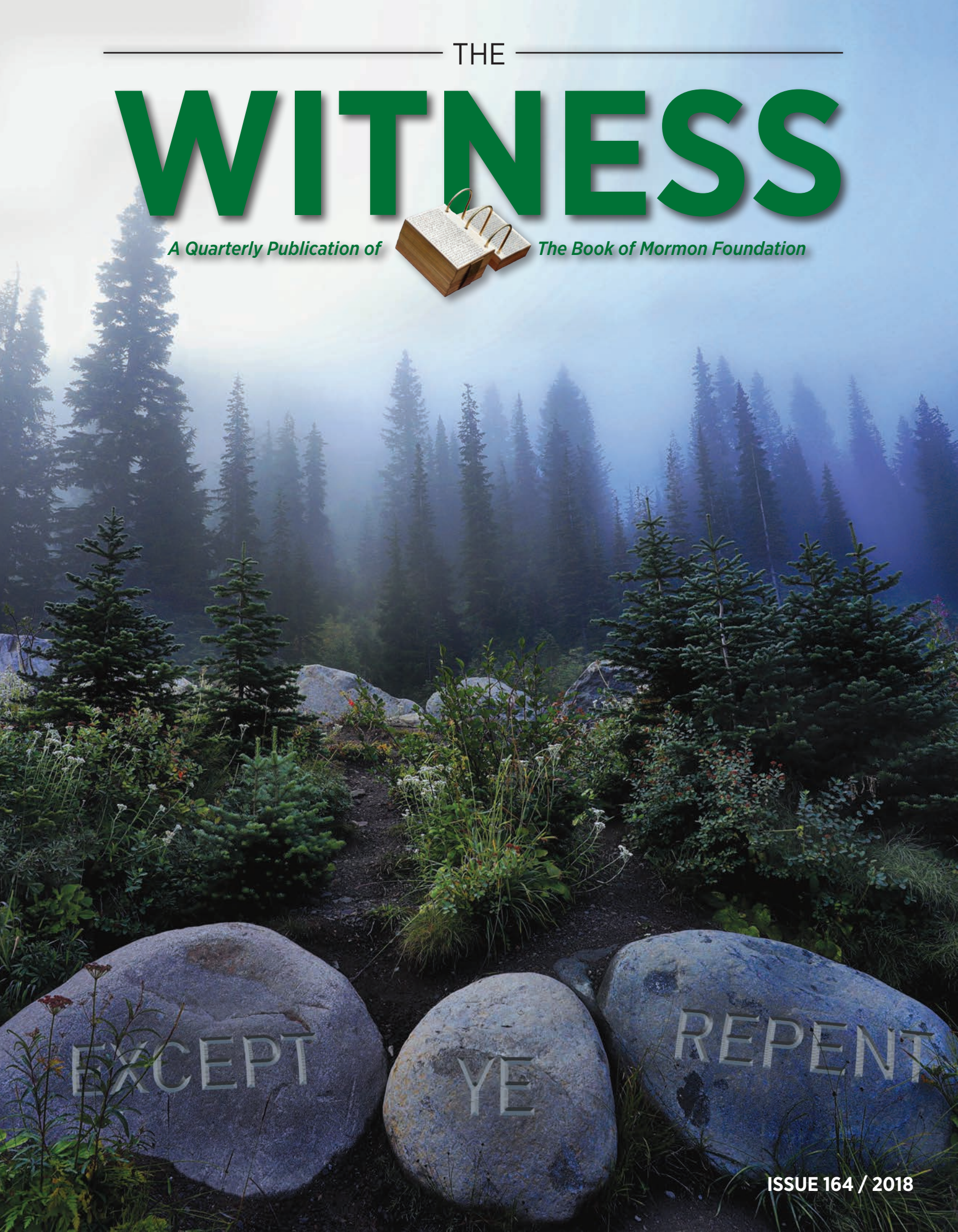

THE

WITNESS

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THE
WITNESS

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Cover Photo Courtesy of Dale Godfrey.
Scripture reference – Behold, now I say unto you, that he commandeth you to repent; and except ye repent, ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God.
(Alma 7:13 RLDS) [Alma 9:12 LDS]

THE Book OF Mormon
FOUNDATION

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Through research, publications, seminars and related projects, members of The Book of Mormon Foundation seek to assist in bringing forth the light contained in the Book of Mormon.

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~ Book of Mormon ~
Reading Challenge

The Book of Mormon Foundation is challenging our readers to read the Book of Mormon in its entirety from November 19th through April 5th. The first step is to make the commitment to join other Book of Mormon believers across the country to read the book cover-to-cover. Go to our webpage at www.bomf.org to download the reading calendar. We also supply a link to the audio Book of Mormon if you prefer to listen. One thing we have in common is the Book of Mormon – what an opportunity for us to join together in reading God’s Word! Invite your family and friends to join. Start reading!

And they said unto me, What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree? And I said unto them, that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; Neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary, overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; Yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God, and remember to keep his commandments always, in all things.

(1 Nephi 4:38-42 RLDS)

[1 Nephi 15:23-25 LDS]

The screenshot shows the website for the Book of Mormon Foundation. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for HOME, ONLINE BOOK STORE, MEET US, STUDY HELPS, CONTACT US, CHILDREN'S RESOURCES, LINKS, BMF HISTORY, PUBLICATIONS, and INTERNSHIP. The main content area features a large yellow box with the text: "Join us in the Book of Mormon Reading Challenge! November 19th-April 5th". Below this, it says: "First step is to commit to read the Book of Mormon cover to cover. Invite your family and friends to participate with you. Download the calendar below. Begin reading! Or you can listen to the Book of Mormon here." There are two buttons for downloading the calendar: "PDF Reading Calendar RLDS Version" and "PDF Reading Calendar LDS Version". To the right, there is a section titled "Support The Book Of Mormon Foundation." with a link to "amazon.com" and a "Donate" button. At the bottom, there is a small text block: "To preserve the Book of Mormon and its purpose, which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers, and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever. And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting Himself unto all nations. The Book of Mormon Title Page".

We've a STORY to TELL to the Nations

by Rich Rowland

There is a timeless Christian hymn that begins with the words, “We’ve a story to tell to the nations.” Christians around the world will recognize this song title. Having read the words, most likely, you can hear the tune in your mind. Christians everywhere, who declare Jesus is Christ, can identify with the joy expressed in the song’s evangelistic proclamation. As believers of the Restoration Gospel, we also have a story to tell. It’s a story that is unique from all other Christian denominations, but it still fully proclaims that Jesus is Christ. It’s a story that is beautiful, powerful and timely for the day in which we live. It is a story of truth and the fullness of God’s love for all His creation. It’s the story found in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon bears a vibrant and affirming testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Two core components of that testimony are the principles of covenant and repentance. These two principles are closely intertwined and fundamental to our faith, yet generally misunderstood. Discerning their true meaning and how they work together is critical for our understanding of God’s plan in the latter days. They are also magnificent components of the unique story we have to share with the world.

