



THE **WITNESS**

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And it shall come to pass in the last days, when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hill, and all nations shall flow unto it, And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (2 Nephi 8:18-19 RLDS) [2 Nephi 12:2-3 LDS]

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*Merry
Christmas!*



Christmas provides an opportunity to share with our readers how important you are to us. To those who have given financially, thank you for your gifts. We also thank everyone who taught classes, attended BMF activities, wrote articles, served on committees, directed programs and volunteered at the office.

The Book of Mormon Foundation wishes each of you a Merry Christmas. This greeting means much more when shared with friends and family as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We wish for you happiness throughout the year. We also wish for you the gifts of health and prosperity to meet your needs. Most importantly, we wish you peace and joy that comes from the relationship you have with your Heavenly Father.

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THE WITNESS



Who Were The Wise Men?

by Verneil W. Simmons
Images by Marla Kroesen

Mormon writes two fascinating verses near the end of the Book of Helaman:

But it came to pass in the ninetieth year of the reign of the Judges, there were great signs given unto the people, and wonders; And the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled; and angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy; thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled. (Helaman 5:125-126 RLDS) [Helaman 16:13-14 LDS]

It was Alma who had written that they were just waiting for the joyful news of Christ's coming to be declared to them by angels. The "glad tidings of great joy" must have heralded the coming birth of Jesus, although the event was still almost two years away.

This writer is not the first to point out the possibility that the "wise men" of Matthew's account, who came to Bethlehem to worship the newborn king, were priesthood members from the church in the land of Zarahemla. Who else was looking for his birth and knew not only the exact time but also the sign of the star which should announce the birth? They had two years and more to make the journey to the "land of Jerusalem" where Alma had prophesied Christ should be born. When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, they asked where the child was, for they had seen the star and knew the birth had taken place. Having found the babe, they were again guided by revelation from God not to return to Herod. That the men who came were of the heritage of Israel, and prophets of the Lord, seems more fitting than the idea that they were

pagan priests of a foreign religion, as the legends have taught.

Only the gospel of Matthew mentions the visit of the wise men, and the account is short.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, 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 2:1-2 KJV] (Matthew 3:1-2 IV)

Herod, after consultation with the priests, sent them to Bethlehem. There they again saw the star and found the child, with his parents, living in a house in the village. Having knelt in worship before the infant, they presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gifts might symbolize his role as king, high priest, and (by his death) Redeemer.

According to Matthew, the commandment to take the child and flee to Egypt followed immediately upon the departure of the visitors. If so, then some weeks had passed since the birth of the baby. Luke writes that Jesus had been taken to the temple in Jerusalem after the required forty-day purification period for Mary. They had gone up to make the sacrifice offering of a pair of turtledoves or young pigeons, as was the custom following the birth of a male child. There Simeon had taken the child in his arms and prophesied concerning him. This must have preceded the arrival of the wise men. Only Matthew refers to the sojourn in Egypt.

Legends, which perhaps began as early as the second century, made these men three in number,



MARLA KROESEN

and eventually equated them with the Magi of Persia. Sometime in the Middle Ages they were given Oriental names. The term *magi* is now known to be an old Accadian word, used to designate one of the learned priestly class who was also a keeper of sacred things. Under the later Persian Empire, the Magi were also considered diviners and astrologers. The ancient Semitic term could have been correctly used, implying that these men were priests of God. Legend later turned them into Oriental kings. Interestingly enough, legend also maintains that one of them was dark-skinned.

If we were to propose three names from our Book of Mormon story to qualify as the legendary three wise men, we would have to suggest Nephi, his brother Lehi, and the Lamanite prophet, Samuel. Nephi left the land of Zarahemla following the news brought by the angels of the nearness of Christ's birth. He turned all the records and sacred things over to his son, also called Nephi, and then disappeared. No one knew where he had gone. He never returned to Zarahemla and, though a search was made, he could not be found anywhere in the land. It was also said of Samuel, the Lamanite that he nevermore was heard of among the Nephites. As for Lehi, he seemed always to accompany his brother on their missionary journeys. He could have gone along on this one as well. Remember that the Lord had promised Nephi that he could have whatever he asked for, because

the Lord knew he would not ask for anything contrary to His will. He and his brother had been named, by their father Helaman; in memory of their forefathers who had left Jerusalem. He had taught them to remember the words of Lehi and Nephi whenever they remembered their own names. There must have been a strong desire on their part to see the land of Jerusalem from which their forefathers came, especially when they knew the Christ was to be born there in a very short time.

Of course, this is speculation and cannot be proved, but it does no harm to suggest the possibility that the angels' message to wise men, as recorded by Mormon, is a clue to the wise men of Matthew's account.

