

# The Gospel News

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## *A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles*

# **CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD; AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME.**

**(Psalms 51:10)**

This was the cry of David, king of Israel, as he sought forgiveness of the Lord after he wrestled with his sin(s) and realized his spirit wasn't right. He carried guilt and pain and needed the Lord. Now, David's sin(s) were well documented in 2 Samuel, chapters 11-12, for all of us to read, and we would no doubt be mortified if our sin were written and recorded in the most well-read book in the history of the world. (It's estimated that as many as 7 billion copies of the Bible have been made!) But when David was through trying to hide his sin, ignoring what he did or burying it in his subconscious, he finally confessed it freely in Psalm 51 and pleads for forgiveness. His request to "Create in me a clean heart..." was another way of asking for forgiveness and for a spiritual cleansing. And though David suffered consequences for his sin, he was forgiven and restored to spiritual fellowship. We read in Romans 4:6-8 that David was forgiven, not because of his "works" to earn forgiveness, but simply because he asked in faith and sincerely repented. We recognize that our works or actions are an important outward demonstration of our heart, but the sacrifice Jesus Christ paid was the atonement for our sin. In spite of the sin(s) that we commit, as often as we approach the Lord in sincerity, we can ask Him for forgiveness, and He can create in us a clean heart.

John tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9). And we recognize that we "...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" but we are "...justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24), while obviously trying to learn from our mistakes and not continue in sin.

There are many other examples throughout the Bible and Book of Mormon, ranging from kings to apostles, from Jew to Gentile, from rich to poor, from military leaders to common laborers, all illustrating the weakness and sinful, fallen state of God's creation and their need for Christ.

### **The Plan of Salvation prepared the Way...**

As Jesus said, "... to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

(Continued on page 4)



JESUS HEALS  
(a faith quiz)

Matt 8:3  
Who had faith when  
Jesus healed here?  
\_\_\_\_\_.



Jesus heals the  
\_\_\_\_\_’s  
servant remotely.  
He didn’t even have to go  
there, as his faith was  
stronger than any in Israel.  
Matt 8:5-13

Mark 2:11-12  
I say unto thee, Arise, and  
\_\_\_\_\_ and walk.  
Jesus teaches a lesson  
about His authority.



Jesus had faith  
that his compassion on  
a mother in her grief  
could raise her dead son.  
He told her to  
\_\_\_\_\_.  
Luke 7:13



Luke 8:46  
The woman with  
the issue of blood had  
the faith to propel her  
to the Lord. Jesus said  
He felt \_\_\_\_\_ go  
out from him.



Matt 9:27-31  
Two blind men received  
their sight when Jesus  
said that \_\_\_\_\_  
to their \_\_\_\_\_ it was done.  
(And then they  
went out and immediately  
disobeyed him!?)

Faith in Jesus abounded.  
This person said, Truth, Lord:  
yet the \_\_\_\_\_  
of the crumbs which fall  
from the \_\_\_\_\_’s table.  
Matt 15:22-28



Sat., Jan. 27, 2024,  
we witnessed the healing  
of the president  
of our church under  
the laying on of hands.  
Same faith. Same power.  
Glory to God.



# BFTP Blast From The Past

By Sister Kellie Speck



**Sixty-one years ago, in 1963, a “Book of Sermons” was compiled. The following excerpts were from a sermon given by Apostle Gorie Ciaravino called, “A Risen Savior”:**

“Our topic this morning will be on The Risen Savior. For our text, we shall use the 5th Verse of the 30th Psalm: ‘weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.’ Surely, these words might be said to depict The Resurrection of Jesus Christ on this Easter morning. There were sorrow and grief in the hearts of The Disciples, as their Master hung on Calvary’s tree. They became even more remorseful when He was carried away and laid in the sepulcher; but, in the morning, when they heard that He had risen, their hearts were filled with joy. Jesus had endeavored to prepare them for This Day by declaring some of the old prophecies concerning His sufferings and inevitable death; yet, when that day came, their hopes for the redemption of Israel had vanished. Israel had been awaiting redemption from its natural bondage. The Israelites, as a result, overlooked the greater importance of His coming to liberate them from a spiritual bondage. Continuing with the account in Matthew, we find that ‘behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door...’ The stone which had been used as a barrier had been removed, just as were the walls of Jericho which stood as a barrier before Israel.”



## Purpose Statement

- To fulfill the plan of God by bringing salvation through Christ to all people.

## Mission Statement

- The Church of Jesus Christ will teach the Gospel to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things commanded by Jesus Christ, while working to draw Israel to Christ through efforts focused on the indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America



## Vision Statement

- Living and worshipping in unity and righteousness will result in the fullness of God's Spirit and power among the Saints, culminating in continuous growth of the Church and fulfillment of Christ's promises concerning His Kingdom on Earth.



