paved with gold (The Doctrine and Covenants, Section 137:4) Ancient Israel used gold extensively in the Temple decor, connoting the heavenly realms and the presence of a king. All the tools of the ancient Temple were of solid gold, and the inner sanctuary was literally covered from floor to ceiling in hammered gold. In the mind of every ancient Israelite, gold would have suggested the temple. It was used to signify royalty, God’s presence, and even god’s promises. Because of its rare and costly nature, and the fact that it doesn’t rust or corrupt, it was one of the few materials considered suitable for use in sacred space.

Now, in your mind, think of the wise men’s gold. Are you thinking of a chest filled with coins? When we think of the wise men’s gift of gold, we almost always think of

gold in the form to which we are the most accustomed from advertisements, books, TV, and movies: gold coins. But the text never says that, and in fact if we performed this same exercise with an ancient Israelite, it is highly doubtful that coins in a chest would be the first thing to come to their mind. If the gold was not in monetary form, what are the other possibilities? Ornamentation? Decoration? Tools for sacred ordinances?

Frankincense

**Frankincense** was a rare spice used in the Temple (Leviticus 2:1, 4, and 24:7 are some examples). It was harvested from the sap of *Boswellia* trees, which were slashed to get them to bleed the precious resin (they called the drops of resin “tears”). It was burnt with almost every sacrifice offered in Jerusalem’s temple. Mixed with salt, the smoke became white, and was seen as prayers ascending up to heaven. Thus it became recognized as a necessary ingredient or requirement for prayers to be heard and for sacrifices to be accepted. It was impossible to perform temple ordinances as proscribed in the Law of Moses without Frankincense.

Myrrh

**Myrrh** is a natural preservative. The Bible first mentions myrrh in Genesis 37:25. It was what the Ishmaelites were carrying down into Egypt (with balm from Gilead) when Joseph’s brothers got the idea that he should be sold to them as a slave, instead of allowing him to die in the pit. Consider this: After acquiring Joseph, the nature of the Ishmaelite’s cargo hadn’t changed much! Joseph as we know later preserved them all from death, and ruled over them all.

Myrrh was also mixed with olive oil and other spices to be used for anointings in the Temple. It was kept in a flask in the Holy of Holies. The formula for this “holy anointing oil” is found in Exodus 30:23–25. It also had preservative properties, and was used in death as a way to prepare bodies for burial. Christ was offered vinegar mixed with myrrh as He hung on the cross.

Tying it all Together

When we normally consider the wise men’s gifts, we usually tend to focus on the fact that they were rare and costly, and the lesson we derive from it is that we too should offer our best to Christ. While that is true, we shouldn’t forget that the gifts were also *incredibly specific* in their nature and use. Aside from their exchange value, the gifts would have been of very little practical use, especially for a young child. Unless.

..

... they were more than just gifts. [These were wise men, men who studied the scriptures and knew about the birth of the Savior based on reading the scriptures. Perhaps these gifts were indications of their knowledge of what was to happen to Christ to fulfill His mission].

Why the THE SHEPARDS?

What do we know

1. abiding in the field keeping watch over the flock by night.
2. Saw an angel and were afraid
3. Received revelation
4. Went with haste to see for themselves
5. They spread the news

## The Witness of the Shepherds

By Paul Thomas Smith

Late March through early April was lambing season, and shepherds may have been laboring in Bethlehem's hillside fields the night of Christ's birth, assisting the ewes in the births of their lambs. It is likely that these were no ordinary animals, for Jewish law proclaimed that only flocks designated for temple sacrifice could be raised near cities.<sup>21</sup>

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them [the shepherds], and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, 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 [Bethlehem] a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” ([Luke 2:9–14](#)).