Christ Is Born!

The author of Third Nephi was the son of the prophet Nephi, who disappeared from Zarahemla just prior to the sign of Christ's birth. He had been custodian of the records and sacred objects from the time of his father's disappearance from the land. He continued the record, beginning his account in the ninety-first year of the Judges. This was also the six hundredth year since Lehi had left the land of Jerusalem. The evidence of Christ's birth, his death, his appearance in land Bountiful, and his ministry there is contained in Third Nephi. The writer was one of the twelve disciples chosen by our Lord in this land.

Fourth Nephi is a very short account begun by the son of Nephi the disciple, but so greatly condensed by Mormon that apparently even one in the line of historians was left out. It covers the period from A.D. 34 to A.D. 320. Sometimes Third and Fourth Nephi are referred to as the New Testament portion of the Book of Mormon.

Nephi's account began in the year that marked the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy. It was time for the sign that would mark Christ's birth in Judea—a night that would seem as day, and the appearance of a new star. Those of the church who

were anticipating these wonders were greatly in the minority. The majority of the population had decided the time predicted by Samuel was past, thus making him a false prophet. A day was set for the death of all those still awaiting the sign.

Nephi the prophet went to the Lord in fervent prayer on behalf of the people who had faith in the prophecies. The Lord answered his prayer in these words:

Lift up your head and be of good cheer. for behold. the time is at hand. and on this night shall the sign be given. And on the morrow come I unto the world. to shew unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.

(3 Nephi 1:12-13 RLDS)

[3 Nephi 1:12-13 LDS]

Night came, the sun set, but darkness did not fall. It continued as light as though it were midday. An unknown star also appeared, as Samuel had prophesied. The next morning the sun arose at the proper time and the people in all the land marveled at these strange happenings. Many were fearful because the sign had appeared, for they knew that it marked the birth of the Son of God. Some repented of their disbelief and their many sins and went to Nephi for baptism.

But even the wonder of a night without darkness soon faded and the populace “began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen....” Shortly the Gadianton robbers were back in business, determined to take over the control of the government in Zarahemla.

Lachoneus was governor, having taken office sometime prior to the sign of Christ's birth. In A.D. 17 Giddianhi,

the leader of the Gadianton band, sent a letter to Lachoneus. He boldly demanded that the country and the government be turned over to his organization of robbers; otherwise he would attack and destroy the people. Lachoneus had a month in which to make his decision. He used it to alert the people to the danger and to ready the armies for combat. He named one of the leading prophets, Gidgiddoni, as his commander of the armies. (3 Nephi 2:24 RLDS)

[3 Nephi 3:19 LDS]

Gidgiddoni's strategy was to call all the people into the center of their lands, with their possessions and supplies. Here he placed the armies to protect the people and waited for the robbers to attack. The land which they were prepared to defend encompassed the territory from the northern boundary of Bountiful to the southern boundary of Zarahemla. The total land area could not have been



MARLA KROESEN

great for there was only a month for the people to receive the warning, gather their possessions and supplies, and move themselves into the central zone.

When the robber bands began to take possession of the abandoned cities and land, they found no foodstuffs and no wild game. They

could find meat only in their own wild mountains. They dared not attempt to raise crops in the cultivated areas because of the attacks of the Nephite armies. Thus Giddianhi was finally forced to come to battle, as the Nephite general had planned. He lost the battle, along with his life. His successor, Zemnahiah, tried a siege rather than a direct attack, but was unsuccessful since the Nephites still had sufficient supplies and the robbers were unprovisioned.

The eventual decision was to abandon the whole campaign and retreat to the far reaches of the land northward, which would have taken them beyond Nephite territory. But their retreat was cut off by the Nephite army and their leader captured, along with thousands of his men. Zemnarihah was hanged and the rest imprisoned. Thus ended the civil war with the Gadiantons, which had lasted nine years.

It was now more than twenty-five years since the sign had been given and Mormon writes, "This book cannot contain even a hundredth part of what was done among so many people, in the space of twenty and five years." (3 Nephi 2:92 RLDS) [3 Nephi 5:8 LDS] The people had returned to their ancestral lands, with their families and all their possessions, and other land had been given to those robbers who had signed a peace treaty. But there was a great deal of social unrest in the country and the church was affected, as well as the nation.



And some were lifted up unto pride and boastings, because of their exceeding great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions: for there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers. And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches, and their chances for learning; Yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches;

Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceeding humble; ... And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land, save it were among a few of the Lamanites, who were converted unto the true faith; And they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.

(3 Nephi 3:11-16 RLDS)

[3 Nephi 6:10-14 LDS]

Mormon adds his own commentary:

Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did willfully rebel against God.

