

President Monson

We have heard Brother Wesley L. Jones, managing director of the Church Auditing Department, read the auditing report and Brother F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, present

the statistical report of the Church for the year 2002.

We will now be pleased to hear from Elders Joseph B. Wirthlin and Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

The Light of Christ

It is a privilege to be with you today. I love hearing the word of the Lord spoken by our leaders as they are guided by the divine gift of the Holy Ghost. Today I would like to say a few words regarding this wonderful gift.

Have you ever thought about the amount of light and energy generated by our sun? The amount is almost beyond comprehension. Yet the heat and light that we receive come as a free gift from God. This is another proof of the goodness of our Heavenly Father.¹

The light from the sun breaks through space, bathing our planet as it encircles the sun with life-giving warmth and light. Without the sun, there could be no life on this planet; it would be forever barren, cold, and dark.

As the sun gives life and light to the earth, a spiritual light gives nourishment to our spirits. We call this the Light of Christ. The scriptures teach us that it “lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”² Thus, all mankind can enjoy its blessings. The Light of Christ is the divine influence that allows every man, woman, and child to distinguish between good and evil. It encourages all to choose the right, to seek eternal truth, and to learn again the truths that we knew in our premortal existence but have forgotten in mortality.

The Light of Christ should not be confused with the personage of the Holy Ghost, for the Light of Christ is not a personage at all. Its influence is preliminary

to and preparatory to one’s receiving the Holy Ghost. The Light of Christ will lead the honest soul to “[hearken] to the voice”³ to find the true gospel and the true Church and thereby receive the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit, a separate and distinct member of the Godhead.⁴ He is a witness or testifier of the power of God, the divinity of Christ, and the truth of the restored gospel. Many throughout history in all nations have sought diligently to commune with the heavens and gain the light of gospel truth. They have felt the influence of the Holy Ghost confirm the truth of the gospel.

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. Had he not taken this . . . ordinance upon him, the Holy Ghost which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him.”⁵

Blessings of the gift of the Holy Ghost

The gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the right to receive the Holy Ghost as a constant companion, is obtained only on condition of faith in Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the laying on

of hands by authorized servants endowed with the Melchizedek Priesthood. It is a most precious gift available only to worthy members of the Lord's Church.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord calls the gift of the Holy Ghost "the unspeakable gift."⁶ It is the source of testimony and spiritual gifts. It enlightens minds, fills our souls with joy,⁷ teaches us all things, and brings forgotten knowledge to our remembrance.⁸ The Holy Ghost also "will show unto [us] all things what [we] should do."⁹

President James E. Faust added that the gift "of the Holy Ghost is the greatest guarantor of inward peace in our unstable world."¹⁰

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, "How great a blessing it is to have the ministering influence of a member of the Godhead."¹¹ Think of what this means—the ability and the right to receive the ministrations of a member of the Godhead, to commune with infinite wisdom, infinite knowledge, and infinite power!

Earn the Holy Ghost's companionship

As with all gifts, this gift must be received and accepted to be enjoyed. When priesthood hands were laid upon your head to confirm you a member of the Church, you heard the words, "Receive the Holy Ghost." This did not mean that the Holy Ghost unconditionally became your constant companion. Scriptures warn us that the Spirit of the Lord will "not always strive with man."¹² When we are confirmed, we are given the *right* to the companionship of the Holy Ghost, but it is a right that we must continue to earn through obedience and worthiness. We cannot take this gift for granted.

The Holy Ghost will warn us of danger, and it will inspire us to help others in need. President Thomas S. Monson counseled us: "We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey. Promptings of the Spirit are not to be postponed."¹³

The Holy Ghost penetrates darkness

I once had the opportunity to tour a large cave. While there, the guide turned off the lights for a moment to demonstrate what it was like to be in total darkness. It was an amazing experience. I put my hand an inch from my eyes and could not see it. It was frightening in a way. I was relieved when the lights were turned back on.