### ***“How High Up?”*** By Brother Doug Obradovich

***“I am not yet ascended to my Father.” – John 20:17***

doubtful, so John and Peter ran to the sepulcher and confirmed all the women had claimed. There were multiple other firsthand encounters with Jesus, which included the spectacular moment when Jesus “stood in the midst” (Luke 24:36) of His 11 disciples, and became the living evidence to His truth, and even allowed Thomas to “put his finger in the print of the nails” (John 20:27).

For 40 additional days, Jesus visited throughout the region, that all might see Him as He had prophesied and promised, the resurrected Savior. However, prior to all these encounters, He had confronted Mary, and explained, “Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father” (John 20:17). He personalized His intended destination, “I ascend unto my Father, and YOUR Father; and to my God, and YOUR God” (John 20:17).

Had Jesus resurrected from the dead at this point? Absolutely. Yet, He had not arrived at His purposed destination, “to my Father.” How high up was His intended purpose? This extraordinary dialogue took place while still in transit to His Father, to His intended ascension. He was only partially “up.”

We, who claim the power of the resurrection, must ask ourselves this same question: “How high up?” The power of the resurrection is not simply to be utilized after our lives are expended. Each of us are still in transit and can claim, “I am not yet ascended to my Father.” We leave the waters of baptism as resurrected beings, but how high up will we venture? We walk into the water as “old” or sinful beings, and walk out of the waters as “new,” sinless creatures. But how high up will we further our travels?

You need not stop now. You can embrace Jesus’ words as your own and continue your ascension, “to my Father.” The power of the resurrection is your intended purpose, but it need not be paused until after you pass from this life. The power of the resurrection can provide countless opportunities to arise immediately, to spiritually grow “up” on a continuous trek towards your final destination.

Don’t stop your upward momentum. Don’t slow your ascent. Don’t be dissuaded from your personal and complete resurrection. The only question remaining concerning your spiritual climb: How high up?

**G**rowing up in West Palm Beach, Florida, my parents would window shop at the Bazaar International in Riviera Beach. A boring endeavor for a 10-year-old, except for the 230-foot-high tower in the center of the mart. The ride up on the floor-to-ceiling-windowed elevator was exhilarating; excitement interspersed with fear as I wondered throughout: “How high up?” How high can it go? How high will it go? Will it maintain? Can I reach the highest point (vs. my fear of plummeting)?

They arrived “very early” that Sunday morning, carrying spices to care for the body of Jesus. They found the entrance stone rolled away, the tomb barren. “Two men stood by them in shining garments” (Luke 24:4), who announced, “He is not here, but is risen” (Matthew 28:6). The women reported to His disciples all they had seen and heard. The men were

Looking at this passage more closely, we see that Jesus:

- is speaking to all (everyone who would seek Him, everyone who would listen to Him, everyone who would consider His ways),
- is looking to those who would come after me (those who would be willing to follow Him, to exercise faith in Him, to repent of their sins, and be baptized),
- is asking us to deny [ourselves] (abstain from actions, words, and even thoughts that would be pleasing to the natural person, but displeasing to God—sin),
- is asking us to take up [our] cross daily (to recognize that EVERY DAY we have the weight of sin to bear),
- Is looking for us to follow [Him] (to lay down the weight of sin at the feet of Jesus every day).

Although David lived approximately 1,000 years before Jesus, like many others throughout the Bible and Book of Mormon, he understood that Christ would come, and that repentance would bring about a “clean heart” and a “right spirit”.

Lehi’s son Jacob, who lived approximately 500 years before Jesus, said this about the importance of having a pure heart, “But behold, I, Jacob, would speak unto you that are pure in heart. Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions... O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever.” (Jacob 3:1-2)

Even in our day, the Lord continues to remind us of the importance and need of having a pure heart! In April 2022, the Priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ accepted an experience as a revelation from God. An excerpt from this experience says: “See now what is before you [conditions in the world] and know that your heart must be sure and your heart must be right and you must be anchored, anchored, anchored, to the principles of My Son, Jesus Christ, the Rock of Salvation that was given through Him and the sacrifice! Are you there? Is your vision clear? Are your eyes focused? Is there love in your heart or is there malice? Cleanse it now! Cleanse it now, that you may see and you may be part, thus saith the Lord.”

This message is very clear and pointed. It applies to The Church of Jesus Christ, individually and collectively. We as individuals need to be found faithful, serving Jesus Christ, covered by His blood and His righteousness. We need to keep our hearts pure through individual surrender to His commandments and will, maintaining a perpetual spiritual readiness, no matter what chaos or hardship occurs in our lives or in the world. We must possess the pure love of God and be cleansed of sin in order to reach a level of righteousness and sufficient faith (Ether 4:6) that in so doing, our individual lives and the Church will be blessed with greater power through the truth of the Bible, Book of Mormon, and the restoration.

The Quorum of Twelve Apostles, hand in hand with the entire priesthood (Evangelists, Elders, and Teachers), are actively working to encourage our members to stay within the Ark of Safety (the Church), and to purify our hearts by staying within the teachings and boundaries established by Christ (not the world).