With the departure of the angels, the shepherds went “with haste” ([Luke 2:16](#)) to see for themselves the Messiah, the newborn “Lamb of God, . . . the Son of the Eternal Father” ([1 Ne. 13:40](#)) who would grow to become the Shepherd of Israel—and be sacrificed for his flock (see [Isa. 53:7](#); [John 1:29](#); [John 10:11, 14–15](#); [1 Pet. 1:18–20](#); [Alma 7:14](#); [Alma 13:11](#); [Ether 13:11](#)). After their visit, they spread the joyous word of the Messiah's birth, “and all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (see [Luke 2:17–18](#)).

## THOUGHT/COMMENTARY

On the eve of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, shepherds watched over their flocks in fields not far distant. These were not ordinary shepherds, for it had been prophesied among the Nephites that angels would declare the glad tidings of the Messiah's birth to "**just and holy men.**" (Alma 13:26.)

The special witnesses borne by these shepherds were to be told to family, friends, and neighbors. They were to be told in the courts of the temple, and from there to be told among all nations of the earth. Luke tells us that after the shepherds had seen the "babe lying in a manger, ... **they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.**" (Luke 2:16–17.) Such was the declaration of the angel who stood before them that holy night, that these "good tidings of great joy" should "be to all people." (Luke 2:10.)

From the writings of Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–1985) we learn: "These were not ordinary shepherds nor ordinary flocks. The sheep there being herded—nay, not herded, but watched over, cared for with love and devotion—were destined for sacrifice on the great altar in the Lord's House, in similitude of the eternal sacrifice of Him who that wondrous night lay in a stable, perhaps among sheep of lesser destiny" (The Mortal Messiah, 4 vols. [1979–81], 1:347).

## MARY

What do we know?

1. Lived in Nazereth was a believer (jewish) also decendant of David
2. espoused to Joseph
3. received revelation
4. asked questions
5. received more revelation
6. went to receive and give comfort (Elizabeth)
7. gave birth to The Savior
8. took him to temple offered sacrifice
9. raised Jesus
10. took him to temple at age 12 lost him
11. asked him to make wine from water 1<sup>st</sup> miracle
12. was at his cruxifiction
13. was at his burial

Luke 1:34 How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

by Joseph Brickey

1. First, he tells Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee" ([verse 35](#)). The Holy Ghost is the power whereby disciples in every age are magnified in their callings. "Remember that this work is not yours and mine alone," taught President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018). "It is the Lord's work, and when we are on the Lord's errand,

we are entitled to the Lord's help. Remember that whom the Lord calls, the Lord qualifies."<sup>7</sup> Then Gabriel gives Mary information specific to her situation: "And the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:<sup>8</sup> therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" ([verse 35](#)).

Luke 1:36 And behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

2. Second, Gabriel tells Mary about Elisabeth, someone who is experiencing a similar, although not identical, miraculous pregnancy (see [verse 36](#)). Elisabeth's pregnancy is a sign to Mary that she is not alone, that there is at least one other person who has some sense of what she is going through.

Luke 1:37

3. Third, Gabriel unequivocally declares, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" ([verse 37](#)). God did the impossible when Elisabeth conceived.<sup>9</sup> Gabriel's declaration is a reminder to disciples in every age that when we respond to God's invitations, miracles can take place.

#### THOUGHTS/COMMENTARY

One hundred twenty years before Christ was born, an angel appeared unto King Benjamin and, speaking of Mary by name, said that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ. About 475 years earlier Nephi saw Mary in a vision and described her as "a virgin most beautiful and fair above all other virgins." [[1 Ne. 11:15](#)] More than a hundred years before that, Isaiah prophesied concerning Mary, saying, "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." [[Isa. 7:14](#)] Only as it pertains to her Son has prophecy more fully identified an individual.

Surely she must have been one of Heavenly Father's very elect to be chosen for her unique role as the mother of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (see [1 Nephi 11:15–21](#); [Mosiah 3:8](#)).

#### **Royal Lineage**

Many scriptures suggest that Jesus was of the royal lineage of King David (see [Isaiah 11:1](#); [Jeremiah 23:5](#); [Matthew 1:1, 6, 17](#); [Luke 1:32](#); [Acts 2:29–30](#); [Romans 1:3](#)), but from whom did that lineage come? Mary or Joseph?

Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote, "That Mary was of Davidic descent is plainly set forth in many scriptures; for since Jesus was to be born of Mary, yet was not begotten by Joseph, who was the reputed, and, according to the law of the Jews, the legal, father, the blood of David's posterity was given to the body of Jesus through Mary alone." Elder Talmage also explained, "Luke's record is regarded by many ... as the pedigree of Mary, while Matthew's is accepted as that of Joseph."<sup>1</sup>

#### **Submissive**

We know little about Mary's life, but what we do know gives us an example of humble submissiveness (see [Luke 1:38](#)). When the angel appeared to her, he informed her that she was

“highly favoured” and that “the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” ([Luke 1:28](#)). Mary, being troubled by these words (see [verse 29](#)), was reassured by the angel: “Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God” ([verse 30](#)).

It’s worth noting that for a woman in Jewish culture to become pregnant before marriage would have created a dire situation. Would Joseph, her espoused husband, now refuse to marry her, believing her to have broken Jewish law by having a relationship with another man? Would she be ostracized from Jewish society? Or worse, stoned? Would her own family think her sullied and disown her?

We don’t know if these concerns flashed through Mary’s mind in that moment, but in her brief, humble response, we see precisely why she was chosen in the first place: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” ([Luke 1:38](#)).

I’ll do it, says Mary. Whatever is asked of me, however difficult it may seem, whatever the consequences may be to me personally, I’ll do it.

### **Courageous**

When Mary was expecting, she sought out family for support, facing her duty with confidence and courage. Her interaction with her cousin Elizabeth is a testament to that strength. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught:

“As the expectant mother of Jesus, Mary sought comfort and peace in the home of her cousin Elisabeth. Elisabeth greeted her: ‘Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb’ [[Luke 1:42](#)]. Mary responded with a beautiful, inspired psalm ... :

“‘My soul doth magnify the Lord,

“‘And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. ...

“‘For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name’ [[Luke 1:46-47, 49](#)].”<sup>2</sup>

Rather than think of her unanticipated pregnancy as a burden, Mary glorified God and rejoiced.

### **Faithful**

Mary’s example of obedience and faithfulness continued throughout her life. The scriptural account suggests that she became a devoted disciple of her holy Son and was with Him from time to time throughout His mission. She was also with Him at the very end, witnessing His Crucifixion. After the Ascension, she continued in prayer with the Apostles (see [Acts 1:14](#)). That example is one for all of us to follow—a life of faithfulness.

Christmas is a season of giving, and Mary, as a central figure in the scriptural account, shows us the one gift that matters more than all others: **the gift of ourselves, the gift of aligning our will to God’s, humbly accepting His mission for us and fulfilling it to the utmost.** That’s what Christ did, as did Mary, His mother before Him.

Who was Zacharias? What do we know of him?

1. Rightful keys of the Levitical Priesthood
2. Husband of Elisabeth mother of John the Baptist
3. Received Revelation
4. Doubted and was then “dumb until naming of John”
5. Raised John until left to ministry.
- 6.

# Zacharias, the True High Priest

The man who rightfully held the keys of the Levitical Priesthood was a humble and faithful priest named Zacharias. Joseph Smith taught, “The Levitical Priesthood is forever hereditary—fixed on the head of Aaron and his sons forever, and was in active operation down to Zacharias.”<sup>4</sup> Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, had not been blessed with children, and were “well stricken in years” ([Luke 1:7, 18](#)). The office of high priest was patriarchal; beginning with Aaron, it passed from worthy father to worthy sons, and thus Zacharias hoped for a son.<sup>5</sup>

To serve within the temple sanctuary was the highest honor bestowed upon a priest. Between 20,000 and 24,000 priests were eligible to serve,<sup>6</sup> but that opportunity occurred only once in the lifetime of a man—if his name was drawn. Zacharias had not served within the sanctuary, and he was nearly 50 years of age—the mandatory age of retirement.<sup>7</sup>