As light penetrates the darkness and makes physical things visible, so does the Holy Ghost penetrate the spiritual darkness that surrounds us and make plainly visible spiritual things that once were hidden. The Apostle Paul taught that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."¹⁴

Enjoy the full blessings of the gift

I fear that some members of the Lord's Church "live far beneath our privileges" with regard to the gift of the Holy Ghost.¹⁵ Some are distracted by the things of the world that block out the influence of the Holy Ghost, preventing them from recognizing spiritual promptings. This is a noisy and busy world that we live in. Remember that being busy is not necessarily being spiritual. If we are not careful, the things of this world can crowd out the things of the Spirit.

Some are spiritually deadened and past feeling because of their choices to commit sin. Others simply hover in spiritual complacency with no desire to rise above themselves and commune with the Infinite. If they would open their hearts to the refining influence of this unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, a glorious new spiritual dimension would come to light. Their eyes would gaze upon a vista scarcely imaginable. They could know for themselves things of the Spirit that are choice, precious, and capable of enlarging the soul, expanding the mind, and filling the heart with inexpressible joy.

President Brigham Young spoke of a sacred experience when the martyred Prophet Joseph Smith came in vision to him, bringing the Saints one more message. It is a message that Saints need today more than ever before:

“[Be sure to] tell the people to . . . keep the spirit of the Lord,” Joseph said, “and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach you what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it.”¹⁶

Assessing whether we have the Spirit

Brothers and sisters, do we turn away the still, small voice? Do we do things that offend the Holy Ghost? Do we allow influences into our homes that drive the Spirit from our homes? The type of entertainment that we permit into our homes will certainly have an impact on the power of the Holy Ghost. Much of the entertainment of the world is offensive to the Holy Ghost. Surely we should not watch movies or television shows that are filled with violence, vulgar language, and immorality.

I invite you to ponder individually in a humble and prayerful manner and ask yourself, “Do I have the Spirit in my life? Am I happy? Am I doing anything in my life that is offensive to the Spirit and preventing the Holy Ghost from being my constant companion?” Have the courage to repent, if needed, and again enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

We need the Holy Ghost in our homes

Do we enjoy the influence of the Holy Ghost in our homes? Are we doing anything as a family that is offensive to the Spirit? Can we more effectively invite the Holy Ghost into our homes?

Our homes need to be more Christ-centered. We should spend more time at the temple and less time in the pursuit of pleasure. We should lower the noise level in our homes so that the noise of the world will not overpower the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost. One of our greatest goals as parents should be to enjoy the power and influence of the Holy Ghost in our homes. We should pray and study the scriptures. We could sing the hymns of the Restoration to invite the Holy Ghost into our homes. Regular family home evening will also help.

In these perilous times, we need this unspeakable gift in our lives. President Boyd K. Packer reminds us: “We need not live in fear of the future. We have every reason to rejoice and little reason to fear. If we follow the promptings of the Spirit, we will be safe, whatever the future holds. We will be shown what to do.”¹⁷

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the Saints could distinguish the gift of the Holy Ghost from all other spirits, for “it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness and build up the kingdom of God.”¹⁸

An outpouring that fills the soul with joy

A friend of mine once told me about his experience in coming to know and understand the gift of the Holy Ghost. He had prayed often and longed to know the truth of the gospel.

Although he felt at peace with his beliefs, he had never received the certain knowledge for which he hungered. He had reconciled himself to the fact that he might be one of those who would have to walk through this life relying upon the faith of others.

One morning, while pondering the scriptures, he felt something surge through his body from the top of his head to the

bottom of his feet. “I was immersed in a feeling of such intense love and pure joy,” he explained. “I cannot describe the measure of what I felt at that time other than to say I was enveloped in joy so profound there was no room in me for any other sensation.”

Even as he felt this outpouring of the Holy Ghost, he wondered if possibly he was just imagining what was happening. “The more I wondered,” he said, “the more intense the feelings became until it was all I could do to tearfully say, ‘It is enough.’”

As a boy, my father had a similar experience the day he was baptized. He related that when the bishop laid his hands upon his head and said, “Receive the Holy Ghost,” “I had a peculiar feeling, . . . something that I had never experienced before. . . . [It was] a feeling of happiness, a feeling that filled my soul.”