Covenant

The Old Testament book of Genesis tells us of the covenant God made with a man named Abram (who would later be renamed Abraham). That covenant is recorded in Genesis.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee shall the families of the earth be blessed.

(Genesis 12:2 IV)
[Genesis 12:2-3 KJV]

This covenant was passed down through Abraham’s lineage; from Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob (Israel), and from Jacob (Israel) to his 12 sons, the House of Israel. It is through this lineage that God would bless all the families of the earth. The blessing would be manifested in at least two ways. First and foremost, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would come into the world through Abraham’s descendants. The genealogy of Jesus’ earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, is thoroughly outlined in the New Testament. Both lines trace back to Abraham. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus remains the most important blessing the world has ever known. Secondly, it is through Abraham and his descendants that God would reveal Himself to the world. The world around Abraham was largely pagan. The days after Noah and the flood down to Abraham’s day saw the steady degradation of the pure worship of God into heathen practices. Idol worship, animism, human sacrifice and many other pagan traditions had become the acceptable forms of worship. God desired a people through whom He could work

to reveal His ways to all mankind. God chose Abraham and his descendants to covenant with to accomplish His work.

Replacement Theology

In the modern Christian world, there is a popular dogma known as Replacement Theology. Replacement Theology, as the name implies, asserts the Christian Church has replaced the House of Israel in the Abrahamic covenant. Its adherents suggest that the House of Israel broke their covenant with God by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. Furthermore, since the Christian Church has accepted Jesus as the Messiah, it is they who have replaced the House of Israel as God's covenant people. The Book of Mormon explicitly rejects this ideology. The title page of the Book of Mormon declares the purpose of its coming forth:

to shew unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off for ever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.

The Book of Mormon was brought forth in these latter days, in part, to make sure all the House of Israel would know they are the people of the covenant. Faithful and unfaithful alike, the descendants of Abraham still have part in the covenant. Generations may have come and gone, and many of the House of Israel may have forgotten the things God has done for their progenitors, but God has not forgotten them. That is, perhaps, the most important message the Restoration Gospel has for all of the House of Israel. God has not forgotten you! The message of the title page goes on to say that the book has come forth to convince both Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God. We live in a world today that desperately needs to be reminded of both points. As disciples of the Restored Gospel, we have a powerful and timely story to tell to Jew and Gentile, faithful and unfaithful; to all nations. God has not forgotten you, it is time to come unto Christ, the eternal God.

Land of Inheritance

As a part of God's covenant with Abram (Abraham), he was given a land of inheritance. This inheritance was not just for Abram (Abraham), but for his descendants as well. That part of the covenant is expressed in Genesis.

And Abram said, Lord God, how wilt thou give me this land for an everlasting inheritance? And the Lord said, Though thou wast dead, yet am I not able to give it thee? And if thou shalt die, yet thou shalt possess it,

(Genesis 15:9-11 IV)

The Book of Mormon tells us of a man named Lehi, who was a descendant of Abraham. Lehi and his family were instructed by God to flee Jerusalem around 600 B.C. In 1 Nephi, we find Lehi's response to God's instruction.

And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and he departed into the wilderness;

(1 Nephi 1:29 RLDS)

[1 Nephi 2:4 LDS]

By leaving Jerusalem, would Lehi and his family lose their portion of the land of inheritance? Would God not honor His covenant with this part



Lands of inheritance

of Abraham's family tree? After all, Lehi and his family only left Jerusalem in response to God's instruction. After the family left Jerusalem, Lehi's son, Nephi, was given instruction in 1 Nephi.

And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands.

(1 Nephi 1:54 RLDS)
[1 Nephi 2:20 LDS]

Lehi's family was ultimately led by God across the ocean to the new world. It is interesting that the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 6:1-3 refers to both the lands of "promise" and the lands of inheritance.

And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord; that he has covenanted with the house of Israel; That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; **When they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise.**

(2 Nephi 6:1-3 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 1-2 LDS]

A detailed study of the terms inheritance and promise would be interesting, but we will leave it for another day. For the purposes of this article, we will simply say God remained true to His part of the Abrahamic covenant and provided a land dedicated to Lehi and his descendants, just as He had for Abraham. Some portion of the Abrahamic covenant extends to this land and to Lehi's descendants. This is also an important element of the unique story we have to tell to the nations.

Repentance

There is, perhaps, no more important message found in the Book of Mormon than the message



The gate by which you should enter.

of repentance. While you can turn to almost any chapter in the Book of Mormon and find an admonition to repent, I find the text of 2 Nephi to be particularly compelling.

For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water: and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire, and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; And ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye enter in by the way, ye should receive.

(2 Nephi 13:24-26 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 31:17-18 LDS]

Nephi's message goes straight to the heart of God's expectation and hope for His creation. I love the image Nephi paints with his words. Repentance and baptism is a gate through which all mankind should enter. On one side of the gate is the world, and on the other side is the path that leads to eternal life. There is only one way to get from one side to the other, and that is through repentance and baptism. Nephi finishes chapter 13 with this truth.

And now behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven, whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen.

(2 Nephi 13:31 RLDS)
[2 Nephi 14:1 LDS]

Without doubt, this is a part of the wonderful story we have to tell to the nations.

Why is it important today?

The understanding of both God's covenant and repentance are of particular importance for the day in which we live. The book of 3 Nephi, chapters 9 and 10, gives us clarity as to why these understandings are so important, not only to our day, but also our land. Chapter 9 takes place after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It is the account of His visitation to Nephi's people in the new world. In this chapter, Jesus, as he did in Jerusalem, called 12 disciples, introduced baptism, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and many other parts of His doctrine to the people. At the end of the chapter, he begins to tell them what will one day happen to their descendants and to the Gentiles in this Land of Promise. Jesus tells the people of Nephi their descendants would fall away from the faith, and the Gentiles would ultimately scatter them. In 3 Nephi chapter 9, Jesus assures them all of this would be done for His purposes.