### **But how can our hearts be made clean and anchored to Christ?**

The process of creating a clean heart is all about yielding our hearts to God. Yielding means to “give way, permit, or allow” Jesus to come first. Helaman 3:35 states, “Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.” We all need to learn how to yield more of our daily lives. Here are a few ways each of us can yield our hearts:

**Be Repentant** - We all sin (by our very nature) and even with our very best efforts and intentions, it would still not be enough to remain pure. Since we would never be able to repay the debt of sin, God offered His son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. But we must accept this sacrifice daily by repenting and seeking forgiveness (and learning from our mistakes by not continuing in them). And when we seek the Lord, in sincerity, God forgives us! A repentant heart is a purified and sanctified heart!

**Spend time in the Word of God** - The Bible and Book of Mormon offer us His timeless word. Spending time on a regular basis, reading and studying, helps provide clarity, strength, understanding, wisdom, peace, and direction for our lives. It helps us focus our hearts on what is important. It allows us to see where our thoughts and feelings align or fail to line up with God’s intention. If you struggle with this, as many do, try an audio version of the Bible and Book of Mormon, look for a daily scripture devotional, download the Church app so you can read the word anywhere, set up a scheduled time to read every day, subscribe to the Gospel Blog, read the Gospel News, view Church videos and listen to Church podcasts, because every effort we make will bring us closer to a purified heart!

**Spend time in Prayer (and Fasting)** - Prayer goes hand in hand with spending time in the word of God. When we take time with the Lord, we open our hearts to allow Him to cleanse us. It’s a time to draw closer to Him as we share our personal thoughts (of thanks and supplication). And when we’re able to combine fasting with prayer we purify and sanctify our hearts (Helaman 3:35). If you struggle with prayer and especially fasting, don’t overthink it—start small because the marathon runner didn’t start training on the first day by running 26 miles! Every effort we make, no matter the size, will bring us closer to a purified and sanctified heart!

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## A Glorious New Day

By Brother Duane Loyalvo

Jesus hung motionless on the cross. His body bore the evidence of His torture and abuse at the hands of His captors: a crown of thorns, nails driven through His hands and His feet, a hole in His side, blood running down the cross to the moist earth. The disciples, no doubt, were wracked with grief over this terrifying development. Their Master, Savior, and friend was gone. The man with whom they had spent countless hours, who had led them preaching throughout Palestine, performed miracles, taught them, was taken from them and laid in a tomb. They could not comprehend what had just happened. Who was going to lead them? Who was going to finish the job that He started? Who was going to deliver Israel from the captivity of the Romans? Who was going to deliver the Jews from the oppression of the Pharisees and the harshness of the Law? In their eyes, this man, Jesus, whom they acknowledged was the Son of God, was defeated, overcome by the powers and principalities of the world. This was catastrophic. In that horrifying moment did they remember what Christ had said to them just one day prior? "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (John 16:7-8)

If the followers of Christ did recall that He told them He was going to leave them, His words now rang hollow in their hearts and minds. They mourned for three days. And after three days had passed, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James went to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ, perhaps for the last time. But when they arrived, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty! In her grief, Mary Magdalene turned away and found herself face to face with a man she did not recognize. "Woman, why weepst thou?" He asked. And when Jesus called her by name, "Mary," she knew it was Him. He was alive! And she ran to tell the disciples.

Meanwhile, the disciples were gathered together in an upper room, somewhere in Jerusalem. They were keeping the doors shut to avoid detection from their tormentors, the Jewish leaders. Soon, reports started to come in from multiple witnesses that they had seen Jesus, in the flesh! But the disciples refused to believe them. To make matters worse, Peter and John had already visited the tomb and verified that His body was indeed gone, perhaps stolen by the Jews. Could things get any worse?

But, later that day, while they sat at dinner, something incredible happened. Out of nowhere, Jesus appeared, standing in their midst, saying "Peace be unto you." What a glorious occasion! Jesus was alive! Ten of the disciples rejoiced, but Thomas was not there. He still did not believe. So, eight days later Jesus appeared again. This time he told Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). Is it any wonder that in commemoration of this wonderful day, The Church of Jesus Christ gathers on the first day of the week, Sunday, to worship Him?

And so, the disciples were with Jesus for forty days before He ascended up into heaven. John wrote of those times saying, "And there are also many things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (John 21:25). Of course, Jesus' promise, that a Comforter would come, came true ten days later. On the Day of Pentecost, they were all gathered together once again, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house...And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost..." (Acts 2:2-4). Amen.

