

will then address us, after which we shall hear from Elders W. Rolfe Kerr and Francisco J. Viñas of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation sang
“Let Us All Press On.”

Bishop Keith B. McMullin

“Jesus, the very thought of thee”

Recently President Hinckley was overheard saying to a young couple newly married in the temple, “What a wonderful time to be alive and to be in love.” His optimistic outlook and nature are reassuring. They foster hope in an otherwise gloomy world. These are, however, more than mere expressions of a positive personality. A glimpse into the past will help illustrate what I mean.

In the early 12th century, the cleric Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, “a man of intense . . . faith,”¹ penned the following words:

Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see
And in thy presence rest.²

These lines speak of hope and joy and peace, though written in a time when much of the world lay blanketed in ignorance, impoverishment, and despair. These words capture the calm assurance that always accompanies the testimony of Jesus. This same assurance gives buoyancy and optimism to our beloved prophet and to all the faithful followers of Christ.

What, then, is this testimony of Jesus, how can it be acquired, and what will it do for those who receive it? The testimony of Jesus is the sure and certain knowledge, revealed to the spirit of a person through the Holy Ghost, that Jesus is the living Son of the living God.³

Because the testimony of Jesus is God-given, it stands preeminent and is essential to a happy life. It is the fundamental prin-

ciple of our religion, and all other things pertaining to our faith are appendages to it.⁴ President Hinckley reminds us:

“It is the privilege, it is the opportunity, it is the obligation of every Latter-day Saint to gain for himself or herself a certain knowledge . . . that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer of all mankind. . . . That testimony . . . is the most precious possession that any of us can hold. . . .

“ . . . I am satisfied . . . that whenever a man has a true witness in his heart of the living reality of the Lord Jesus Christ all else will come together as it should.”⁵

Nurtured through righteous living, this testimony of Jesus becomes the governing force in all that a person does. Furthermore, it is available to everyone, for “God is no respecter of persons.”⁶

Acquiring a testimony

Acquiring such a testimony does not, however, come without personal effort. One must *desire to know*, *study to learn*, *live to merit*, and *pray to receive*. When so pursued in humility and faith, the knowledge comes, and with this knowledge comes both the sweet assurance that all will be well and the inner strength to make it so.

Desire to know

The *desire to know* is the first step in one’s quest for a testimony of Jesus. The scriptures counsel, “If ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more

than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.”⁷

Study to learn

A testimony of Jesus requires that the honest seeker *study to learn*. Said the Lord, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”⁸

From cover to cover, the Holy Bible teaches and testifies of Christ. He is Jehovah of the Old Testament, Messiah of the New.⁹ The Book of Mormon, another testament of Him, was compiled, preserved, and brought forth for the express purpose of “convincing . . . Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”¹⁰

Live to merit

Concurrent with one’s *desire* and *study*, one must *live to merit* such a testimony. The person who does what Jesus says comes to know who Jesus is. Said He:

“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”¹¹

Pray to receive

Finally, the testimony of Jesus comes to those who *pray to receive* it. “Ask, and it shall be given you”¹² is the invitation that leads those who are humble and penitent to such knowledge. With this knowledge, the seeker also gains an understanding of the origin and purposes of life, opening vistas that would otherwise remain hidden.

For example, the Lord’s life did not begin in Bethlehem,¹³ and ours did not begin at birth. In the premortal world, He stood as the stalwart, unwavering advocate of God’s eternal plan for His children,¹⁴ and we were there. In the great War in

Heaven, it was by the power of the First-born that Lucifer was cast out,¹⁵ and we helped champion the cause. Through God’s Only Begotten Son “the worlds are and were created,”¹⁶ and we can therefore achieve our divine potential. As President J. Reuben Clark has said:

“It was not a novice, not an amateur, not a Being making a first trial, that came down in the beginning . . . and . . . made this world. . . .

“And if you think of this galaxy of ours having within it from the beginning perhaps . . . one million worlds, and multiply that by the number of millions of galaxies . . . that surround us, you will then get some view of who [Jesus Christ] is.”¹⁷

The divine mission of Jesus Christ

In awe, we exult with the ancient cleric: Jesus, the very thought of Thee with *wonder* fills my breast.