And behold, this is the thing which I will give unto you for a sign, for verily I say unto you, that when these things which I declare unto you, and which I shall declare unto you hereafter of myself, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, which shall be given unto you of the Father, shall be made known unto the Gentiles, That they may know concerning this people who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, and concerning this my people who shall be

scattered by them; Verily, verily, I say unto you, When these things shall be made known unto them of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you, for it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, And be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;

(3 Nephi 9:87-90 RLDS)
[3 Nephi 21:2-4 LDS]

Even in this word of prophetic warning to Nephi's people, Jesus stresses that God is still at work and has not forgotten His covenant with the House of Israel. Jesus also says that it is wisdom in the Father that the Gentiles should be established in the land. This explanation ties the two peoples, the remnant of the House of Israel and the Gentiles, together in this land. The Gospel of Jesus would go from Nephi's people to the Gentiles, and then from the Gentiles back to Nephi's descendants. In effect, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. It would all be done for God's purposes, concerning both peoples. Chapter 9 gives further clarification regarding God's reason for including the Gentiles in His plan for this land of promise.

For thus it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, that he may shew forth his power unto the Gentiles, for this cause, that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel:

(3 Nephi 9:92 RLDS)
[3 Nephi 21:6 LDS]

It is important to understand the invitation to the Gentiles is for them to be numbered among the House of Israel; not replace the House of Israel. That invitation is contingent upon the repentance

of the Gentiles. It's only on the conditions of repentance that the Gentiles can be numbered among God's people. In verses 99-101, Jesus foretells the fate of the Gentiles in the Land of Promise, if they do not repent.

And my people who are a remnant of Jacob, shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Their hand shall be lifted up upon their adversaries, and all their enemies shall be cut off. Yea, wo be unto the Gentiles, except they repent,

(3 Nephi 9:99-101 RLDS)
[3 Nephi 21:12-14 LDS]

It seems that, in God's prophetic word, He always presents two paths. Which path we go down depends on our response to His word. In this case, if the Gentiles in the Land of Promise do not repent, the remnant of Jacob will tread them down and tear them to pieces. However, if the Gentiles choose the path of repentance, there is a wonderfully different outcome. The beginning of 3 Nephi, chapter 10, describes the fate of a repentant Gentile nation.

But if they will repent, and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant, and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance, and they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob;

And also, as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem; And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem. And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will



He always presents two paths.

be in the midst, and then shall the work of the Father commence, at that day even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people.

(3 Nephi 10:1-4 RLDS)
[3 Nephi 21:22-26 LDS]

The words of Jesus make it abundantly clear that there are two paths from which the Gentiles, in the Land of Promise, can choose. Make no mistake, the path we take will be the path of our own choosing. I see no place in the Word of God where He has or will force His people down a road they choose not to go... even if it is for their own good. It would be easy for us to think there is a fork somewhere down the road of our future. Perhaps we will see it off in the distance and have time to prepare to make a decision, but the reality is the decision is before us even today.

We have a special story to tell to the nations. It is a story of covenant, and it is a story of repentance. It is a story of the love of God for all mankind. It is the story of all of scripture. It is the story of the Book of Mormon. We began this article with the words of a familiar Christian hymn, "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations." The refrain of that hymn says "For the darkness shall turn to the dawning, And the dawning to noon day bright, And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, The kingdom of love and light." Those words are true, and we, through the Book of Mormon, absolutely have a story to tell about them!

Mercy,

the Atoning Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

by Karen Bates

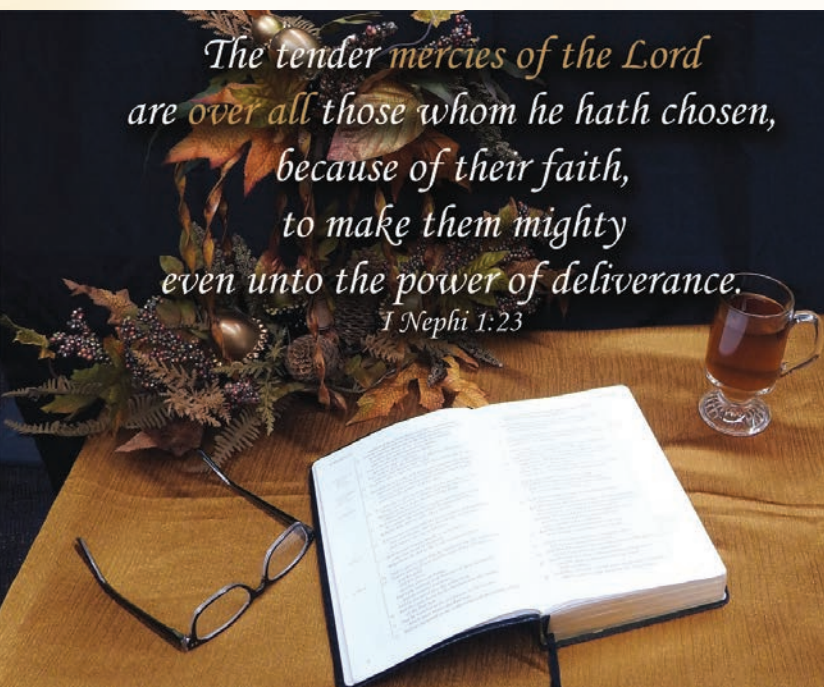
God's mercy is over all (Alma 14:127 [26:37 LDS]). Beginning in 1 Nephi with the record of Lehi's dream, Lehi exclaims the Lord's mercy (1 Nephi 1:13 [1:14 LDS]). He has seen a vision of Christ and the twelve apostles descending out of heaven. He is shown that Jerusalem will be destroyed because of her abominations. Yet he declares that God's mercy is over all the earth and because of God's mercies He will not allow those that come unto Him to perish. **This is the beauty of God's mercy, it is "over all," yet it is those that come unto Him in covenant that have the promise of His deliverance because of His mercy** (Psalms 145:9; 1 Nephi 1:23 [1:20 LDS]).

The Infinite Atonement

There is an eternal expression of this mercy and that is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our salvation (Alma 14:37-38 [24:14 LDS], Psalms 85:7). Jacob declares "O the wisdom of God! His mercy and grace!" He has just given a description of the infinite atonement in 2 Nephi 6:10-19 [20:3-12 LDS]. The first judgment came on man when Adam

partook of the forbidden fruit and justice demanded his fall, death; Adam was cut off from the presence of the Lord (2 Nephi 6:14 [20:7 LDS], 2 Nephi 3:9 [10:8 LDS]). Mercy could not claim him, because his deed was sinful (Mosiah 1:128 [2:1 LDS]). John tells us, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). This corruption could not put on incorruption, death could not be life, except there was an infinite atonement (2 Nephi 6:16 [9:7 LDS]). This atonement came as the Great Creator, Jesus Christ, took on flesh that He might have the bowels of mercy (Alma 5:22 [7:12 LDS]). Jesus then suffered and died, giving His own life on the cross, dying for all men (2 Nephi 6:10 [9:5 LDS]). Then, Jesus rose from the dead in victory over death (Mosiah 8:35 [15:8 LDS]). "For as death has passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection" (2 Nephi 6:11 [9:6 LDS]). Breaking the bonds of death gave Jesus power to make intercession for the children of men (Mosiah 8:35 [15:8 LDS]). Jesus is our advocate (1 John 2:1, D&C 45:1c [45:3-4 LDS]). It is by virtue, power, of Jesus' sacrifice that this atonement is made: "and verily I say, even as many as have believed on my name, for I am Christ, and in mine own name, by virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them" (D&C 38:1c [38:4 LDS]). The great love of God is expressed in D&C 16:3c (D&C 18:10-11): "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; for, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore He suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him."

