

NT LESSON #3

AND THE CHILD GREW, AND WAXED STRONG IN SPIRIT

READING: Luke 2; Matt 1; D&C 96:12-18; Matthew 3:24-26 JST

INTRODUCTION: The accounts of responses to the birth of Christ have caused me to think again about Nephites watching the sun go down. When the announcement was made that believers in the *night with no darkness* would be put to death after a certain date, faithful Nephites must have spent every sunset out of doors watching the disappearing sun and the diminishing light, and praying. And the unbelievers must have watched the watchers with great derision. Who could actually believe that it could be light at night?

I can imagine a sophisticated Gadianton Robber slipping through the fence to talk to his neighbor on the front porch in the gathering darkness. “Ralph, give it up! There are only seven days left. Think of your children and your beautiful wife . . . Come with us. You can’t really believe that one of these nights the sun will go down and you will still be able to weed your garden. It gets dark every night. It always has. It always will.”

How hard it must have been to be faithful to the words of Samuel when it kept getting dark! No one had seen him for five years (Hel. 16:8). For that matter, the great prophet Nephi, the son of Helaman, had disappeared as well (3 Nephi 1:2). What a test to believe in the absent prophets and ancient scriptures when the lives of loved ones were on the line!

Those who remained faithful and continued to watch were not motivated by social conscience or some economic order that had blessed their lives. These were people who *believed* in the star and the Son and the manger and the miracle. They were not people who thought it all might be true. They were people who knew.

How many minutes passed after the sun went down, on the night it happened, before people began to raise their heads in wonder? How long before they were sure? And what must those with murder in their hearts have been thinking? Among the most believable words in all of scripture are those describing the unbelievers on that night.

And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets had been frustrated; for the sign which had been given was already at hand (3 Nephi 1:16).

They seem to have passed out from fear? It happened to Alma the Younger, and Lamoni, and Saul of Tarsus. It happened on this night. And every time those infidels regained their senses and opened their eyes, it was light. That brightness was an inescapable physical witness of a brilliant spiritual reality. The sun had set, but another Son had risen, in a stable, in a manger, in an obscure village in Judea. And that Son would never go down. In fact, because of the light of that night, it will never be absolutely dark again.

In this lesson we will have the opportunity to learn of people whose responses were as dramatic and varied as those in America—people who pretended there was no new light, and people who became messengers of that light.

1. THE RESPONSES OF VARIOUS PEOPLE TO THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR TEACH US HOW WE SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT RESPOND TO HIM IN OUR OWN LIVES

The scriptures offer substantial evidence that the Father made great effort to let people know of the arrival and the mission of the Messiah, so that they would be prepared to receive him when he came. Even though the night of light was not a Judean event, the following verses demonstrate the effort the Father made to inform people of the impending birth of the Son of God:

a. Matt 2:1-3

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea 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. When Herod the king had heard these things, *he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him* (emphasis added).

b. Luke 1:65, 66 (This happened when the mouth of Zacharias was

opened after the birth of John)

And *fear came on all that dwelt round about them*: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout *all the hill country of Judaea*. And *all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts*, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him (emphasis added).

c. Luke 2:17

And [the shepherds] came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, *they made known abroad the saying which was told them* concerning this child (emphasis added).

d. Luke 2:36-38

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and *spake of him to all them that looked for redemption* in Jerusalem (emphasis added).

Each of the following was in some way involved with the events surrounding the birth of the Savior. Their responses give us a dramatic insight into the proper response to the Savior as he seeks to become a part of our life, our family, our culture. See if you can match each of the following individuals with the correct response.

A. Wise Man (Matt. 2:1-12)

B. Elisabeth (Luke 1:39-45)

C. An angel (Luke 2:13,14)

D. Anna (Luke 2:36-38)

E. Herod (Matt. 2:3, 16-18)

F. Shepherd (Luke 2:8-20)

G. Simeon (Luke 2:25-35)

H. Person at the inns (Luke 2:7. In the JST, this verse reads as follows: "And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him

in a manger, because there was none to give room for them in the inns.")
Heavenly Host (Luke 2:13-14)

1. ____ I rejoiced, even at the visit of his mother?
2. ____ As soon as I heard the news, I came with haste to see him and then spread the word.
3. ____ I traveled a great distance with gifts for him, and fell down and worshiped him.
4. ____ I gave thanks and spoke of him to all.
5. ____ I took him in my arms and felt that I could now die in peace for I had seen him.
6. ____ I felt threatened at his coming and tried to kill him
7. ____ I burst suddenly into song and praised God for the gift of his son.
8. ____ I did not want to make room.