From that moment on and throughout his life, he always knew that Jesus Christ lived and directed His Church through a living prophet.¹⁹

Receive this unspeakable gift

There are many today who have felt promptings from the Holy Ghost as they study the Book of Mormon or listen to the testimonies of missionaries and friends. Unto these I say, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel in its fulness is restored to the earth once again! Joseph Smith was a true prophet who translated the Book of Mormon through the gift and power of God. I urge all to read the Book of Mormon and apply its promise:

“When ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”²⁰

To you who are not members of the Church, I urge you with all the tenderness of my heart—do not resist the truth any longer. Give place in your hearts to this heavenly light. Have faith, repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you too shall receive this unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.

Our Heavenly Father lives! Jesus is the Christ! Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fulness. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the prophet, seer, and revelator in our day. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Experts at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) estimate that “the total energy radiated [by the sun] is 383 billion trillion kilowatts, which is equivalent to the energy generated by 100 billion tons of TNT exploding each second” (NASA Office of Space Science, “Solar System Exploration,” Internet, www.solarsystem.nasa.gov/features/planets/sun/sun.html).
2. John 1:9; see also Moroni 7:16; Doctrine and Covenants 84:46.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 84:46.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:555.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 121:26.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 11:13.
8. See John 14:26.
9. 2 Nephi 32:5.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 41; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 32.
11. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 259.
12. Genesis 6:3; see also 2 Nephi 26:11; Doctrine and Covenants 1:33; Moses 8:17.
13. *Live the Good Life* (1988), 59.
14. 1 Corinthians 2:14.
15. See Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 32.
16. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1846–1847*, comp. Elden J. Watson (1971), 529.

17. In Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 8; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 8.
 18. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 529.

19. Joseph L. Wirthlin, in Conference Report, Apr. 1956, 12.
 20. Moroni 10:4.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

Sharing the gospel on market day

All of us who are under the baptismal covenant have promised to offer the gospel to others.¹ Sometimes, fear of rejection or of giving offense looms before us like an impassable obstacle. Yet some members clear that barrier with ease. I have observed them carefully in my travels. I can picture some of them now.

Saturday is a market day across the world. In the countryside of Ghana, in Ecuador, and in the Philippine Islands, countless people bring the produce of their farms and their handicrafts to a town to sell. They talk with those they meet on the road. And they visit with those near them as they wait for someone to buy. Much of the talk is about the struggles of existence, of breaking out of poverty, and sometimes about danger.

Among those on the roads and in the markets are Latter-day Saints. Much of their talk with those they meet would be the same as you would hear anywhere in the world. “Where are you from?” “Is that your son with you?” “How many children do you have?” But there will be a difference in the Latter-day Saints. It would be noticeable in their eyes as much as in their words. They listen carefully with the look of someone who cares about the answers to questions and who cares about the person.

If the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, it would turn to things that matter deeply to both of them. They would talk of what they believe brings happiness and what brings sadness. And the talk

would turn to hopes for this life and the next. The Latter-day Saint would express quiet assurance. Not every time, but sometimes, the Latter-day Saint would be asked, “Why are you so much at peace? How do you know these things you say you know?”

And then there would come a quiet answer. Perhaps it would be about Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appearing to the young boy Joseph Smith. It might be about the resurrected Savior’s loving ministry, as described in the Book of Mormon, to common people who had faith in Him and who loved Him as we do.

How can I do better at sharing my faith?

If you could hear such a conversation, which reaches spiritual things in a marketplace or on a street, you might ask, “How could I do that? How could I become better at sharing my faith with those who do not yet feel what I feel?” It is a question for all of us who are members. That same question is on the mind of every bishop and branch president in the Church, who now have the charge to lead missionary work among his people. The answer to that question is at the heart of the harvest which will come.

I’ve studied carefully and prayerfully some who are remarkably faithful and effective witnesses of the Savior and His Church. Their stories are inspiring. One humble man was called as the president of a tiny branch. There were so few members he could not see how the branch could function. He walked into a grove of trees to pray. He asked God what he should do.