This sacrifice was from the foundation of the world so that from the beginning those that believed and came unto Christ received of the infinite atonement (Revelation 13:8; D&C 17:4a-6c [D&C 20:17-18 LDS]). We find a beautiful explanation of this in Alma 16:213-217 [34:12-16 LDS]



... that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God; yea, infinite and eternal; and thus He shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on His name; This being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowered justice and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus **mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance, is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice;** therefore, only unto him that has faith unto repentance, is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

Alma gives us insight into God's mercy and the plan of redemption when he states: "But God did call on men, in the name of His Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid,) saying: 'If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son. Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest' " (Alma 9:54-55 [12:33-34 LDS]). As mercy is the applying of the atoning blood of Christ unto the forgiving of sin and the purification of hearts (Mosiah 2:3 [4:2 LDS]), the plan of redemption brings a remission of sin through Jesus Christ and the promise of His mercy.

Mercy and Justice

If God's mercy is over all, yet those that choose to make a covenant and keep it, have the promise of that mercy, what happens to those that do not know the law? We find an answer in 2 Nephi: "the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them (those that do not have the law), because of the atonement: For they are delivered by the power of him: for the atonement satisfieth the demands of His justice upon all those who have not the law given to them" (2 Nephi 6:50-55 [21:20-25 LDS]), They are restored to God through the atonement of Jesus Christ. They too will come before the judgment bar of God and "they who are righteous will be righteous still and they who

are filthy will be filthy still" (2 Nephi 6:38 [21:8 LDS]; Revelation 22:11, 1 Nephi 4:53-61 [15:33-35 LDS], Alma 5:36-37 [16:29-30 LDS], Mormon 4:74 [9:14 LDS]).

Little children are also without the law (Moroni 8:25 [8:22 LDS]). The infinite atonement of Christ is how God's mercy is applied to little children. Scripture tells us that little children are whole from the foundation of the world, and do not need baptism (Moroni 8:9-13 [8:8-12 LDS]). Genesis 6:56 IV, D&C 28:13a [D&C 29:46-47 LDS]). Little children are alive in Jesus Christ because of the power of His mercy (Moroni 8:20-21 [9:20 LDS]).

The Book of Mormon gives us the most complete understanding of mercy and justice in all the scriptures. Read Alma 19:77-114 [41:31-42:30 LDS]. **Through the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ, God's mercy does not rob justice (Alma 19:107 [42:25 LDS]), but can satisfy the demands of justice (Alma 16:217 [34:16 LDS]).**

Alma, in calling his son Corianton to humility and repentance, warns him not to try to excuse himself in the "least point" because of his sin (Alma 19:114 [42:30 LDS]). Proverb 28:13 instructs that "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (D&C 61:1b [61:2 LDS]). We understand that mercy has no claim on those that are in open rebellion against God (Mosiah 1:79-85 [2:36-39 LDS]). In modern day revelation we read: "That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willet to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, or judgment; therefore, they must remain filthy still" D&C 85:8b [88:35 LDS]). However, Nephi tells us that "where there is no condemnation, the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement," (2 Nephi 6:53 [9:25 LDS]).

And now the plan of mercy could not be brought about, except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.

(Alma 19:97 [42:15 LDS])

The Power of Mercy

“The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty” (Numbers 14:18). “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged” (Proverbs 16:6).

How can this be, that mercy and truth purge iniquity yet the guilty are not cleared? Jacob tells us that all mankind would be lost if no atonement were made (Jacob 5:21 [7:12 LDS]). God Himself makes atonement for the sins and iniquities of His people in and through the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, otherwise we would perish because salvation does not come by the law alone (Mosiah 8:5 [13:28 LDS]). There is a law with fixed punishment. However, by the law (both temporal and spiritual) men are cut off from God (from all good) and are miserable forever because all have sinned and broken the law (Romans 3:23, Alma 7:12 [9:11 LDS]). Since we have all broken the law we cannot be justified by the law. Therefore, justice carries out the law and inflicts the punishment (Alma 19:95-96 [42:13-14 LDS]). “Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only, on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state; yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice” (Alma 19:94 [42:13 LDS]). If it was not this way, justice would not exist and if justice didn’t exist, God would not exist, for God is just, (Mosiah 8:71 [16:1 LDS], Alma 19:104 [42:22 LDS]). However, God does exist, and God is merciful.

For behold, ye yourselves know, that He counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all His works; wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him, through the atonement of Christ, His Only Begotten Son. That ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first fruits of Christ, unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him, before He manifesteth himself in the flesh.

(Jacob 3:15-17 [4:10-11 LDS])

Whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine only begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.”

Alma 9:55



For more on the power of God’s mercy refer to Ammon’s praise testimony (Alma 14:97-104 [26:16-22 LDS]).

This is why redemption can only come through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Holy Messiah. Jesus sacrificed himself for sin to answer the end of the law. Nephi tells us no flesh can dwell in the presence of God save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah (2 Nephi 1:65-77 [2:4-9 LDS]). “And since man had fallen, he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atoneth for their sins, through faith and repentance, etc.” (Alma 13:46 [22:14 LDS]). “Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest” (Alma 9:55 [12:34 LDS]).

The mercies of God have claim upon the penitent because of the atonement.

But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent (repentant, contrite), and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead: and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence

of God; And thus they are restored into His presence; to be judged according to their works; according to the law and justice; for behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.