**Watch our Thoughts, Words, and Actions** - Thoughts, words, and actions are often a reflection of our heart. So, if our desire is to purify our hearts, we must be mindful of each of these. In other words, the things that fill our thoughts are often the things that will come out through our words and actions. Being self-aware of thoughts, choosing to intentionally control where our mind goes by placing greater focus on our spiritual walk will help strengthen what we say and how we say it. It will influence our actions despite the cloudy distractions our society and culture offer us about the love of God. Being conscious of our thoughts, words, and actions will help us align ourselves with Christ and become more like Christ. Not doing this will yield the opposite effect!

**Look out for Distractions** - Along any path, we often find things that distract us, or draw our attention away from what's really important. This happens to everyone in varying degrees. In fact, it's so easy to be distracted that we often don't even realize it's happening. When we do see it, we often rationalize it because "it's not sinful," or we justify it by thinking, "it won't be this way forever." Our focus must be on Christ as we seek a clean heart—it means we can't turn to the weak and beggarly elements of life. We must be mindful to guard against every weight (distraction) that so easily besets us.

**Seek out Advice** - Everyone has struggles and challenges that we think no one else would ever understand or have experienced. The truth is, God gave us fellowship with others who share the gospel of Jesus Christ—the Church, the Ark of Safety, as a place where we can find spiritual advice with Godly wisdom. The Lord has called and ordained men and women to help provide spiritual advice and guidance. He's given us our brothers and sisters, many of whom are friends and mentors. It's important to surround ourselves with like-minded people by attending church and seeking out those who can offer spiritual wisdom as a priceless gift on our journey to a pure heart.

**Abstain from Sin** - While it may go without saying, each of

us must abstain from sin and even the very appearance of it, because the Lord wants to bless us, use us, prepare us and save us! He wants us to cleanse our heart of malice (ill feelings toward others or hatred), abstain from fornication (sex outside of marriage), from lust (desiring or wanting something that isn't good for us), from pride (being arrogant or having excessive self-esteem), from greed (desire or love of wealth or money), from envy (jealousy), from addictions (being dependent on a substance or behavior that is detrimental), etc., etc. Jesus asks that we abstain from EVERY sin that would draw us away from His perfect will.

### **In Summary**

Life can be hard, and the challenges we face in our future may be even more difficult than those of today, BUT with Christ, our burdens are lightened because He has overcome it all! This is where we must focus our hearts—by placing our trust and faith in Him! We need Jesus in our daily lives, not just on Sunday or when we're in need! Let us each give attention to sincere repentance, studying the scriptures, fasting and praying, singing songs of praise, spiritual fellowship, church attendance, and reviewing our personal life priorities, to ensure our hearts are pure so that the Lord might "create in each of us, a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us."

In the love of God,

### **The Quorum of Twelve Apostles**

James Crudup, Joel Gehly, Pete Giannetti, John Griffith, Scott Griffith, Paul Liberto, Thomas M. Liberto, Leonard A. Lovalvo, Frank Natoli, Paul A. Palmieri, Peter Scolaro, Jerry Valenti

**To learn more about The Church of Jesus Christ, with Headquarters in Monongahela, PA, please visit our website. The World Operations Center for world-wide missionary efforts is in Greensburg, PA.**

[www.thechurchofjesuschrist.org](http://www.thechurchofjesuschrist.org)

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## ***Mesa Branch Visit from Brother David Picciuto***

***By Sister Valerie Dulisse***

**B**rother David Picciuto from the San Carlos Mission visited the Mesa Branch, opening our service by calling the hymn, "The Gospel Restored" in the Saints Hymnal. He shared that songs like this were like the original Songs of Zion. Brother David stated that sometimes we ask ourselves, how can I be chosen of God?, and we need to remember that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We can look to Christ at any moment, any time of day, and He will be there to comfort us, and help us to achieve His purposes in our lives. Brother David exhorted us that the time is far spent,

and we need to bring this Gospel that we have been given to the seed of Joseph, tell them of God's plan, and lift them from the sad lives and depressed state that many experience. We have an obligation to them. Judgment will start in the House of God. We as individuals must DO something.

In 2 Timothy 3:3-4 it states that "In the last days perilous times shall come..." This scripture mirrors today's society. Brother David shared with us that a minister recently spoke of how we as a nation are in trouble.

(Continued on page 8)

## What Does Easter Mean to Me?

By Sister Sydney Lovalvo

Growing up, Easter was always my favorite holiday, but I couldn't really pinpoint why. Maybe it was the pastel colors everywhere I looked, the fact that Springtime could possibly be coming soon, or the excitement at Church followed by gathering with family that always filled my soul. Even though there was no specific "thing" that made Easter my favorite, it just was.

Once I was in my early twenties and started working in a hospital, I quickly realized that Easter wasn't an official "holiday," therefore there wasn't a rotation for who worked Easter each year. At that point I was working Saturdays and Sundays a few times a month and of course, I was scheduled to work on Easter. It was also 2021, our branch had just opened back up after the COVID closure, and I so desperately wanted to be at Church.