(3 Nephi 3:20 RLDS) [3 Nephi 6:18 LDS]

Again prophets came among the people, not

only warning them concerning their sins and iniquities but testifying boldly of the coming death, resurrection, and redemptive ministry of Christ. This brought persecution from those in official positions such as lawyers and judges. The law provided that no such officer could condemn anyone to death unless the death warrant was signed by the governor, but many were put to death secretly. Eventually charges against such judges reached the central government in Zarahemla and the men were brought to the capital to stand trial.

The friends and relatives of the

accused men joined with those elements in the society who still supported a royalist party. Together they formed a conspiracy to kill the governor and set up a king who would free the guilty judges. They succeeded in murdering the chief judge, undoubtedly Lachoneus II who had succeeded his father in A.D. 29. This action dramatically divided the people and brought an end to the democratic form of government which had been instituted at the beginning of the reign of Judges.

It is obvious that the central government was

already greatly weakened and unable to enforce its laws outside Zarahemla. The economic drain of the long war, coupled with the breakdown of moral law, had left the nation vulnerable to internal pressures. The people did not want a king, but neither did they have any confidence in the corrupt government of the Judges.

The civil disturbances in the land resulted in a collapse of all law and order, as far as a national government was concerned. Those in the conspiracy to establish a king found themselves in the minority and unable to impose Jacob, the man of their choice, upon the nation. Seeing that he could never rule in Zarahemla, Jacob led his followers into a remote area and founded a city where he could be king. He flattered the people, telling them that soon they would have many dissenters join them and, in time, they would be strong enough to take over all the country.

The rest of the population gathered together into family and clan units, resulting in the restoration of the old tribal system. Each tribe chose a leader to see to its interests and make laws for the tribe. These tribal chiefs agreed not to war with one another, so a semblance of peace was maintained, although the nation was actually in a period of anarchy.

What of the church during these turbulent events? Mormon wrote an abbreviated account of the state of the nation, of which the church was a very insignificant part. He mentioned that a few Lamanites had continued as staunch members during this time of national disaster, but it is obvious that the church was in trouble too. Nephi had continued to minister with power and authority, even in the face of persecution, but with few results.

And it came to pass that they were angry with him, even because he had greater power than they, for it were not possible that they could disbelieve his words, for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, that angels did minister unto him daily; and in the name of Jesus did he cast out devils and unclean spirits; and

even his brother did he raise from the dead, after he had been stoned and suffered death by the people; and the people saw it, and did witness of it, and were angry with him, because of his power; and he did also do many more miracles, in the sight of the people, in the name of Jesus.

(3 Nephi 3:59-61 RLDS)

[3 Nephi 7:18-20 LDS]

Nephi continued to preach repentance and remission of sins by baptism in water, and some few were baptized and added to the church. Nephi was not alone in this ministry, so the church organization was still functioning among the people.

Now I would have you remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance, who were not baptized with water; Therefore there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them, should be baptized with water, and this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins. And there were many in the commencement of this year, that were baptized unto repentance: and thus the more part of the year did pass away.

(3 Nephi 3:68-70 RLDS)

[3 Nephi 7:24-26 LDS]

The year was A.D. 33. The church group may still have been few in number but they had great faith in the words of the prophets concerning Christ. They knew that the time was near for the sign which would mark the crucifixion of the Lord, as prophesied by Samuel. This must have been a time of dread, for Samuel had been specific about the earthquake, tempest, darkness, and destruction which should mark that tragic day. Some watched in soberness, some with doubts and disputations.

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The Angel

by Carmen Forsgren

“For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold he sent angels to minister unto the children of men...”

(Moroni 7:21 RLDS) [LDS]

Mom had brain surgery in 1999. After a long stay in the hospital, we finally got to bring her home. She was home only a few days when suddenly she started acting strange and didn't know how to do the simplest things. I called my sister and she told me the doctor had previously said, “If she begins having problems knowing where she is or who she is, let me know right away.” I called the doctor's office and was told to get her to the hospital immediately and they would be waiting for her when she arrived. I took her to St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville. By the time we got there, she didn't know how to use the restroom or wash her hands. The doctor saw her as soon as she arrived and admitted her back into the hospital.

After we got to the hospital room, several different professional people came to evaluate her. One was a speech therapist because Mom couldn't talk very well. She couldn't remember family members and was unable to write. The therapist told me when Mom returned home to Clarksville, she would have to undergo therapy to help

with her memory, writing and doing simple everyday things.

