

Christmas Address

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Gordon B. Hinckley was president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this First Presidency Christmas Devotional was given at the Conference Center in Salt Lake City on 1 December 2002.

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How pleasant and wonderful it is when in many areas of the world we join together in singing praises to the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind.

Tonight, altogether, we speak many tongues, but our voices are as one as we pay homage to our King, the Lord Immanuel.

We sing and speak of Jesus born in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea. On that occasion angels sang, "Peace on earth, good will to men." But tonight there is no peace in that area. Anger, hate, suspicion, and bitterness fill men's hearts. It is as Longfellow wrote long ago:

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

Then follow these beautiful words:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.*

*Till, ringing, singing, on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*
(Hymns No. 214.)

We do not wonder that there is conflict in the world. There is now, and has been from the time that Cain slew Abel, so much of hatred. And yet, is it not a miracle, an absolute miracle, that in so many parts of the earth, in so many places

under so many different circumstances there is peace and love and a vast measure of goodness?

Wherever the Spirit of Christ is known there is much of good will, of mutual respect, of love and appreciation and kindness.

There is a manifestation of God's eternal love for us, His children. There is an expression of the great truth that we are all sons and daughters of God. There is appreciation for His great concern with His children. While preciously safeguarding our free agency He has reached out and pointed the way and invited us to follow. He sent His Beloved Son to earth to teach us the wondrous lessons of the Beatitudes, and the beautiful principles of the parables.

At this time of year we retell the story of the star that guided the Wise Men to the infant born in Bethlehem. It is interesting to me that the star described by Matthew has become one of the symbols of Christmas. It is found on our cards, on the tops of our trees, in the decorations of our streets. To me it speaks in an indirect way of another great and wonderful truth.

When I was a small boy, we lived on a farm in the summertime. My brother and I slept out of doors in a wagon box. We would lie on our backs and look at the heavens and see the wonders of the firmament. We would find the Big Dipper. Two stars of the cup pointed to the North Star.

We would awaken sometimes in the night. While we had slept there would have been a movement of the stars, actually a rotation of the earth. The constellations were in a different position. The dipper had turned. But the North Star stood immovable and fixed, a great constant in the sky that for centuries guided mariners at sea and had become a

symbol of steadfastness to men of earth. It is known as the Lodestar, the Polar Star, because of its constancy. It is as the God of heaven Himself, fixed and immovable, certain, sure, unchanging.

A week ago we were in Southern Utah, in St. George, for a regional conference. We stayed in a home out in a rural area, away from the lights of the city. The night was dark. The sky was clear. One of my associates had a pair of high-power nighttime binoculars. I took them in hand while seated in a chair and looked heavenward. I saw a myriad of stars such as I had never seen before. In the great Milky Way they were like sands upon the sea shore. Their light left long ago to reach me. The breadth of the sky enthralled me. The innumerable quantity of stars amazed me. I watched in utter wonder, marveling at what I could see. How could anyone doubt that there is a great Creator who brought all of this together and who governs it? How marvelous and grand His design. How infinite His works. How marvelous His creations.

As I looked the words of David's psalm passed through my mind: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

"For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalms 8:3-5).

And further:

"He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.

"Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Psalms 147:4-5).

And then I thought of the words of Moses:

"For behold, this is my work and my glory-to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

I have since reflected much on this. The heavens tell the glory of God, the wonder and majesty of His firmament, the vastness of the universe over which He presides. And yet His great concern is with His children, His sons and daughters, of whom we are a few who worship together tonight. It is a thing of wonder to me that He can listen to us when we pray and that He answers those prayers. I do not know how it is accomplished, but I do know and can testify that it happens. Among all His wonderful creations He has established a plan, a marvelous and wonderful plan, under which He permits His children to come to earth, here to exercise their agency, giving them a choice between good and evil, between light and darkness, between happiness and misery. He knew that many would rebel, as so many had done in the great war in heaven. But under this plan He sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, who was His agent in the creation of this earth. He came in the humblest of circumstances, born in a manger in a conquered nation. That Son was born into the world that holy night when angels sang and shepherds came.

The baby was carried into Egypt to escape Herod's wrath when the great slaughter of the innocents occurred.

He returned and grew up in Nazareth. He was baptized of John in Jordan who asked, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:14).

He replied, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

He endured the great test placed upon Him by Satan, the wily tempter.

He walked about the land teaching the people, performing miracles through His

infinite power, laying a foundation of apostles and prophets on which His Church could be established.

On complaint of the Pharisees He was taken by brutal men, mocked and beaten, accused and evil spoken of. He was crucified on Calvary's Hill between two thieves. Could anything be more ignominious?

In His terrible agony He cried out, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The earth trembled, and hope fled from his followers. He was buried in Joseph's tomb.

And then, miracle of miracles, and yet in fulfillment of His promise, He arose and left His place of burial, a resurrected, glorious being, "the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). He came among His apostles and electrified them with the majesty of His presence. Thomas, on seeing Him later, declared: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). He walked with two men on the road to Emmaus. He appeared to 500 as Paul testified (see 1 Cor. 15:6). He came to the people of the Western Hemisphere, the promised Messiah. He taught them as He had taught in Palestine.

Centuries passed, and then, with His

Beloved Father He appeared to the boy Joseph, and parted the curtains to open this the grandest of all dispensations, the dispensation of the fulness of times.

He has restored His work. He has restored His priesthood. He has granted the keys of that priesthood.

His work moves on. That which we do, you and I, as members of this Church and as His sons and daughters, we do in His Holy name and in tribute to Him.

Great is His glory, endless is His estate. His has been the greatest of all gifts. He is our King of Kings. He is our Lord of Lords. He is the Son of God incarnate. He reigns with His Father in the realms on high.

I cannot look at the pristine beauty of the earth without marveling at His creations. I cannot think of the eternal journey of man and of that which He has prepared for them that love Him without saying thanks be to God, for Him who has redeemed and purchased us with His blood.

May we ever walk in remembrance of Him, paying homage to Him by the goodness of our lives and the outreach of our service, I humbly pray in His holy name, even the name of our Redeemer, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, amen.