But the day arrived when his name was drawn, and Zacharias had the rare experience of going into the temple sanctuary. Wearing the robes of the Levitical Priesthood, he completed his sacred tasks. As a worthy high priest, Zacharias could rightfully inquire of God’s will and receive a reply, if needed, by the ministering of angels (see [D&C 13](#); [D&C 84:19–26](#); [D&C 107:18–20](#)). The Prophet Joseph Smith said that “Zacharias [pled] with the Lord in the temple that he might have seed so that the priesthood might be preserved.”<sup>8</sup> We are told that Gabriel, a heavenly messenger, appeared to him (see [Luke 1:11–20](#)). When Gabriel lived in mortality, he was the prophet Noah<sup>9</sup> who presided over the baptism of the earth.<sup>10</sup> Now Noah was about to reveal knowledge of the prophet who would help bring to fruition the law of Moses, or the old covenant.<sup>11</sup> “Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

“... Many shall rejoice at his birth.

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord. ...

“And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

“And he shall ... make ready a people prepared for the Lord” ([Luke 1:13–17](#)).

Zacharias was astonished to learn that his future son was to be the very prophet who Isaiah said would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (see [Isa. 40:3](#)).

Zacharias asked, “Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years” ([Luke 1:18](#)). Gabriel answered, “Thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words” ([Luke 1:20](#)).

His temple responsibilities completed, Zacharias returned to his village in the hills of Judea filled with wonder at the blessings and promises of the Lord. At home he

somehow made known to Elisabeth the overwhelming news—that she was to be the mother of a prophet of God.

### **Gabriel** (Twelve Witnesses of Christ’s Birth By Joseph Fielding McConkie)

Our first New Testament witness of the birth of Christ is a messenger from the presence of God: Gabriel. Appropriately, this messenger makes his initial appearance in the temple to a faithful priest of the Aaronic order, Zacharias, who is performing a ritual function on behalf of his nation—burning incense on the altar within the Holy Place.

In performing this duty, Zacharias represented the combined faith of Israel. His prayer was their prayer for an everlasting deliverance from all their enemies at the hands of their promised Messiah. The ascending flames of incense symbolized the ascension of that united prayer. As Zacharias prayed, his fellow priests and all within the walls of the temple united their amens to his appeal.

In response to Israel’s prayer, an “angel of the Lord” appeared before Zacharias, standing on the right side of the altar of incense and identifying himself as Gabriel, one who stood “in the presence of God.” ([Luke 1:11, 19.](#)) By modern revelation we know that Gabriel was known on earth as Noah, that he “stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 157), and that he holds the keys of the “restoration of all things” ([D&C 27:6–7.](#))

The keys held by Gabriel made him an Elias to prepare the way before the Lord. How perfectly appropriate, then, for him to announce the birth of the earthly Elias, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

### **Zacharias**

Who was this Zacharias to whom Gabriel appeared? He was one of the “just and holy,” as was his wife, Elisabeth. ([Alma 13:26.](#)) Zacharias was a descendant of Abia, whose name meant “remembered of Jehovah.” Elisabeth, like Zacharias, was a descendant of priests (see [Luke 1:5](#)), and her name meant “consecrated to God.”

Thus, this noble couple were, in the nativity story, to be remembered of Jehovah. Promised a child destined to be the earthly forerunner of the Messiah, Zacharias received the sign from Gabriel that he would remain “not able to speak, unto the day that these things shall be performed,” because he did not believe the Lord’s prophetic promise. ([Luke 1:20.](#))

He remained mute until “Elisabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered.” It was then that Zacharias’s “mouth was opened” and he bore witness of the divine mission of his newborn son, testifying that he would “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.” News of these miraculous occurrences “were noised abroad throughout Judea.” ([Luke 1:57, 64, 65, 76.](#))