The doctor started questioning her about current events and personal facts which should be familiar to her; like who was the president of the United States, was she married and whether she had any children. He asked her where she lived and several other questions. The only thing she knew was her age and she lived in Clarksville, Tennessee. The doctor told me she was having brain seizures caused by the surgery. The seizures were affecting her memory and motor skills. He said she would have to start taking medication that would control the seizures, but it would take time for it to start working. He also said she would have to remain in the hospital for about a week in order to regulate the medication and determine exactly what kind of therapy she needed. I was told again she would have to continue her therapy when she got home. She was scheduled to work with a variety of speech and physical therapists. She had to learn to do almost everything over again.

They were going to begin her treatment the following morning. All I could do for the moment was sit with her through the evening and wait for the next day to arrive. During the early part of the night, I just sat there and

watched her sleep. At times she would wake up and look at me as if she was looking at a stranger.

I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew it was 2:00 in the morning. I had a dream Big Daddy (Mom's dad) was leaning over me while I slept in the hospital chair. He told me not to worry; everything was going to be okay. This was so real I woke up and looked around the room for him. I know he had been there even though he had died many years before.

Shortly after I awoke, a nurse came into the room. Her name was Wendy. She was beautiful. Her hair was perfect, and she was wearing a nurse's hat, a white nurse's dress (no wrinkles, perfect); she had on white stockings and white nursing shoes. She was dressed like nurses did way

back when. She told me she was going to wake Mom up to see if she could get her to drink something. Mom had not eaten or drank anything since arriving at the hospital. Wendy gently woke mom and asked her if she would drink some juice. She gave her a small cup of juice to drink. After drinking that cup she got mom to drink another one. Then Wendy told me she was going to take her for a walk down the hall. She told me Mom would be okay, but I couldn't go with



them. She said I could wait in the room for them to return. Wendy told me again before she left the room that I should not worry because Mom would be okay and everything was going to be fine. So I sat down and waited for them to return. She returned a short time later and put Mom back to bed. She assured me once again that it would be okay. She told me she had to go but would be back to check on Mom. When she was in the room there was such a calm feeling. Wendy left and I just sat there trying to figure out what had happened.

I couldn't sleep the rest of the night. I kept going to the door looking up and down the hallway for Wendy, but I never saw her. I walked down the hallway to the nurse's station to look for

her but I couldn't find her. The nurse at the station asked if she could help me and I told her I was looking for a nurse named Wendy who had come to my mom's room earlier. She didn't know anyone by that name or who I was talking about. I didn't want her to think I was crazy, so I went back to the room. I looked for Wendy the rest of the morning and never saw her again. I must have dozed off about 6:00 a.m. when suddenly Mom said something to me. I got out of the chair and asked her if she knew who I

was. She did. I started asking her questions and she was able to answer them. She remembered! She could write again. She asked me if I remembered the nurse who came in and I told her I did. We both knew at that moment who Wendy was. She was Mom's angel!



When the doctor came in and asked Mom if she knew the name of the president, she said yes, and proceeded to tell him what she thought of him. You could tell the doctor didn't like her answer. Maybe he voted for the president in the last election. He asked her all the same questions from the previous day and couldn't believe her responses. He had never seen anything like it before. But we knew! When the therapist arrived, she couldn't believe Mom's improvement either. Mom was able to do everything

she was asked to do including writing. The therapist was amazed at the miraculous change. They said they saw no reason to keep her and I could take her home. They did prescribe medication to prevent the brain seizures. She only took it for about six months and never needed it again. I asked them if she still needed therapy when she got home and they said she didn't need it because her memory and physical skills were back to normal.

I know Big Daddy was there that night and he was the one who woke me up and told me not to worry; everything would be okay. I know Wendy was a beautiful angel and she was real. Mom knew it too. She never told me where Wendy took her or what happened. She did tell me she knew Wendy was an angel! Or maybe she was mine, because I had four more years with my mom and she knew me till the day I lost her. I'm thankful to the Lord for his love, mercy and the ministering of angels.

The Book Of Mormon Challenge

In November 2006, we challenged the youth of the Kirtland Region to read The Book of Mormon from start to finish by the beginning of youth camp 2007. Those who completed the challenge would receive a set of tab dividers for their Book of Mormon, a certificate of recognition and their name published in The Witness. In addition, the first person to finish would also receive a \$25 gift card to Family Christian Book Stores.

We are pleased to announce two youth completed the challenge: Matthew Smith from Parkersburg, West Virginia and Miranda Webster from Kirtland, Ohio. Congratulations to both of you!

We have extended the challenge for another year, offering the youth of the area another opportunity to gain the eternal benefits of reading the word of God. We look forward to having more young people accept the challenge this year.