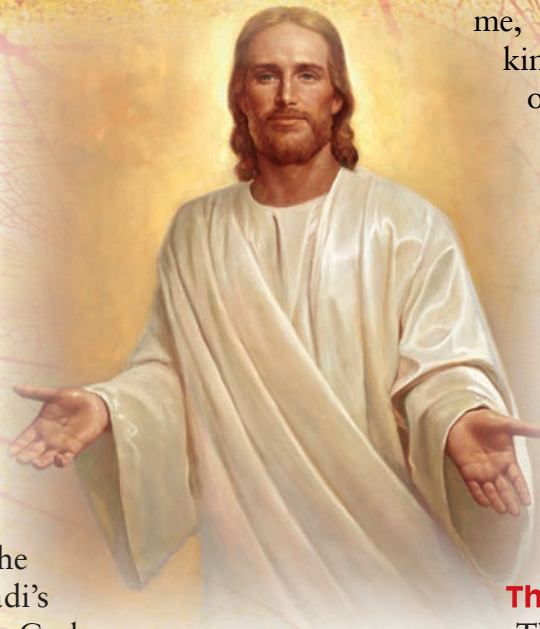
(Alma 19:105-106 [42:23 LDS])

This is all possible through the divinity of Jesus Christ. In Abinadi's repentance talks he explains that God Himself came down among the children of men to redeem His people. He, in the person of Jesus Christ, took on flesh being the Only Begotten Son of God and was subjected to the things of the flesh, yet remaining sinless, was crucified and slain, subjecting the flesh to death. Yet the bands of death were broken through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And thus God breaketh the bands of death; having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men: Having ascended into heaven; having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion toward the children of men; Standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions; having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

(Mosiah 8:28-37 [15:1-9 LDS])

In Ammon's praise speech he names the attributes of God saying God "has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; He comprehendeth all things, and He is a merciful being even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on His name" (Alma 14:124 [26:35 LDS]). This is the beauty of mercy and the heart of this study on covenant mercy. Through this covenant mercy our sins are blotted out. The psalmist writes, "Have mercy upon



me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions" (Psalms 51:1). The Lord himself stated His wonderful promise in ancient times as well as modern revelation, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." (Hebrew 10:17; D&C 58:9c [42 LDS]). What a difference this can make in our lives, if we will accept the invitation of mercy and come in covenant with the Lord.

The Invitation of Mercy

There is a beautiful image of our Lord standing with His arms outstretched and the invitation He extends to all in His mercy to come and receive "the greatest of all the gifts," salvation in the Kingdom of God (D&C 6:5e, 12:3b [6:13, 14:6-7 LDS]). The prophet Alma exhorts us to repent or we cannot be saved, and then records the invitation of mercy: "Behold, He sendeth an invitation unto all men; for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and He saith, Repent, and I will receive you" (Alma 3:57 [5:33 LDS]). This admonition to come unto the Lord and repent with the promise that because of His mercy the Lord will turn away evil is also found in Joel 2:13 and 2 Nephi 12:41. The psalmist gives an example of the Lord's mercy in Psalm 136:12 and calls it His "stretched out arm." In Ezekiel 20:34 the Lord promises to gather His scattered people "with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm." Amulek illustrates that those who exercise faith unto repentance are encircled with the arms of safety as mercy satisfies the demands of justice (Alma 16:217 [34:16 LDS]).

The Book of Mormon warns us against hardening our hearts to the invitation and receiving death rather than life (Jacob 4:9 [6:5 LDS]; Mosiah 8:86-89 [16:12-13 LDS]). The choice is ours as Mosiah reminds us:

If that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice doth awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, Which doth cause

him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flames ascendeth up for ever and ever.

(Mosiah 1:83-84 [2-38 LDS])

Modern day revelation makes the choice plain: “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 85:7 [88:33 LDS]). Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ extends the invitation directly in 3 Nephi 4:42-48 [9:14-18 LDS]: “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.” Again in these latter days Jesus invites,


Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the great I AM, whose arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins, who will gather his people even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, even as many as will hearken to my voice, and humble themselves before me, and call upon me in mighty prayer.

(D&C 28:1a [29:1-2 LDS])

This loving invitation is a free gift extended by God to all His creation. It is not forced on us. God is asking us to accept the invitation of mercy by coming into covenant with Him.

What joy! To know that our sins will be forgiven and our guilt relieved through this covenant mercy. We read, “Men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 1:115 [2:25 LDS]). Enos gives testimony of the power of mercy. After crying unto the Lord for forgiveness, God spoke to him: “‘Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.’ And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away” (Enos 1:7-8 [1:5-6 LDS]). We can lift our hearts in praise as Alma writes,

And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that He hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that He hath forgiven us of



*He sendeth an invitation unto all men,
for the arms of mercy are extended
towards them, and He saith,
Repent, and I will receive you*
Alma 3:57

those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and took away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of His Son.

(Alma 14:32 [24:10 LDS])

What a wonderful, healing promise, to have our guilt “swept way!”

Mercy and Keeping the Covenant

Our acceptance of this invitation of mercy is coming into covenant and living the way God commands us.

We are told that God keeps covenant and mercy with:

1. Those “that love Him and keep His commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9, Nehemiah 1:5, Daniel 9:4)
2. Those that keep the commandments, statutes, and judgments of God; that “hearken to these judgments,” and keep and do them (Deuteronomy 7:11-12)
3. God’s servants that walk before Him with all their heart (I Kings 8:23, 2 Chronicles 6:14)
4. “Such as keep His covenant and His testimonies” (Psalms 25:10)
5. Those that fear (reverence) God, His righteousness; keep His covenant, remember and do His commandments (Psalms 103:17-18)

The association of mercy with God’s covenant people and their keeping of the covenant through

the keeping of the commandments is simply stated in modern day revelation (D&C 54:1e [D&C 54:6 LDS]): "...blessed are they who have kept the covenant, and observed the commandment, for they shall obtain mercy."

Hear God's Voice and Do Not Harden your Heart

The prophet Jacob illustrates how reading the scriptures, listening to the word of God and keeping the commandments will help us be more inclined to accept God's "invitation to mercy." Jacob exclaims, "How merciful is our God unto us!" (Jacob 4:6 [6:4 LDS]) He goes on to illustrate that even though God extends the arms of mercy all the day long, salvation in the Kingdom of God is extended to those who hear God's voice and do not harden their hearts (Jacob 4:5-6 [6:3-4 LDS]). Modern day scripture tells us that the word of the Lord is His voice (D&C 83:9a [84:60 LDS]). Jacob 4:10-13 follows this same theme admonishing the people to hear the Lord's voice and having been nourished by the good word of God, not rejecting or denying it. The prophet Hosea said that the Lord had a controversy with those that would not hear His word because there was no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. Alma instructs his son to declare the word so that souls could be brought to repentance and the "great plan of mercy" could have claim on them. Jacob clarifies that to not have a hard heart is to hear God's voice, repent, come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God (Jacob 4:7-10 [6:4-6 LDS]).