In the month leading up to Easter I was pretty frantic, asking every coworker on my unit to swap days with me or even just work half of my shift so I could still have some of my Easter. Everyone said no, and I was heartbroken that I would miss the holiday. My coworkers were familiar with the fact that I was a religious person and was involved in Church activities, so when I was at work explaining how upset I was about missing Easter, my friend said, "Wow, so you're really upset about missing Easter because of your love for the Lord and not because of the material Easter celebrations." She didn't phrase it as a question, she really believed that's how I felt and I responded by saying, "Of course!" My coworker walked away, but I stood there frozen because she barely knew me and was confident that was why I was upset, but I personally couldn't feel in my heart that that was the full reason behind my feelings.

This conversation stuck with me because I was so frustrated with myself. It may sound silly, but it really was something that stopped me in my tracks. Was my love for Easter because of the material things that came along with the holiday, or because of the Salvation that was provided? Suddenly, at 22 years old, I started reflecting and digging deeper into my own faith, feeling ashamed that I hadn't done it earlier.

I was 16 years old when I was baptized. I thought I was very mature at the time, but as I reflected, I realized how young and naïve I was. Of course, I felt the Lord's love, gave my life

to Him, and wanted to be a dedicated servant. But now at 22, what was I really doing to understand more about the Lord?

This reflection period took up about a month of my life. I felt like my whole life since being baptized was a movie in my mind, thinking about what I had learned thus far. I was brought back to my late grandmother, Loretta Lovalvo's, constant testimony. During this time, she was going through treatments for pancreatic cancer and any time she would go to Church, she would stand up and testify, thanking the Lord for sending His son Jesus Christ to die and resurrect so that we all might have Salvation. And as I kept thinking, I realized that was her testimony all the time, sick or not, she was thankful for her Salvation. Admittedly, I was probably being hard on myself, but I thought, "How often am I thankful for my Salvation? Especially if that is what Easter is all about." In that moment, I really decided to think more about the resurrection.

But also in that moment, I finally felt like I understood. The thought of being tortured and dying on the cross is unimaginable to me, but Jesus Christ did just that for me. Three days later, He rose again. His resurrection provides Salvation: Eternal life is given to me if I repent of my sins and give my life to Him. Of course, at that point in my life I was already baptized, but I felt such an overwhelming feeling of love and peace from the Lord. It was like it had finally "clicked" for me and honestly, a weight lifted off my shoulders.

I was obviously still bummed that I had to work on Easter, but I went into it with a new mindset and my heart was full of joy because I was thankful that Jesus died and rose again for my Salvation. He paid the ultimate price for me, and all of us. I felt happiness and peace all that day, not once thinking about the things I was missing at Church or with my family.

While this whole story may seem silly or small to some, it made a huge impact on my life. Today, I try my best to reflect often on the amazing things that have happened to me because of the Lord's goodness. I remind myself to never forget that my life is what it is because He has been in the matter. And of course, I have found a new meaning and appreciation for my Salvation, which is why, three years later, Easter is still my favorite holiday and means so much to me.

(Continued from page 6)

People endorse perversion, calling it a diverse lifestyle. We neglect disciplining our children so we don't hinder their self-expression. We are living in a world that is upside-down! We must be rooted and grounded in the Lord and His teachings. When we stand before Him, what will He say to us? Brother David then shared a dream he had of his father, Brother Dan Picciuto, after Brother Dan had passed away. Brother Dan walked up a ridge, and Brother David viewed the land and said to his father, "Dad, the promises are exactly what we are seeing in Zion!"

Brother Caleb Picciuto sang "How Great Thou Art". He had recently suffered affliction caused by complex migraines, and was struggling to walk and talk, with weakness and paralysis on his left side. He gave his testimony that he had been feeling very down a few weeks prior. God spoke to him then and told him to read the story of Moses lifting his hands during the battle. God told Caleb to raise his hands and give praise to the Lord. Caleb was following the Lord's command,

singing his heart out, and there was no sign in his song of the speech difficulty he had been suffering!

A beautiful season of testimony followed. Brother Pete Giannetti shared that when he went to visit Sister Yvonne Saffron, who has been afflicted, he was suffering himself with his own affliction of anxiety attacks following a serious fall and concussion he had experienced the previous year. Sister Yvonne quoted the third verse of "The Time is Far Spent," which says, "Be fixed in your purpose, for Satan will try you; the weight of your calling he perfectly knows; Your path may be thorny, but Jesus is nigh you; His arm is sufficient, tho' demons oppose."

Our sister told Brother Pete, "This is for you. It is what is happening to you, but God will bring you through it." And HE HAS! We praise God for this miracle of healing in our Brother Pete, and for this encouragement God gave of the healing to come. Praise the Lord!

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## ***The Indictment and the Invitation***

***By Sister Valerie Dulisse***

**D**ecember 10, 2023 was the Baptism Day for our new, young brother in Christ, Elias (Eli) Vargas. One week prior, a sister who is blessed with the gift of visions told the minister passing her sacrament that she was seeing a light descending over Eli's head, and that God was calling him. The ministry waited upon the Lord to touch Elias to make his desire known. As soon as our sacrament service ended, Elias stood upon his feet and requested his baptism!