Jason and Renee Webster

Youth Directors for Kirtland Area Regional Reunion and Youth Camp



B N E W S T A R K D C
 F E O A M Q P V J O Y
 I S T J H A W O Q I R E
 V E E O C L R J P N O U
 Y H E B N E K I N I M
 E P N F Y M H N S V A
 A O G M A R Y E S A S
 R R I J E S U S M S J
 S P S D R E H P E H S



KEY

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 P E U I R M T L B A S O Y D C W F X H J N G K Q V Y

Unscramble the words below. Then find them hidden in the wordsearch above. You will find these words in the stories of Christ's birth as recorded in the Bible and Book of Mormon.

QDYB ABJEK _____
 KJFCBH _____
 KDVU _____
 UBP KGJE _____
 UL NJEWUBKK _____

ABJOB _____
 AELASBGK _____
 KSBASBENK _____
 IBGSHBSBF _____
 KJYDLÉ _____

DUU _____
 JUVBH _____
 FJEM _____
 TLM _____
 TBKCK _____

12 15 18 27 24 14 21 33 11 38 35 26 34 27 38 27 35 34 18 11 34

38 15 25 35 33 34 28 32 11 38 11 24 37 11 38 33 11 26 14 26 27 34

16 11 21 26 34

KEY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
3	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	Y

Directions: Use the KEY to find the missing letters from our scripture verse. EXAMPLE: S=33, M=25, G=17

Directions: To fill in the missing words from our scripture verse from Mosiah 11:149, begin at the Start arrow and write down every other letter, moving clock-wise, until you have used each letter once.

We are commanded of:

Start

↓

S	D	O	T	D	O	T	G	O	I	P	V	R	E	A
N		N	I	I	H	S	T	A	L	E	L	C		Y
S		N											A	H
A	G	G											T	W
													N	A
													U	I
													I	N
													O	T
													S	H
													K	

He Is Born

ANSWER KEY

PUZZLE 1: God's Name
 PUZZLE 2: Behold I Say Unto You, That Ye Must Pray Always And Not Fail
 PUZZLE 3: God To Pray Without Ceasing And To Give Thanks In All Things

PLACE
 MARY
 JOEL
 MARY
 JOEL
 MARY
 JOEL

PLACE
 MARY
 JOEL
 MARY
 JOEL
 MARY
 JOEL

PUZZLE 1: God's Name
 PUZZLE 2: Behold I Say Unto You, That Ye Must Pray Always And Not Fail
 PUZZLE 3: God To Pray Without Ceasing And To Give Thanks In All Things

A SPECIAL GIFT AT CHRISTMAS

By Sue G. Manning

The scent of fresh oranges filled the air. I was sitting on the floor by Big Mama's chair while she peeled fruit for a salad, occasionally handing me a juicy section of orange. Her chair was soft and red with big wide arms that I could easily sit on. There was a tall floor lamp and a small table on the side where she usually kept books. Today, it was piled high with fruit. On her lap was a big glass bowl full of freshly peeled apples and oranges. She talked while she worked. Big Mama loved to tell stories of her family. Some were funny and some were sad, but I loved hearing all of them as much as she loved telling them. Granddaddy sat in his big gray chair in the corner reading the afternoon newspaper. The Christmas lights that hung in the big picture window seemed to reflect off his white hair. He was quiet and pretended not to notice us, but occasionally reached over and tugged at my earlobe when I wasn't looking. I am sure Granddaddy had heard these old stories a million times and seemed more interested in teasing me than listening to Big Mama's tales. I was more interested in getting one more bite of orange when Big Mama started telling about her great grandfather, George Washington Bankester. Listening to her talk sent my mind back to a time long ago...

Mr. Sibley rode his big black horse across his farmland, inspecting the property to see how the Cherokee Indians left it. He had agreed to allow the Cherokee to camp on his land by the Styx river in what is now southern Alabama near the Gulf coast. After the Creek Indians attacked nearby Fort Sims and killed over 500 settlers, including men, women and children, Andrew Jackson obtained the aid of the Cherokee to fight the warring part of the Creek Indians, known as the Red Sticks. Mr. Sibley had been afraid for the safety of his family and neighbors before the Indian war. The Red Sticks lived in those woods, and he gladly let the Cherokee use his land to camp while fighting the dangerous Red Sticks.

The Cherokee left everything just like they found it. Other than the burned spots in the ground from the campfires, Mr. Sibley's property looked the same as before. He turned his horse toward home and anticipated a calm evening. The woods were quiet, except for the splash of the river and an occasional bird calling out in the warm summer evening. He was glad the Indian war was over. He looked forward to everything getting back to normal. Then, suddenly, a noise made the horse jerk his head to one side. It was an unfamiliar noise for a place so deep in the woods. Mr. Sibley would have thought his ears were playing tricks on him if his horse hadn't reacted so. He sat still in his saddle and listened to see where the noise was coming

from. He heard the noise again. He slowly got off his horse and quietly stepped toward the noise. He heard it a third time.