Side note: \*\*\*In Matthew 23:35 Jesus said that Zacharias was slew between the Temple and the altar. “When Herod’s edict went forth to destroy the young children, John was about six months older than Jesus, and came under this hellish edict, and Zacharias caused his mother to take him into the mountains, where he was raised on locusts and wild honey. When his father refused to disclose his hiding place, and being the officiating high priest at the Temple that year, was slain by Herod’s order, between the porch and the altar, as Jesus said.” (TPJS, p. 261) \*\*\*\*

## **Elisabeth**

We read of John that he was “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.” ([Luke 1:15.](#)) Indeed, when Mary visited Elisabeth, “Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, [and] the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.” ([Luke 1:41.](#))

As a pure vessel who recognized the special nature of her own son, Elisabeth also testified and bore witness of the divinity of Mary’s son, crying: “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” ([Luke 1:42–43.](#))

Elisabeth concluded her witness by prophesying that “there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.” ([Luke 1:45.](#)) She added her testimony to those who came before and those who followed in declaring the divine birth.

## **John the Baptist**

As Christ was, by birth, the rightful heir to David’s kingdom, so John was born the rightful heir of the office of Elias. He appropriately began his ministry, to “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways,” by leaping for joy while yet within his mother’s womb. ([Luke 1:41, 76](#); see also [Luke 1:15.](#))

What a marvelous event it must have been: John leaping for joy; Elisabeth greeting her cousin Mary in the spirit of prophecy; and Mary responding by that same spirit. Again, we note how wondrously the witnesses and testimonies fit together: the testimonies of two women—the aged Elisabeth and the youthful Mary—each bearing

a child conceived under miraculous circumstances. They, and even the unborn John, all rejoice in the great event about to take place.

### Other Witnesses:

#### Simeon

Our attention now turns to Jerusalem. There an aged man, described by Luke as “just and devout,” who had received the promise of the Lord that he would not die until he had seen the Savior, was moved upon by the Holy Ghost to go to the temple. There he held the Christ child.

When the parents and the child entered the temple—Mary for the ritual of cleansing and Joseph to pay the tax necessary to redeem the firstborn from priestly service—Simeon took the child in his arms. “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word,” he declared. “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.” (Luke 2:29–32.)

Simeon’s declaration reached far beyond the understanding and hope of those of his nation, for he saw the universal nature of Christ’s ministry. He bore witness that Jesus was Savior to Jew and Gentile alike.

#### Anna

The marvelous testimony of Simeon was not to stand alone. Joining his special witness in the temple of the birth of Christ was Anna—the aged widow whose name means “full of grace.” A devout and saintly woman who worshipped for many years in the temple with fasting and prayer both day and night, she was undoubtedly well known to those of the Holy City who faithfully sought the coming of the Messiah. She approached the holy family and thereafter bore testimony of the Messiah to those in Jerusalem who “looked for redemption.” (Luke 2:38.)

#### Herod

Our concluding witness is a most unlikely and reluctant one—Israel’s king, Herod the Great. Herod had made an alliance with the powers of the world: his friends were Augustus, Rome, and expediency. He had massacred priests and nobles. He had decimated the Sanhedrin. He had caused the high priest, his brother-in-law, to be drowned in pretended sport before his eyes. And he had ordered the strangulation of his favorite wife, Mariamne, though she seems to have been the only person he ever loved. Anyone who fell victim to his suspicions was murdered, including three sons and numerous relatives.

It was to this man, who personified the world’s wickedness, that the wise men from the east bore their testimony that Israel’s rightful king and ruler had been born. Such a testimony would not have been heeded had it come from Simeon, Anna, or simple shepherds. But Herod gave the testimony credence, coming as it did from these Eastern visitors whose credentials, whatever they were, established them as men of great wisdom.

The kingdom of God will never go unopposed in the days of earth’s mortality, the period of Satan’s power. Evidence of the anger and wrath of hell at the birth of God’s son makes the

nativity story complete. The glad tidings of heaven brought no joy to the prince of darkness or his servants. Herod, as Satan's servant, responded to the testimony of the wise men with murderous wrath and sought to destroy the Christ child. Thus, the decree went forth that "all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under," according to the time that Herod had inquired of the wise men, were to be slain. (Matt. 2:16.)