We met at the banks of the Salt River to witness the fulfillment of his calling to be baptized. He was baptized by Brother Austin Landrey and the bestowal of the Holy Ghost took place during the prayer of Brother Anthony Scolaro.

Brother Brandon Dulisse was visiting from Forest Hills, FL branch that day, and he opened with John 1:29, where John the Apostle was identifying Christ as both the sacrificial lamb and the scapegoat, as written in the Talmud. He was indicating Christ was ordained to purify His people, but also to purge, according to the rituals of the Israelite people. In Isaiah 1:11-18, there is an indictment and an invitation. God is speaking here of making the physical sacrifice of animals, but while they carried this out, the hearts of the people were empty. They pursued the things that fulfilled and gratified their flesh.

The Lord gives His people an indictment, but along with the indictment He gives an invitation to be redeemed. Though their sins be as scarlet, God can change that; He invited His people to purge and purify their lives of sin.

In Matthew 27:25, when Pilate couldn't get the Israelites to listen to reason, he washed his hands of the condemnation

of Jesus. It was done symbolically; God gave His people an opportunity to become clean, but Israel asked for Christ's blood to be upon their heads and their children's heads. That blood upon their heads can now be washed away, because of Jesus' grace and forgiveness. Brother Brandon made an analogy between the two goats in the Talmud ordinances: the sacrificial goat and scapegoat, and the two men: Jesus and Barabbas.

In Matthew 27:28, the soldiers put a scarlet robe on Jesus to mock Him; but scarlet represents the sin of all the people. Traditionally, a scarlet ribbon was hung on the temple in the Talmud practices to signify the sins of the people. Then at the end of the year, the ribbon would turn white, which signified that God had accepted their sacrifice for their sin. There is only one sacrifice that God now accepts: that of His pure and sinless Son, Jesus. Therefore, something that is dyed red does not need to stay red. In Revelation 7:9, John the Revelator saw every person arrayed in white. When we see no hope for ourselves, God offers a solution: to be changed from scarlet to white, when He forgives our sins. The garment dyed red only stays red if we choose not to acknowledge the sacrifice of Christ in our lives. Everyone who is in heaven will be spotless, without sin, because of the sacrifice of Christ!

Brother Pete Giannetti followed, speaking of Brother Eli's baptism that day. "Brother Eli has entered into a covenant with Almighty God." He told Brother Eli that every Sunday, the deaconesses had been fasting and praying before our service that souls would come to God and saints that have left the Church would return to God. He referenced Mosiah 5:5: We are willing to enter into a covenant with God,

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to do His will and be obedient in all things. Brother Pete shared what is meant by all things: to serve God with all our hearts, to be there for one another, and now we are the sons and daughters of Christ!

Brother Pete then shared an experience when flying in a corporate jet with his co-workers when the front wheel under the plane was cocked and would not go up. For over an hour, it was a very intense, potentially dangerous situation. Brother Pete told his fellow passengers he was going to pray, to which they all agreed. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him as he poured his heart out to the Lord. As they were beginning to land in Tucson, chosen as an alternative airport because the runway was much larger than their original destination, Brother Pete began singing, "Sheltered in the Arms of God".

The pilot kept that front wheel from touching the ground for as long as he could, and they landed safely, thanking God for His mercy on them. Brother Pete added that, despite his recent bout with anxiety, he fared better than his associates who suffered emotionally and even became physically ill from the rough landing. Our brother exhorted us that wherever we go, whatever we do, take Jesus with us!! He told our new brother that no gift we would receive this Christmas would ever compare with the gift Brother Eli received from the Lord on this day!

Brother Eli then expressed himself in a grateful testimony to the Lord for calling him into this Church. What a glorious day, and how good our God is, constantly calling, forgiving us, and protecting us from all harm. We are indeed a blessed people!

## Ladies' Uplift Circle News



### **Nature and Christ** By Sister Marty Jumper

I have a great love of nature. I am amazed at the seasons, and how they follow the same sequence each year. Spring precedes summer, then fall, followed by winter. It is always in the same order and each season has its beauty. We are in winter now, but we look forward with great anticipation to the coming of spring, a time of new beginnings. As the grass turns green, the trees start to form leaves, and the spring flowers unfold and share their beauty as they color the land, we know that we will soon be celebrating the beautiful holiday of Easter, the time when Jesus granted us a chance for a new beginning. Because of His death and resurrection, He provided an avenue for us to return to our heavenly Father, to begin again, free of sin. I'm thrilled by the scriptures that tell me how nature itself acknowledged the authority of Jesus. Jesus is the God of nature.