It was a baby's cry. Then he saw a baby boy tucked safely between the intertwining roots of a large tree on the bank of the river. The Cherokee had purposely left him where he would be safe until he was found. They knew Mr. Sibley would look over his land as soon as they left, and the baby would be discovered.

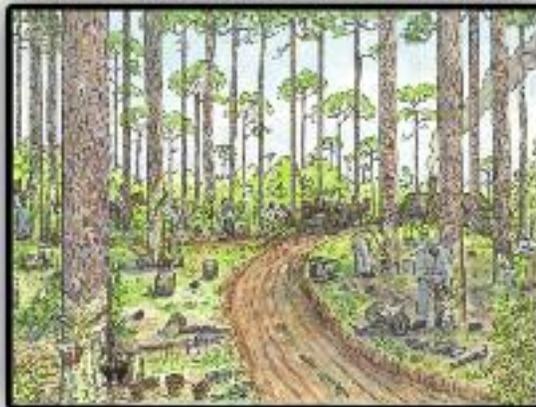
Mrs. Sibley and the neighbor ladies couldn't imagine the baby's mother leaving him behind unless she had died in the terrible Yellow Fever epidemic that swept through the area during the war. The Indians were very protective of their children, and the women were good mothers. If the baby's mother had died from Yellow Fever, there may have been no one else to care for him. His other relatives could have died from the fever or in the war. Regardless, the Sibleys and their neighbors took turns taking care of the little Cherokee boy.

I was shocked and asked Big Mama how someone could leave a baby behind, even if his family had died. I thought it was a terrible thing to do! Big Mama told me about how God allows things to happen for the good of others. I had no idea what she meant. She gave me another orange section to keep me quiet and went on with her story.

As the boy got older, he spent most of his time away from the farm houses. He loved to wander into the piney woods and hunt. He spent hours fishing on the Styx river, and he slept under the stars. When he was at home, he liked to turn a chair upside down, lean back on it and sleep on the porch. Some say he never slept in a bed.

The boy eventually chose his own name, George Washington Bankester, because he was found on the banks of a river. Most everyone called him Woods, though, because of his love for the pine forests. Woods, ironically, married a Creek Indian woman in 1833 from the same tribe his forefathers fought against. They had several children. Their first son was born in 1835 and was named George Washington Bankester Jr. George Jr grew up, married and named his first son George Washington Bankester III. George III grew up and had a family, too. All of the Bankesters continued to live in the piney woods around the Styx river.

One day, missionaries came into the area. They shared about how many plain and precious things were taken out of the Bible. God knew this would happen, so He instructed others, hundreds of years ago, to keep records on gold plates so people would have an opportunity to know the fullness of the gospel.



Artist: Patrick Elliot
 Compliments: The Longleaf Alliance: www.longleafalliance.org
 The Longleaf Alliance is a non-profit organization that seeks to restore longleaf pine and the longleaf ecosystem to the forests of the Southeastern, U.S.

They told about a prophet named Joseph Smith and how he was led by an angel to gold plates. He was given the gift to translate the plates and, because of that, we now have The Book of Mormon. The fullness of Jesus' gospel is contained in The Book of Mormon. The spirit of God was with the missionaries when they spoke. God touched those who heard these good words so they would know it was true. George Jr, George III and their wives listened to what the missionaries had to say. They knew it was true and were all baptized.

George III was a very large, but very gentle man. He loved and was loved by all. He especially loved the Lord. He had great faith and knew God's promises were true.

When George had a problem, he would go into the woods and kneel and pray. When he left the woods, he also left the problems there, knowing God would make everything would all right.

George III worked in the turpentine business. He spent his days in the woods gathering sap (or turpentine as it was known) from the pine trees. First, he attached a box to the bottom of a tall long leaf pine tree. Then, he would cut diagonal slashes in the tree with an ax. The pine tar would drip into the box. He would have to go back to each tree and continue to add slashes to get more tar. When the box was full of pine tar, he would scrape the sticky stuff out the box and put it into barrels. He worked long hard days in those piney woods. Sometimes he walked many miles away from where he started in the morning. He only got paid if he worked, so he worked in all kinds of weather.

Once, after a day of constant rain, he was walking home in the dark. The clouds blocked any light from the moon or stars, and he could barely make out the trail. He came to a swampy area and could tell the water was standing deeper than usual because of the rain. He knew he would never be able to stay on the trail in the dark, so he stopped and prayed. Then, a light from above shown down and lit the trail until he was safely across. Some of the neighbors laughed at him because of his faith and said the light was just swamp gas, but George knew that God had sent down the light for him to get home safely. He learned God was concerned about our well-being, and George had come to depend on the Lord in all areas of his life.