### The Father and The Savior

The Father with The Savior have an immense work that is laid out in the scriptures and only a student of them with the aide of the Holy Spirit has eyes to see the unfolding plan laid out. The Father and The Savior allow those students to be instruments in completing each part of this immense painting that is coming to a completion in our day. I want to share with you a "story" about how I knew what to share with you this evening.

### Story of "The Elephant in the Room"



Last conference I purchased 3 color by number paintings to help my husband “not fall asleep during conference. Throughout the years Ive tried many tactics to help him and my daughter in that area; I don’t know how successful Ive been but Ive tried nonetheless. What I found was a frustrating task and for especially myself. I don’t consider myself artistic in any sense but I have other talents that The Lord uses and at times they bring me great joy but for the most part they are hard and largely go unappreciated by worldly standards. These talents include being a task completer and a “organized” person. I “all in” in what I do. This color by number had me anxious, frustrated and task driven. I couldn’t see or appreciate what was arising out of the number by number pattern of 30 plus colors and how I would have to go back and do a color I thought I was “done” with slowly over the next few days I was driven to complete this unfinished painting that sitting on my kitchen table. After staying up late several nights in a row the picture finally emerged and I was finally able to see the “elephant in the room”. Not the one in the painting but the one The Father and The Savior taught me last night as I contemplated what to say. I had accumulated all kinds of notes and quotes and scriptures. And They taught me that THEY are the artist and I am the instrument in which they paint my mission color by color and when it is all done THEN AND ONLY THEN will I see the whole picture. So like these people they may have had “glimpses” thru revelation, but the full picture we cannot fully see because we don’t have the capacity yet and we just need to Trust the Lord and know by following his prompting Thru His Holy Spirit. We must know the mind and will of the Lord in order to even qualify to be used as the instrument.

THOUGHT/COMMENTARY

## **Birth of the Savior (inn=caravansary):**

Christ the Savior Is Born  
By Elder Russell M. Nelson

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University on December 10, 2002.

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

To better understand this verse, we need to be aware of the culture of that time and region, and we need to learn one word from the original Greek text. In the Greek New Testament, the root from which inn was translated is kataluma. We don’t have an equivalent word in the English language. The Greek prefix kata- (or cata-) means “a bringing down.” We see it in English words such as catastrophe and cataclysm. When the prefix kata- was joined with the suffix -luma, it meant literally “a breaking down of a journey.” A kataluma was a place to rest or to lodge, or a guest chamber in a lodging place.

In those days an inn was not like a Holiday Inn or a Bethlehem Marriott. A lodging place in that part of Asia had to provide accommodations for traveling caravans, including the people and their animals. Caravans stayed at what was then, as still is, known as a caravansary, or a khan.

Such a facility is typically rectangular in shape. It has a central courtyard for the animals that is surrounded by walled cubicles where the people rest. These quarters allowed guests to be elevated slightly above their animals, with open doorways so that owners could watch over their animals.

The Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 2:7 indicates that there was no room for them in the “inns,” suggesting that all of the katalumas or cubicles of the caravansary were occupied.

At a caravansary, animals were secured for the night in the center courtyard. In that courtyard there would have been donkeys and dogs, sheep, and possibly camels and oxen, along with all of the animals’ discharges and odors. Because the guest chambers surrounding the courtyard were filled, Joseph possibly made the decision to care for Mary’s delivery in the center courtyard of a caravansary—among the animals. There, in that lowly circumstance, the Lamb of God was born.

## **Prophecies fulfilled: (This Shall Be a Sign unto You, New Era, 2011)**

“All the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?” (Mosiah 13:33).

Christmas is a time filled with anticipation—anticipation of presents, good food, and celebrations. Sometimes it seems that the first 24 days in December are just too long to wait. Imagine if you had to wait for 1,000 years!