As the literal offspring of God and being born of a mortal mother, the premortal Christ became the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. Though the fulness of His majesty, messiahship, and godhood came not at first, He “continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness,” and so can we.¹⁸

Angels attended Him, the Holy Ghost descended upon Him, the woes of all mankind were carried by Him, and our sins can be forgiven through Him.¹⁹

This Jesus, who is called Christ, wrought out a perfect atonement for all mankind by His incomparable life, His suffering in Gethsemane, the shedding of His blood, His death upon the cross, and His glorious Resurrection. He conquered the grave, and because of Him, so will we.²⁰ “He is the greatest Being to be born on this earth. . . . He is Lord of lords, King of kings, . . . the Savior, . . . the Bright and Morning Star. . . . His name . . . is the only name under heaven [whereby] we can be saved.”²¹ He is the Anointed One. Again

we exclaim: Jesus, the very thought of Thee with *reverence* fills my breast.

As the world could not overcome Him in the meridian of time, so the world cannot do without Him in our time, and neither can we. His purpose is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”²² Hence, He came to the Prophet Joseph Smith, restored the priesthood, reestablished His Church, and again proclaimed the plan of redemption. Joseph saw Him, conversed with Him, and has left us this transcendent, poetic account of Him:

I beheld round the throne holy angels
and hosts,
And sanctified beings from worlds that
have been,
In holiness worshipping God and the
Lamb,
For ever and ever. Amen and amen.

And now after all of the proofs made
of him,
By witnesses truly, by whom he was
known,
This is mine, last of all, that he lives;
yea, he lives!
And sits at the right hand of God on
his throne.

And I heard a great voice bearing
record from heav’n,
He’s the Saviour and only begotten
of God;
By him, of him, and through him, the
worlds were all made,
Even all that [careen] in the heavens
so broad.

Whose inhabitants, too, from the first
to the last,
Are sav’d by the very same Saviour of
ours;
And, of course, are begotten God’s
daughters and sons
By the very same truths and the very
same powers.²³

Witnesses of Christ

We have with us today the Lord’s duly ordained Apostles. True to their sacred commission as “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world,”²⁴ they declare:

“Jesus is the Living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the light, the life, and the hope of the world. His way is the path that leads to happiness in this life and eternal life in the world to come. God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.”²⁵

Jesus, the very thought of Thee fills my heart with *inexpressible joy*. It controls every part of my being. My life, my loves, my ambitions are molded, enlivened, and given purpose because I know that Thou art the Christ, the Holy One.

I thank God for my testimony of Jesus and pray that all may be likewise blessed, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (1988), 167.
2. “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 141.
3. See Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11.
4. See *History of the Church*, 3:30.
5. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 647–48.
6. Acts 10:34; see also Doctrine and Covenants 1:35; 38:16.
7. Alma 32:27; italics added.
8. John 5:39.
9. See “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2.
10. Book of Mormon title page.
11. John 7:16–17.
12. See Matthew 7:7–8; Doctrine and Covenants 4:7.
13. See “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles”; see also Moses 2:26.
14. See Abraham 3:22–27.

15. See Moses 4:1–3; Doctrine and Covenants 76:25–27.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:22–24.
17. “Who Is Our Savior?” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1962, 798–99.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:12–20.
19. See Alma 7:11–13.
20. See Luke 24:36–39; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Alma 11:41–45; 3 Nephi 11:7–14.
21. Bible Dictionary, “Christ,” 633.
22. Moses 1:39.
23. “A Vision,” *Millennial Star*, Aug. 1843, 51; see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 65–66; see also Doctrine and Covenants 76:21–24.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 107:23.
25. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles.”

Elder W. Rolfe Kerr

Prophets speak the words of Christ

I feel it a sacred honor and a privilege to have joined with members of the Church around the world in sustaining the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. We humbly declare that they are “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23). We testify that they “speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:3–4). The Savior said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). We declare to the world that these latter-day servants of the Lord speak the words of Christ.

The Book of Mormon is the word of God

The Savior said, “Search the scriptures; for . . . they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). The Apostle Paul wrote to his trusted companion Timothy, saying, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). We declare to the world that the Book of Mormon is

scripture, given by inspiration of God. It too is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

We fervently declare that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, translated from ancient records by the gift and power of God. This ancient record was written and preserved to come forth in fulfillment of prophecy as a companion scripture to the Holy Bible, the two to be used as one in the hands of the Lord (see Ezekiel 37:16–20). In the Book of Mormon we are admonished to “feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3). We testify that the Book of Mormon is a second witness of the life and mission of the Savior. It is, indeed, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” We declare that the Book of Mormon contains the words of Christ.

Christ’s ministry in ancient America

Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Lord directed the ancient prophet Lehi to leave Jerusalem with his family and embark on a marvelous journey that would ultimately take them across the many waters to a land that would become a “promised land” to them. The Book of Mormon is the scriptural record of the sojourn of these people in ancient America. It contains the prophetic writings and