He loved God deeply and was called to the office of elder. He walked many miles to preach to groups who needed ministry or to administer to the sick. He was such a loving, kind man, and God blessed him greatly.

I asked Big Mama how she knew so much about George. She told me he was her father. She said he was a wonderful father and loved his children dearly. They had a happy home and grew up loving God and prayed together often. Big Mama



George Washington Bankester III

got up with her bowl full of fruit and started toward the kitchen. I followed her through the dining room, where she kept her coconut and Japanese fruitcakes safely on the sideboard for Christmas day. It smelled wonderful in there. I thought we should stop and admire the cakes and even try one, but Big Mama kept walking. I knew I wouldn't get in any trouble if I stuck my finger in the icing of one of the cakes, but I stayed at Big Mama's heels. She washed her hands at the big sink and said she wanted to show me something special.

We went to the dresser in her bedroom. She pulled out a small worn box. Inside were a tattered old Bible and some papers. She pulled out a yellowed envelope and carefully opened the letter inside. It was her father's patriarchal

blessing. At the top was the date March 13, 1917. It read, "Patriarchal Blessing of George W. Bankester by James Davis, Patriarch." I could tell Big Mama was searching for something important in the document. Finally, she began to read, "...therefore cease not to pray for those who are near and dear to you by the ties of nature, for we feel from among them God will raise up those who will be useful..." Big Mama could tell I didn't understand the importance of what she read. She

explained how our family was a part of the church because of the lives of those who had lived many years before us. Because a little baby had been left behind by the Cherokee, we had an opportunity to have the fullness of the gospel. He grew up to have a son who heard the gospel and accepted it. The Book of Mormon was a special gift from God to give us a fuller understanding of His commandments and covenants. We were a very blessed family to have that knowledge and understanding. Big

Mama's father had been told in his patriarchal blessing to pray for those who were dear to him by the ties of nature, in other words, related to him. Because of his prayers, she and her brothers and sisters were all a part of the church.

I looked down at the yellowed sheets of paper. I felt that indeed this was important. We had been blessed with a gift greater than anything that could have been wrapped and put under the Christmas tree.

Big Mama put away the box with the Bible and papers and went back to the kitchen to get ready for Christmas dinner the next day. I stood alone in her room looking out her window into a small stand of tall pine trees. With the scent of oranges still fresh in the air, I wondered if George Washington Bankester III ever prayed for me.

*George Washington Bankester III is the great-grandfather of the author.



Photo by: Marla Kroesen

But behold I say unto you, that ye must pray always, and not faint: that ye must not perform anything unto the Lord, save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 14:12 RLDS) [2 Nephi 32:9] LDS]

Hot Dogs and Nachos for Christmas Dinner

By Beth Spencer

Whitney watched the first snowflakes of the year dance along the windowsill. She dreamily thought of bundling up in layers of clothes, tripping outside into the snow, racing downhill on her favorite sled, making snow angels...

"Whitney? Whitney? Whitney!" said Mrs. Penny.

"What?" Whitney answered, suddenly aware her teacher was calling her name. She heard muffled giggles as she glanced around the room.

Mrs. Penny frowned at Whitney and continued with the assignment. "With the Christmas season nearly here, I have a special assignment for you. I'd like you to think of your most memorable Christmas and write a paper describing it to the class. Your topics are due tomorrow. Are there any questions?" Despite the moans and groans which erupted from her 5th grade class, Mrs. Penny just smiled and passed out the assignment sheet.

The afternoon ticked by, and the 3:00 bell finally rang. Whitney joined her friends as they walked home from school catching snowflakes on their tongues and dodging snowballs. The afternoon was spent laughing and enjoying the first snowfall until her mother called her in for dinner. Her smiles quickly faded when Mom asked if she had any homework. "Oh, Mom, that's the perfect way to ruin a great day! Mrs. Penny wants us to write about our most memorable Christmas, and I don't have any idea what to write about!"

"Pray about it," said Mom. The Book of Mormon tells us that we must pray always and that we should not do anything without first praying. (2 Nephi 14:12 RLDS) [2 Nephi 32:9] LDS]

After dinner, Whitney sat by the crackling fire and stared at the assignment sheet. *The Christmas I got my life-sized Barbie? No, the boys would make fun of that. The Christmas I got my big stuffed pony? No, I couldn't tell the class I still sleep with it.* Whitney sighed and buried her head in her hands. *Dear Lord, please help me with this homework assignment. I could really use a good idea! In Jesus' name, Amen.*

"How about Horse?" Mom suggested.

Whitney looked up and smiled. She started to write that on her paper.

Mother laughed and said, "That should be interesting to explain his name!"