John 1:3 reads; "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Because all things were created by Him, nature respects and abides by His thoughts and words. Helaman 14:4-5 speaks of nature revealing the time of Christ's birth. There would be great lights in the heavens and the night before He was born, there would be no darkness. Also, a new star would appear "such an one as ye never have beheld." The same star was seen in Bethlehem leading the magi to find Jesus.

The Easter story is replete with examples of nature acknowledging the majesty of the Lord. On His triumphant ride into Jerusalem, Jesus rode an unbroken colt, which obediently took Him into the city. As He came close to the city, the crowds followed Him rejoicing and praising Him and, as usual, the Pharisees complained and asked Jesus to silence the people. Luke 19:40; "And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." Again, this shows

that nature recognized Jesus as the Creator and the stones would have praised Him if the people had stopped. Nature reacted strongly to the crucifixion of Christ. Referencing III Nephi, chapter 8, Number 170 in The Songs of Zion tells of how nature responded on this land at the death of Jesus.

#### Verse 1

The rocks bowed down when my Savior died,  
The earth cried out "He is crucified."  
The cities fell and the mountains rose,  
and many wept for the life they chose.

#### Verse 2

The trees bent low when our Savior died,  
The weeping willow broke down and cried.  
The lightning cracked and the thunder roared,  
for nature knew they had slain our Lord.

At the same time in Jerusalem, the earth quaked, the veil of the temple was torn in two, rocks were split, and tombs were opened (Matthew 27:50-52). Nature, and all those who knew and loved Jesus, were angry and sad. Sadness turned to joy as on the third day the tomb was found empty.

Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;  
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever with His saints to reign,  
He arose! He arose!  
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

—Saints Hymnal, Number 357

This Easter let us, like nature, respect and abide by His thoughts and words and we will praise His name forever.



## The Empty Tomb

Dear Friends,

Did you know that there are millions of people on this earth that do not know God created everything in the world and the entire cosmos? They make up religions. They worship statues or a good luck charm.

They follow bad people. They are selfish and hurt others. But when they have trouble, they also have no one real to help them.

But we do. Over two thousand years ago a Messiah, or Savior, was born into this world. Prophets and those close to God had been preaching about this wonderful birth of God's son, Jesus, and millions had been waiting for Him. He came and taught us.

We celebrate His birth at Christmas, and when He let them put him on a cross over thirty years later, we celebrate how Jesus changed the world. Keep in mind that Jesus willingly let Himself be put to death and three days later, the tomb He was buried in was empty. He had resurrected! He proved it! His soul would live forever. And so do ours!

This is how mankind learned of the power and promises of God. Jesus was in heaven with God before He was born to Mary. He taught us that everything we do is known to God. And after our bodies die, our souls go before God to be judged.

So the world needs a friend in heaven to help us. We need someone who understands we are human and we make mistakes and are sorry. The whole world needs God's direction of how we should live and love each other, forgive each other, help each other, and thank the Creator, God. Jesus understands us.

Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of our heart, souls, and minds. The second great commandment was to love our neighbor (other people) like we love ourselves! (See Matthew 22:34-39.) Think how much kinder the world would be if we really did treat others the way we wanted to be treated!

Remember, when Jesus allowed His body to be killed on the cross, He had all the power to stop the evil men who hated Him. He also knew the day, the time and even which man—Judas—would bring the angry guards from the Temple to take Him away. But He was going to be the last sacrifice and prove that there is life after death when He came back alive and the tomb was empty!

When the mob came to take Jesus, Apostle Peter wanted to fight them.

He grabbed a weapon and sliced off the ear of one of the guards taking the Lord. Jesus put the ear back on and healed him.

And He said, "Don't you know that I could ask my Father (God) and He would send 12 Legions of Angels?" (See Matthew 26:13.) A legion is 6,000. So that would make 72,000 angels fighting on his side!

But Jesus proved heaven is real. His words were also true. His tomb was empty and weeping soon turned to joy when his followers understood the beauty and power of the Lord!

With love,  
Your friend and Sister in Christ,

*Sister Jan*

## DIRECTIONS FOR JESUS IS MY FRIEND CHAIN

### Materials:

Paper (can be printing paper or any color that you can write on), a ruler, tape, and markers.

### Directions:

Cut paper into 10 strips. Use width of a ruler 1" x 8". Once each link is attached to the next, secure with tape. Using markers, write a word describing Jesus. Decorate with hearts and designs.

Some possible word choices to write on the chain:

JESUS IS KIND  
JESUS HELPS US  
HE IS A FRIEND  
HAS POWER  
LISTENS TO US  
JESUS IS LOVE  
KNOWS EVERYTHING  
LOVES CHILDREN  
IS ALIVE!