As you consider the various reactions to the birth of the Redeemer of the world by those who were in the neighborhood, consider your own reactions and your own response to him.

Elisabeth rejoiced. Can you give an illustration of the joy that has come into your life because of the Savior? You might write those feelings in your *scripture journal* as did the young lady whose testimony was written in lesson #1. As you read her words, can you feel her joy?

I hardly know where to begin. Jesus Christ is the most important [person] in my life. I know, without a doubt, that he lives, that he is the Son of God and that he loves me with a most complete and perfect love.

This past . . . year I have grown so much! I have learned about the Savior's life, his mission, and all the things he taught. But most important, I have come to know that Christ lives. He is a real person with feelings, and personality. I love him very, very much and I hope I always will. I know that if I will just live the teachings that he taught, I will never have to wonder and doubt again. (CB, May 19, 1979)

The Wise men brought gifts from a great distance. What gifts should you bring?

How far should you be willing to go to worship the Savior? (See Alma 22:18) Have you offered your heart? Your time? Your talents?

*Who are the people that you should be telling about the Savior in the way that the shepherds and Anna made known their own experiences. Who in your family and neighborhood needs to hear your testimony. Review Elder Eyring's conference talk given in October, 1996.

Every member has made a covenant to do works of kindness as the Savior would do. So any call to bear witness and to care for others is not a request for extra service; it is a blessing designed by a loving Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. They have provided such calls as well as other settings, sometimes without a formal call, all for the same purpose. Each is a chance to prove what blessings flow from being a covenant people, and each is an opportunity for which you agreed to be accountable. Each is a sacred responsibility for others accepted in the waters of baptism but too often not met because it may not be recognized for what it is (Henry B. Eyring, "Witnesses for God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 31).

Note the singing of the angels. How can you glorify, praise, and give thanks to God for the gift of his Son? Mosiah 2:17,19,20,22 suggest that there are only three things we can do to show our gratitude and praise: service, thanks, and obedience.

Many years ago, I visited Bethlehem, and on a quiet summer evening, I traveled to the hills around Bethlehem with several friends. We watched small flocks of sheep in the area and observed the city as the sun set and the lights began to blink on. We sang Christmas songs and read aloud the story of his birth from the Holy Scriptures. And the Spirit seemed to whisper, "You have been here before." How do you think you responded to the birth of the Savior when you were in the pre-mortal world? How did the "multitude of the heavenly host" respond to this wonderful event? We do not know what the pre-mortal spirits were doing at the time of his birth, but if a choice was offered, what would you have been doing on that holy night?

*How important was it in Simeon's life to "see" the Savior? What lesson can you learn from the record of his encounter with the Christ child? Look at Moses 6:26 and Alma 33:19-21.

Some did not greet the Savior's birth with the same joy as these we have discussed. Herod felt threatened by the coming of the Savior. How are people today threatened by him and his commandments? What might even supposedly faithful people do to avoid having to change their lives because of him and his requirements? Have you ever seen people refuse to make room for him in their business activities? Or in their social lives?

In what ways do people today refuse "to give room for [him]" in their lives? Are there events or circumstances in your life when you are reluctant to make room for him, to accept his presence or guidance? Are you making sufficient room for prayer, fasting, study, meetings, repentance, service?

In our own lives we should demonstrate all of the responses of those that loved the Lord.

2. THE YOUTH OF THE SAVIOR TEACHES US THE WAYS IN WHICH WE SHOULD DEVELOP

Ponder the following verses teach about the youth of the Savior.

a. (Luke 2:40) What happened to the child as he grew? What activities would the Savior have participated in as a youth that helped him "wax strong in spirit [and be] filled with wisdom?" (The Savior spent much time studying the scriptures. This is demonstrated by the number of times he quoted from many different books in the Old Testament. His teachings throughout his life demonstrate that he was a careful observer of the natural world around him. He spoke of the lilies and the sparrows; he spoke of farmers and fishermen. His parables and sermons show a deep insight into human nature that could only have come with careful observation and inspiration. Elder McConkie observed:

He was as much the product of the mother who bare him as were her other children. As a babe he began to grow, normally and naturally, and there was nothing supernatural about it. He learned to crawl, to walk, to run. He spoke his first word, cut his first tooth, took his first step--the same as other children do. He learned to speak; he played with toys like those of his brothers and sisters; and he played with them and with the neighbor children. He went to sleep at night and he

awoke with the morning light

He learned to speak, to read, to write; he memorized passages of scripture, and he pondered their deep and hidden meanings. He was taught in the home by Mary, and then by Joseph, as was the custom of the day. Jewish traditions and the provisions of the Torah were discussed daily in his presence. He learned the Schema, revered the Mezuzah, and participated in prayers, morning, noon, and night. Beginning at five or six he went to school, and certainly continued to do so until he became a son of the law at twelve years of age

It is also apparent that Jesus learned much from nature--from observing the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, and the foxes that have holes for homes

Further: in his study, and in the learning process, he was guided from on high in way that none other has never been. (Bruce R, McConkie: The Mortal Messiah: 1:368-369.)

b. (Luke 2:41-50) What does the experience of Jesus in the temple with the doctors teach us about his youth and training? Why were those who heard his comments and questions astonished at his understanding? Note that the JST teaches that the doctors were asking *him* questions.

Joseph Smith taught:

When still a boy, he had all the intelligence necessary to enable him to rule the kingdom of the Jews, and could reason with the wisest and most profound doctors of law and divinity, and make their theories and practice to appear like folly compared with the wisdom he possessed; but he was a boy only, and lacked physical strength even to defend his own person; and was subject to cold, to hunger, and to death."
(*Teachings*, p. 392)

In response to the concerns of Mary and Joseph, what did Jesus say? (Luke 2:49) What does his response tell us about the Savior as a young man? Jesus was not reproving his parents for searching for him, but was surprised that they did not know

exactly where to find him. The first place they should have looked was in the Temple, where he could be "about his Father's business."

If you are a parent, and did not know where your child was for three days, where are the places you would look? Would you be confident that you would find him or her doing the things your Father in Heaven wanted? Share with your children this sweet insight into the character of the Savior. How wonderful it is for a parent to be able to say, "I do now know where my child is, but I do know that whatever he or she is doing is right."

Even with his superior knowledge, what was the Savior's relationship with his parents? (Luke 2:51) What lesson should we learn from this example of the Savior? The JST provides additional insight into the early years of the Savior's life. Notice we learn from Matthew 3:24-26 JST about the family life of the Savior.

Matthew 3:24-26 JST

24 And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come.

25 And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.

26 And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh.

(Luke 2:52) In what four ways did the Savior develop. What could you be doing in order to grow in each of these areas? Why are all of them important? (For a superb discussion of these four areas of growth, review the article by President Benson in the *Ensign*, September 1988, pp. 4-6.)

In his preparation to become the Redeemer of the world, the Savior did not receive all the necessary intelligence, power, wisdom, and glory at once. According to D&C 93:26-28, how did the Savior acquire a "fullness of the glory of the Father?" (He received "grace for grace.") How did John, in D&C 93:12-14, emphasize this truth? What is the meaning of receiving "grace for grace"? What clues to the preparation of the Savior do you find in the following verses?

- a. John 5:19,20
- b. John 8:26-29, 38
- c. John 12:49, 50

How does D&C 93:19, 20 apply this truth about the youth of the Savior to all of us?

3. THE FATHER PERSONALLY PREPARED THE SAVIOR FOR HIS GREAT MISSION

Matt 3:25 JST indicates that Jesus "needed not that any man should teach him." Why do you think this was so? What do the following statements made by the Savior himself indicate about who taught him and the manner in which he was taught and prepared for his mission.

- a. John 5:19,20
- b. John 8:26-29, 38
- c. John 12:49, 50

What effort do you think was required of the Savior to be taught by the Father in this manner? I believe that this kind of communication does not come without great personal effort. The Savior's practice during his ministry of frequent personal prayers alone, and often all night, indicates the personal preparation that would have been required during his youth (see Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 9:18, 28; Luke 11:1).

CONCLUSION: "After many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh" (Matt. 3:26 JST). When the hour came for the Savior to begin his ministry, the Father himself offered this evaluation of the first 30 years of Jesus' life. (Luke 3:22) "Thou art my beloved son; in thee I am well pleased." Try to apply the patterns of the Savior's development to your own life so that one day the Father will be able to say the same thing about you.

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