In scripture we are instructed to teach the people to be "meek and lowly in heart" (Alma 17:65-67 [37:32-34 LDS]). In Moroni we learn that this meekness and lowliness of heart comes only by the Holy Spirit through the remission of sin. This remission of sin is received through fulfilling the commandment to have faith on Jesus Christ, repent, and be baptized (Moroni 8:29 [8:25-26 LDS]) by water and fire (2 Nephi 13:24 [31:17 LDS]).

Those That Come Unto Christ Will Not Perish

We have a promise that those who come unto Christ will not perish (1 Nephi 1:13 [1:14 LDS], 2 Peter 3:9). When we have a knowledge of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and His doctrine¹ we will know how to come unto Christ, (1 Nephi 4:19 [5:14 LDS]). Moroni explains that to come unto Christ, be perfected in Christ, is to: 1) Deny yourself of all

ungodliness; 2) Love God with everything that you are, spiritually and physically, 3) Do not deny the power of God; then by Christ's grace, favor which is not merited, you are sanctified, made perfect in Christ (Moroni 10:29 [10:32 LDS]). Grace and mercy go hand in hand. It has been said that mercy is when you do not get what you deserve; we do not get the punishment we deserve, eternal death. Grace is when you get what you do not deserve; a reward we cannot earn, eternal life. Grace and mercy are both possible only through the gift, sacrifice, and triumph over death of Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.

The plainness of Lehi's message was the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the world through Him. Nephi then affirms that "the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom He hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:23 [1:20 LDS]). Here we see that faith is integral to the promise of deliverance, which is only possible because of God's mercy. Alma explains that this is the purpose of Christ's sacrifice: "This being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance" (Alma 16:216 [34:15 LDS]). True faith will lead you to repentance. Alma exhorts us "...to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon His holy name, that He would have mercy upon you; yea, cry unto him for mercy; for He is mighty to save;" (Alma 16:218 [34:17-18 LDS]). As we grow in faith unto repentance we find that the first fruits of repentance is baptism:

And the first-fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith, unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart, cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.
(Moroni 8:29 [8:25-26 LDS])

When we have the gift of the Holy Ghost we are filled with love and perfect hope, which are important to enduring to the end (2 Nephi 13:29-30 [31:20 LDS]). The pure love of God (charity) comes by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). This love is necessary to salvation in the Kingdom of God (Moroni 10:15 [22:7 LDS]; Ether 5:35 [12:35 LDS]) Alma tells us in Alma 16:135 [32:13 LDS], “And now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.”

Jesus, Himself, tells us in 3 Nephi 4:42-52 [9:14-22 LDS] that His arm of mercy is extended and those that come unto Him must receive Him through faith, belief on His name, repentance, and baptism; having a broken heart and a contrite spirit; those that come unto him will be saved (3 Nephi 12:25-35 [27:13-21 LDS]). This wonderful promise is to everyone who chooses to receive it by responding to the commandment (Moroni 7:36 [7:34 LDS]). “Nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of hosts” (2 Nephi 12:41 [28:32 LDS]).

Psalms 32:10 contrasts the wicked and those that trust in the Lord: “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.” “And thus doth the Lord work with His power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him” (Mosiah 13:27 [29:20 LDS]). It is Jesus Christ our redeemer that atones for our sins (D&C 28:1 [29:1-3 LDS]). God’s mercy means those that come unto Christ (come into covenant through the doctrine of Christ) and keep the covenant (endure to the end) will not perish.

Conclusion

The Lord’s mercy is in giving Himself freely, our response is accepting this gift by giving ourselves through repentance and good works in covenant (Mosiah 3:21 [5:15 LDS]). Your good works are a light that glorifies God (3 Nephi 5:63 [12:16 LDS]), “Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (3 Nephi 5:63 [12:16 LDS]). As the psalmist writes, “Also

unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest (gives reward) to every man according to His work” (Psalms 62:12). Alma admonishes his son to be merciful. He says to “deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually.” (Alma 19:78 [41:14 LDS]) Alma expands on this:


...teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity; Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ: teach them to humble themselves, and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart: for such shall find rest to their souls.

(Alma 17:65-67 [37:32-34 LDS])

Now that we have a greater understanding of God and His mercy through His Son Jesus Christ we can better understand the commandment found in Luke 6:36, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” Repenting and coming into covenant, giving ourselves in love, good works, is how we extend mercy to others.

Helaman tells us, “Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon His holy name; yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God” (Helaman 2:25 [3:27 LDS]). Because God is just, merciful, and has all power to save, we must believe on the name of Jesus Christ and bring “forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 9:27 [12:15 LDS], Alma 14:124 [26:35 LDS]). This repentant, soft heart must be merciful to others. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (3 Nephi 5:54 [12:7 LDS]), Matthew 5:9). Alma admonishes his son, “Therefore, my son, see that ye are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things, then shall ye receive your reward” (Alma 19:78 [41:14 LDS]).

¹ 2 Nephi 13:3-32, 14:1-7; 3 Nephi 5:23-43; Hebrew 6.



“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

by Francis Harper

But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner. (Luke 18:13 IV/KJV)

We have been told to preach nothing but repentance to this generation. *Say nothing but repentance unto this generation....* (D&C 6:4b RLDS) Before we can repent and change our ways, we need to identify our sin or sins. We need to admit we have a problem, as in an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting, in which each person introduces themselves by giving their name and saying, “I am an alcoholic.” Our sins need to be identified and admitted. My name is Francis Harper, and I am a sinner.

David and his son, Solomon, were guilty of some of the most abominable sins! David repented and was forgiven. Solomon did not repent. It is written: *And his heart is become as David his father; and he repented not as did David his father, that I may forgive him.* (1 Kings 11:33 IV) How could Solomon, who was known for his great wisdom, *neglect so great salvation.* (Hebrews 2:3 IV/KJV) Billions of people on the earth today are following in the footsteps of Solomon!

Why did Solomon not repent, as did his father? Most likely, it was because the Holy Spirit was not present in his life to awaken him from his spiritual blindness! Solomon’s 700 wives, princesses and 300 hundred concubines *had turned away his heart* from God. (1 Kings 11:3 IV/KJV) Likewise, billions today are not aware of their sins and of their need to repent and ask the Lord to forgive them.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to penetrate our hardened hearts, *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23 IV/KJV) Evidently, Paul’s heart was touched by the Spirit, which caused him to say, *O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Romans 7:24 IV/KJV) Isaiah answered Paul’s question when he prophesied of

Jesus: . . . *he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . and with his stripes we are healed.* (Isaiah 53:5 IV/KJV)

We are very good at covering up our sins and even denying them. Jesus said we can see the smallest sin of others and cannot see even the larger ones of our own. *Again, how canst thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?* (Luke 6:42 IV/KJV)

Some of the behaviors that are specifically mentioned as being sinful in the Scriptures are no longer considered evil by many in our country today. The statistics compiled by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and others in 2008 revealed the following percentages of adults who approve of the behaviors listed: gambling 61%, adultery 42%, fornication 60%, abortion 45%, pornography 38%, profanity 36%, drunkenness 35% and homosexuality 30%. They found 51% of mainline clergy support the legality of abortion, 65% of clergy support same sex marriage, 57% of Christians do not believe Satan exists, and only 42% are certain God exists. Periodic updates since 2008 indicate the decline in moral values is happening at a rapid rate. We are quickly becoming an “I’m ok, you’re ok,” society.