**HANG IN YOUR ROOM OR GIVE TO A FRIEND!**



THE CHURCH OF  
**Jesus<sup>®</sup>  
Christ**

# SAVE THE DATE

**GMBA CAMPOUT 2024**

**JUNE 22-28**

**@ PENN WEST  
UNIVERSITY,  
CALIFORNIA PA**

**REGISTRATION DETAILS  
COMING SOON!**



## ***How does the resurrection of Jesus help you live by faith, even in these difficult days?***

"He keeps His promises; He said He would never leave or forsake us. So I trust in Him wholeheartedly in ALL things." -Sister Dienna Rogers, Irvine, CA Branch

"Although I am going through cancer treatment for the second time in six years, I fully believe that God is rich in Grace and Mercy. The resurrection of Jesus is my greatest hope, that even if I don't live to see Zion, I know that one day I will see my resurrected Savior." - Brother George Kovacic, Middle Tennessee Mission

"Life is full of so many twists and turns, so many ups and downs, but starting each new day with a prayer that God will walk with us through the day and protect us, guide us, and strengthen us to face whatever the day holds always brings a sense of peace and a kind of euphoric joy, even amid all the struggles. God is the only one who brings true peace in the middle of a storm." -Sister Jan Offet, Bell, CA, Branch

"I know that God has a plan, and my salvation is secure. Whatever comes, I'm in His hands." -Sister Anita Znoy, Creekside, MI Branch

"Knowing Jesus resurrected and is alive gives strength, joy, and faith. I know He is with us in the fire and difficult times. As He promised, He will never leave us comfortless." -Brother Michael Zaino, Edison, NJ Branch

"These days, I know I have to stay strong and put all my faith in Jesus Christ. There will be good days and bad days, but knowing He is by my side gives me hope that there are better days ahead." -Sister Kim Morle, Atlanta, GA Branch

# Blessing Bits

**BB Lead Me to the Waters -** Toward the end of September 2023, I had a vision where I saw feet leading me to a river. I was reminded of Christ's words in the 4th chapter of John as He speaks with the Samaritan woman, "But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." As I meditated upon those words, I saw how the pursuit of that living water has led me away from my former life of sin and emptiness. Like a porcelain doll shattered into a million pieces, I (had) cried out to God to put me back together; make me whole again. And I heard a voice say, "(Those things) were never meant to be, for you are a new creation." In Him I have new life. To God be the glory! - Sis. Fatima Macias, Bell, CA Branch

**BB Tears Calmed by Faith -** My 5-year-old has started losing her teeth and this big, exciting moment we'd built up was, in the moment, a colossal and terrifying experience for her until that first tooth was in her little hand. I resolved that next time a wiggly tooth was ready to come out, we'd do better. Well, next time was smack in the middle of getting to bed late after a very long day, and my capacity to meet her where she was... well... depleted. Making her anxiety worse, I impatiently attempted to convince her to just pull it out, or go to bed and try again tomorrow. It finally dawned on me that I should pray. I simply asked the Lord to take away her fear and protect her tooth overnight. Tears calmed by pure faith, she lay down and fell asleep. The next morning her tooth was still there! Her tiny, relieved voice said, "God heard you pray, mommy." With pure trust, faith, and gratitude she whispered,

"Thank you, Jesus." It took another hour to get that tooth out, but because of the faith of my child, I was reminded and so blessed to use that time to pray with her again, be grateful for His love for us in the small-big things, and slowly grow her confidence with patience and tenderness the way Jesus does with me every single day. - Sis. Amy Buccellato Wolfsohn, Simi Valley, CA Branch

**BB A Chance Encounter -** One of the patrons at my local gym happens to be a retired actor who has a large social media presence which focuses on his Christian values. We got to talking one day and I was able to share about our Church and the values we have. I've never had the opportunity to share like that before (let alone at the gym)! This interaction inspired me to start studying more so that I can have even more confidence when talking about Jesus Christ! Two blessings in one! - Sis. Alyssa Morle, Atlanta, GA Mission

**BB Amazing Healing -** I was at a Pacific Region conference and my hands started to swell. I went to the restroom to try and get the rings off of my hands. They were so swollen that I caused an open wound on both ring fingers and they were bleeding. Brother David Picciuto took out his blessed oil, said "I anoint you in the name of Jesus Christ," and walked out. I went and sat back down and showed my wife my wounded fingers. When the meeting was over 20 minutes later, I looked at my hands and both fingers had been restored to perfect condition. Thank God for a simple but profound anointing miracle in my life! - Bro. Darron Surdock, San Diego, CA Branch

Send us your Blessing Bits by contacting Sister Elizabeth McDonnell at [eksanchor@gmail.com](mailto:eksanchor@gmail.com). [in approximately 150 words]. Answers to Question of the Month to [gospelnews@thechurchofjesuschrist.org](mailto:gospelnews@thechurchofjesuschrist.org).



## Question for this month:

**Camp 2024 will be here soon! If you could only bring 5 things to camp what would they be?**



## Answer from last month:

**Through faith in Jesus, God makes us alive as well (Ephesians 2:1-10). How does the resurrection of Jesus help you live by faith, even in these difficult days?**

Turn to page 11 for answers.



*The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come... Song of Solomon 2:12*