Whitney's hand froze! *Oh, yeah. How was she going to explain that? She hadn't even wanted him at first! She had thrown a big fit that day!* Two years ago, Whitney asked for one thing and one thing only. A horse! That's the ONLY thing she

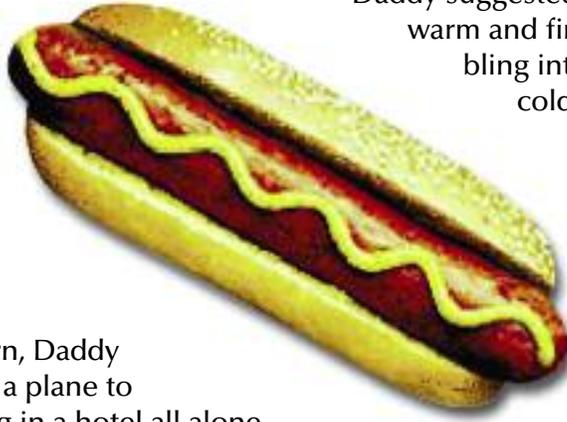
wanted. When Christmas morning arrived, Whitney just knew there would be a horse waiting for her! To her great disappointment, there was only this yappy little puppy that wouldn't stop licking her. Whitney was so mad, she had pushed it away. The puppy had wagged its tail and made a nice puddle right on the floor. "You make a great HORSE!" Whitney had yelled before she ran to her bedroom for a good cry. A few minutes after Whitney had raced to her bedroom, she felt that warm tongue licking her salty tears. Daddy came and sat beside her. He said he thought the puppy kind of liked being called a horse because it made him feel bigger than life. They both laughed, and the name stuck. Daddy explained why they couldn't have a horse in



town. He reminded Whitney that any time we are disappointed about something, we should pray about it. Daddy reminded Whitney of the many times Nephi became disappointed because his brothers, Laman and Lemuel, hardened their hearts toward their family and toward God. Nephi prayed continually and received many blessings throughout his life, despite the ill wishes of his older brothers. Then Daddy had told Whitney about a Christmas that started out to be a big disappointment to him...

Daddy was an airplane pilot. On Whitney's first Christmas after she was born, Daddy had to work. He had flown a plane to Indianapolis and was staying in a hotel all alone on Christmas Day. He couldn't help but think about his grandfather, who was back home in the hospital. Grandfather was always helping people and fulfilling the second commandment to "love your neighbor." Daddy was disappointed that he couldn't be home with baby Whitney and her mother, enjoying the spirit of Christmas, enjoying a traditional holiday dinner and being near his sick grandfather.

Daddy told himself he could sit in that hotel room feeling sorry for himself and wishing he was home, or he could walk outside and maybe do something to help someone else like his grandfather would have done. So Daddy changed his clothes and went outside. It was a cold afternoon! The wind whistled past him, whipping his coat around, stinging his nose and freezing his toes. Many times, Daddy saw the welcome sign of a restaurant and scurried to its door, only to find it was closed for the holiday. After several minutes, he turned a corner and nearly ran into another man who was also looking for a place to eat. They decided to look together. As they walked along the streets of Indianapolis on that bitter cold day, Daddy began to learn about the man. He was from Africa, but had recently attended



college in London and had come to Indianapolis looking for a job. The man was tired, had no job, no home, his family did not live here, and he was living on the street. They walked and talked for about an hour, and Daddy knew they'd better find shelter from the cold soon.

Since they could not find an open restaurant, Daddy suggested they go to the theater to get warm and find a snack there. Finally stumbling into the downtown theater on that cold Christmas day, Daddy found the snack bar and bought hot dogs and nachos for each of them. Daddy learned the man had a small job starting the next day, so he gave the man some money to stay in a place that night. As the man turned to leave, he threw his arms around Daddy in a big hug and asked Daddy to pray for him.

Based on an actual testimony. (Jared Smith, *Zion's Call*, Winter 2002)

Daddy learned an important lesson that day. He learned he could share the Spirit of Christmas in a city far from home with someone he hardly knew. He learned when you give your problems to God He can turn disappointment into something wonderful. Whitney's daddy helped her

understand God could help

her turn disappointment into something wonderful, too. Horse became part of the family, and Whitney would not trade him for anything.

The fire popped, and Whitney jumped. "That's it!" she cried. "I'll write about the Christmas when I didn't get what I wanted! Oh, yeah!

Mom, Dad, let's have hot dogs and nachos sometime for Christmas dinner!"

Daddy and Mother exchanged puzzled looks. Then, they all laughed when Horse licked Whitney's cheek and barked as if to say, "Me, too! Me, too!"



I WITNESS Kids



But behold I say unto you, that ye must pray always,...

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