The first Christmas—the Savior’s birth—had been prophesied for hundreds of years, from Isaiah in the Old Testament to Samuel the Lamanite in the Book of Mormon. The prophets of old knew and anticipated the signs of the coming of Jesus Christ, and they waited patiently for those signs. They prophesied of His coming so others would be able to recognize the signs and share in the joy of knowing He had come! The fulfillment of those prophecies was a testimony of His divine calling as Savior and Redeemer.

Read the following prophecies of the birth of Jesus Christ and the miraculous circumstances surrounding it and learn how these prophecies were fulfilled.

Born of Mary, a Virgin

Prophecies: Seven hundred years before she was born, Mary was prophesied to be the mother of Christ. Isaiah wrote, “The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Alma the Younger also identified Mary as the Savior’s mother about 80 years before Jesus’s birth and halfway across the world from Isaiah: “He shall be born of Mary, ... she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God” (Alma 7:10).

Fulfillment: Eight decades later, the angel Gabriel appeared “to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, ... and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:27). Mary was the mother of Jesus, who was the Son of God.

#### Unto Us a Child Is Born

Prophecy: Isaiah prophesied the birth of the Messiah: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Fulfillment: The Savior’s ministry fulfilled all that Isaiah prophesied, yet Christ was born in humble circumstances: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ... Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11–12).

#### Born in Bethlehem

Prophecy: The prophet Micah lived about the same time as Isaiah. He prophesied of the Lord being born in the village of Bethlehem: “But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Fulfillment: Seven hundred years later, Herod commanded that his scribes tell him where the new ruler could be found: “He demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea” (Matthew 2:4–5).

#### Of the Seed of David

Prophecy: The Lord told Jeremiah six centuries before the birth of Christ that He would come from the lineage of David: “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 33:15).

Fulfillment: Matthew gives us Christ’s genealogy, showing how the Lord is descended from that king of long ago: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ... So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from

David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations” (Matthew 1:1, 17).

#### Visited by Kings

Prophecies: Despite the humble circumstances of His birth, prophets declared that kings would come to see Christ: “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isaiah 60:3).

Samuel the Lamanite told the Nephites five years before Christ’s birth of the signs that would herald His coming. One of these signs was the star the Wise Men followed: “There shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you” (Helaman 14:5).

Fulfillment: The Wise Men knew what sign to look for because they must have looked for the fulfillment of prophecies. They said, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2).

In the New World, the Nephites also recognized the signs and knew the prophecies were fulfilled: “And it had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets. And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word” (3 Nephi 1:20–21).

#### **Closing Remarks (Prophetic Announcements of Christ’s Birth By Elder Dallin H. Oaks, 2016)**

The prophecies and announcements just quoted tell of the first coming of the Savior. We are now preparing for the Second Coming of the Lord, a time eagerly awaited by believers and dreaded or denied by unbelievers. We are commanded to “stand ... in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold, it cometh quickly” (D&C 87:8). Those “holy places” surely include the temple and its covenants faithfully kept, a home where children are treasured and taught, and our various posts of duty assigned by priesthood authority, including missions, temples, and other callings faithfully fulfilled in branches, wards, and stakes.

As we prepare for His Second Coming, and as we stand in holy places, we persist in observing Christmas not just as a season of “Greetings” or “Happy Holidays” but as a celebration of the birth of the Son of God and a time to remember His teachings and the eternal significance of His Atonement. I pray that we will be faithful in doing so.

#### **Twelve Witnesses of Christ’s Birth By Joseph Fielding McConkie 1990**

The nativity story mentions twelve witnesses of the birth of the Savior and illustrates the pattern by which the knowledge of God is to be restored and to go forth once again among all the nations of the earth.

How will it go forth? By special witnesses—witnesses called and prepared in the councils of heaven. Who will they be? The old and the young, women and men, the learned and the unlearned—those who walk “in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,”

those who dream dreams, entertain angels, and are filled with the Holy Ghost. (Luke 1:6.) So it has ever been, and so it must ever be.