I am deeply concerned when I observe many of those I sincerely love becoming involved in some of the sinful things listed, without recognizing they are endangering their immortal souls and salvation! I become very frustrated when I see their peers applauding them for their courage in taking a stand against what the Scriptures clearly teach as sin. As a result, great multitudes of people live without the least conviction of

the sins they are committing!

When people do not consider their sinful behavior as sin, they do not recognize their need to repent and, in their blindness, they do not repent! If they do not repent, God cannot forgive them! God never violates our freedom to choose.

We need to be awakened to a *lively sense [the reality] of our guilt*. (Mosiah1:83 RLDS) [Mosiah2:38 LDS] This awakening happens when we are blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the presence of Jesus and witnessing the miraculous catch of fish, Peter exclaimed, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*. (Luke 5:8 IV/KJV) The Scriptures assure us that if we sincerely repent, we will be forgiven. *Yea, and as often as my people repent, will I forgive them their trespasses against me*. (Mosiah 11:139 RLDS) [Mosiah 26:30 LDS]

Jesus proved that He has the power and authority to forgive our sins when He healed the man afflicted with palsy.

He said unto the man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this that speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? But Jesus perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Does it require more power to forgive sins than to make the sick rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I said it. And he said unto the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thy house. (Luke 5:20-24 IV/KJV)

Our lives can become a slippery slope. Choosing anything but complete obedience to the word and will

of God is the first step toward moral decay. We need to pray daily:

And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:14 IV) [Matthew 6:13 KJV]

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished; (2 Peter 2:9 IV/KJV)

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired you, that he may sift the children of the kingdom as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted strengthen your brethren. (Luke 22:31-32 IV/KJV)

Jesus prayed for Peter. He will also pray for us, if we ask.

We all need to heed the wise counsel of Alma, who wrote:

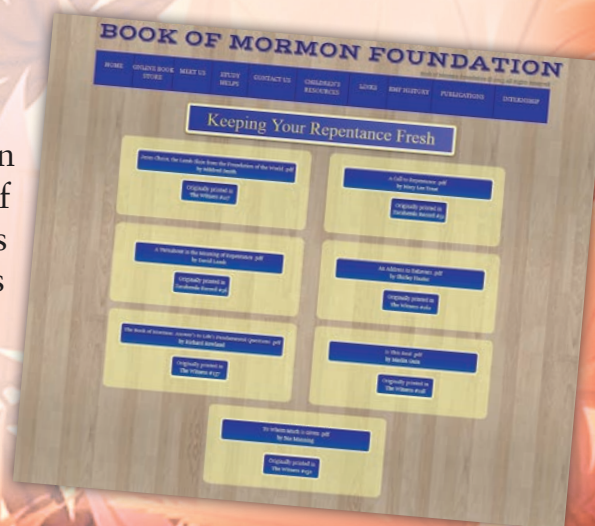
I beseech [beg] of you, that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; (Alma 16:229 RLDS) [Alma 34:33 LDS]

May it never be said to us:

Behold, your days of probation are past: ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation, until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; (Helaman 5:51 RLDS) [Helaman 13:38 LDS]

Keeping Your Repentance Fresh

The Board of Directors at The Book of Mormon Foundation has felt an urge to promote the message of repentance within the Book of Mormon. You will see articles concerning that subject in this issue and in upcoming issues of The Witness. On our website at www.bomf.org, past articles are available for you to read online or download and print. You will have the choice to download the entire issue of The Witness in which the article was printed, or just a copy of the article.



CPRS Third Grade Visit

On Friday, September 14, 2018, the third graders at CPRS walked over to The Book of Mormon Foundation with their teacher, Ken Bobbitt, and a few moms. Everyone gathered in the Intern room to cool off with some cold water and watched the movie, “Build Upon the Rock,” filmed at the 2014 Book of Mormon Day for Kids.* The film was directed by high school students from CPRS and the actors were 5th and 6th graders at the time. Our visitors recognized many of the actors.

The kids then gathered around Karen Bates’ desk to learn about the translation and printing of the Book of Mormon. They saw copies of the original manuscript written by Oliver Cowdery. A 100- year old Book of Mormon was passed around. It was published by the Board of Education of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1917. It was the oldest book the kids had ever touched! They also found out the original printing had no verse numbers and decided it would be hard to look up scriptures without those numbers. Karen told them about her research work on a study Book of Mormon and showed them her volumes of research books.

The students then moved into the library. Keeping with the Build Upon a Rock theme, pieces of obsidian were brought out. The kids learned that obsidian is actually a type of hard, brittle glass formed from lava and even older than the 100-year old book they had just held! Because it can be fractured into very sharp tools, warriors and hunters used obsidian for arrowheads and spearheads. The heavy rocks and arrowheads that were found in Central America by archeologists were passed around for the students to examine.

We talked about what kind of stones the Brother of Jared would have given to the Lord to bring light to the dark barges. Then the conversation



included what other things the Jaredites took with them on the barges. Some of the kids decided they wouldn’t want to be in the barge with the bees! Bees tend to mind their own business, plus the honey would be available during the trip, but they do sting. A swarm of bees could become somewhat agitated while being tossed around in the depths of the sea in a barge! But the benefits of having fresh honey might be worth taking the trip with the bees. A piece of beeswax was passed around and a treat of honeycomb dripping with fresh honey was sent back to school with Mr. Bobbitt to share in class. **

A lot of ideas were covered in the 40 minute visit. The kids were exceptionally polite and enjoyed their visit. We hope to see Mr. Bobbitt’s class again next year!

* See this movie and other videos on The Book of Mormon Foundation’s YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC38zMovnhbXxSD7gdL2ifSg>

**Thanks to Alton Gilmore, beekeeper, who shared the honeycomb and honey with our visitors.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

TRANSLATED BY
JOSEPH SMITH, JR.

COMPARED WITH THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT AND THE
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WHO WERE THE WISE MEN?

by Eric Woolery

Scripture records that, following the birth of Christ, wise men appeared, having traveled from afar and offering gifts.

Who Were These Men?

Who were these wise men, and where did they come from? Were there only three? What reason would they have for traveling a long distance, just to see a new born baby, unless His birth had special meaning to them? Who would have had this kind of prophetic insight? Were they kings, wise men or prophets of God?

The most apparent answer is they were prophets of God. They clearly had a sound understanding of prophecy, had searched the scriptures that they might know the word of God, and they were strong in the knowledge of the truth. They also demonstrated a spiritual knowledge and understanding that was not commonly known in Israel at that time. Scripture also tells us, *Surely the Lord God will do nothing, until he revealeth the secret unto his servants the prophets.* (Amos 3:7 IV/KJV) Surely an event of this magnitude would merit being revealed to God's prophets!

The word "wise," as defined in the 1828 Webster dictionary, is as "having knowledge; hence, having the power of discerning and judging correctly, or of discriminating between what is true and what is false. Discrete and judicious in the use or applications of knowledge." However, this is man's definition of wise.

How do the scriptures define being wise?

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil.

(Proverbs 3:5-7 IV/KJV)

Therefore, *whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them*, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock,

(Matthew 7:24-25 KJV)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

(James 1:5 IV/KJV)

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by

bread alone, but by *every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

(Matthew 4:3-4 IV/KJV)

Considering dictionary and scripture definitions of what a wise man is, we can see that a "wise" man correctly understands and applies the word of truth, or of God, to his life. He has a personal ongoing relationship with his Heavenly Father "*rightly dividing the word of truth*" and being "*thoroughly furnished unto all*" good works. (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:17 IV/JKV) Plainly put, he is a servant of God who has knowledge of and understands the scriptures. This also describes the "wise men" who came to visit the Christ child. These men had knowledge of who Christ was, why He was born into the world and a general idea of where He would be born. This is much more sensible than believing they were kings or magi from pagan lands who saw a new star and decided to follow it.

What About Jesus Invited Their Attention and Wonder?

Jesus, during His ministry on earth, gave some insight as to His mission on earth as well as after His ascension into heaven. He said, "I am not sent but unto the *lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" (Matthew 15:23 IV/KJV) He said also, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And *other sheep I have*, which *are not of this fold*: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:13, 15-16 IV) [John 10:14-16 KJV]

Just What Did The Prophets Know?

There were prophets in ancient America, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, who did have a knowledge and understanding of where, when and how Jesus would be born. God, being no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35 IV/KJV), wanted every nation that had descendants of the house of Israel to have a knowledge of the coming of the Messiah. For instance:

For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven, among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning; and his

mother shall be called Mary. And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith, on his name;
(Mosiah 1:97, 102-103 RLDS)
[Mosiah 3:5, 8-9 LDS]

And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth: and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me, Nephi, what beholdest thou? And I said unto him, A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins. And he said unto me, Knowest thou the condescension of God? And I said unto him, I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless I do not know the meaning of all things. And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me, Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!
(1 Nephi 3:52-57, 61-62 RLDS)
[1 Nephi 8:12-15, 18-19 LDS]

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying, Repent ye, repent ye and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight: For behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. And behold, he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed, and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God; And he shall go forth, suffering pains, and afflictions, and temptations of every kind; And this that the word might be fulfilled which saith, He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people; and he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people: And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh, that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions, according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.
(Alma 5:17-23 RLDS)
[Alma 7:9-13LDS]

Five years before Jesus was born, the prophet Samuel prophesied that a new star would appear, announcing the birth of Christ.

And behold there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. And behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven.
(Helaman 5:59-60 RLDS)
[Helaman 14:57 LDS]

And it came to pass also, that a new star did appear, according to the word.”
(3 Nephi 1:24 RLDS)
[3 Nephi 1:21 LDS]

Interestingly, they began to mark time from the day the sign of Christ’s birth appeared. (3 Nephi 1:45 RLDS)
[3 Nephi 2:8 LDS]

What happened to those prophesying of Christ in the Americas?

As with many of the prophets of God, Samuel’s preaching and prophesying was rejected by many of the people who heard him. They even tried to kill him. This caused Samuel to flee from them, never to be heard from again among this people in the Americas. Helaman tells us:

...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)
[Helaman 16:13-14 LDS]

Nephi, a prophet and a keeper of records among his people, in observing all of the happenings among the people, gave custody of the records and sacred things to his son, who was also named Nephi. After doing this, he left the land, and no one knew where he went. A search was made for him some years later, but he was never found and was never heard from again.

This Nephi also had a brother, Lehi, who was also a prophet of God. Nephi and Lehi did much ministry together and were almost inseparable. After Nephi disappeared, Lehi is never mentioned again, either.

Nephi, Lehi and Samuel were all men of God who sought to serve him with their whole soul. They were what we would call righteous men. In our view, these men could very well be the “wise men” mentioned by

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Matthew in the bible. Consider who would be more desirous to see the Christ child than those who had Christ revealed to them by God, and who had preached and taught his precepts while looking forward to his coming. These “wise men,” if leaving when signs and wonders of Christ’s impending birth were displayed, could easily have traveled for up to two years to reach Jerusalem and inquire of Herod about Jesus.

How did Herod know to seek after the Christ child?

After conferring with the chief priests and scribes, Herod had the wise men brought to him privately and “inquired diligently what time the star appeared.” Following this meeting, Herod sent them to Bethlehem to “search diligently for the young child” and, when they had found him to bring back word to him so that he could “come and worship him also.” (Matthew 3:7-8 IV) [Matthew 3:7-8 KJV] After this the wise ones left and continued to follow the star which they saw in the east. They followed it until “it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” (Matthew 3:9-10 IV) [Matthew 2:9-10 KJV] When they entered into the “house” and saw the “young child” with his mother Mary, they “fell down and worshipped him,” opening their gifts or treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 3:11 IV) [Matthew 2:11 KJV]

Before they left, the “wise men” were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod. After they departed, Joseph was told by the angel of the Lord to “Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child, and his mother by night,



and departed into Egypt.” (Matthew 3:13 IV) [Matthew 2:13 KJV] When Herod realized the wise men were not coming back, he was very angry. Knowing the approximate age of the child, he then sent soldiers to kill “all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.” (Matthew 3:16 IV) [Matthew 2:16 KJV] This occurred after Jesus had been circumcised and had been blessed by Simeon in the temple at a point when Joseph and Mary had returned to Jerusalem for the Passover and were staying at Joseph’s house in Bethlehem.

Other prophetic words to live by

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come

(John 16:12-13 IV/KJV)

As we consider what has been presented here, let us remember the instruction of Jesus to his disciples:

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

(John 14:15-17 IV/KJV)