

Choosing Christ Christmas Message

Given in Willow Creek 3rd Ward – December 29, 2019

Bishop Rich Goaslind

1st Counselor Donald Stepan

2nd Counselor Brett Hopkin

Good Morning Brother and Sisters. My name is Clint Weaver for those who do not know me. I live in the 6th ward with my wife Sarah and my family. I have 3 daughters. Elizabeth who, yes I enlisted to be my companion speaker. I didn't have to look very far for a returned missionary. Thank you for your message Elizabeth. Kathryn who graduated from Brighton High School last year and is attending BYU, and Rebekah who is a freshman at Hillcrest High School. I love being here with you this morning especially during this wonderful time of year. I bring to you the love of our Stake Presidency. I have always known that they love us but I now have a firsthand witness and the most firm testimony of just how much President Staples, President Matheson and President Smith love us in the Stake and you in the 3rd ward. I testify with all of my heart that these men pray for us daily and receive inspiration and revelation for us in the Willow Creek Stake. I testify that Bishop Goaslind, Brother Stepan and Brother Hopkin do the same; they each have a stewardship and act in love in fulfilling this stewardship. I invite you to consider the words of President Russell M. Nelson from his September 2019 address at Brigham Young University..."My dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to seek earnestly a confirmation from the Spirit that what I have told you is true and is from the Lord. He has declared that we may seek knowledge from heaven and expect to receive it: "If thou shalt ask," the Lord promised, "thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge. Ask your Heavenly Father if we truly are the Lord's apostles and prophets. Ask if we have received revelation on this and other matters. I extend this invitation to ask the Lord for confirmation that your local leaders receive revelation upon revelation and knowledge upon knowledge for us here in the Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake.

I have recently been called to serve as the Stake Young Men's President as a member of the High Council following the adjustments announced in the October 2019 General Conference. I so look forward to working with the youth of our Stake. I see them doing so many wonderful things and activities. My message to you Young Men and Young Women especially those who joined the Young Women and Deacons Quorum at the first of the year, I encourage you to visit President Russell M. Nelson's June 3, 2018 Worldwide Youth Devotional and answer his call to action and join the youth battalion working to gather Israel. I bear witness that as you follow our prophet's guidance and teachings you will be blessed. It was noted recently that that family history center across from Albion Middle School is the 3rd most used / active in the Church. That is wonderful news that we are using resources available to us. I pray you use this family history center as a resource in gathering Israel. Additionally, I would also suggest you incorporate your home as resource. Elder David A. Bednar said in his April 2019 General Conference address: "The ultimate missionary training center is in our homes; secondary missionary training centers are located in Provo, Manila, Mexico City, and in other locations. Our most instructive Sunday School classes should be our individual and family study in our places of residence; helpful but secondary Sunday School classes are held in our meetinghouses. Family history centers now are in our homes. Supplemental support for our family history research work also is available in our meetinghouses." Deacons and Beehives I encourage you to use all resources available and join the youth battalion. To the Young Women and Young Men ages 14-18, I hope that you were able to attend the Missionary Academy. I pray that your testimony was strengthened. I pray that you remember the feelings, emotions and the promptings felt through the Holy Ghost.

Throughout 2019 our High Council messages have been focused on choosing Christ by adopting his attributes. Over the year I have learned so much about Christlike attributes of, Seeking after virtue, Facing challenges with hope and patience, Being prayerful,

Being forgiving, Being understanding of our imperfections and recognizing our divine worth, Being a model minister and treating others in a holy way and Being inclusive and loving of one another. Learning about these attributes filled my heart with the spirit and with a greater love of Christ.

However, during this time of year I have found myself with my focus waivering. I have been checking the December budget daily as we buy family Christmas gifts. I have been wondering why FM100 plays Christmas music so early. I have been thinking of the materialism of getting the newest iPhone, the newest Airpods and shopping Black Friday deals, Cyber Monday and Terrific Tuesday and every other sale. The messages I have learned throughout the year have been drowned out by materialism and anxiety of the Christmas season.

I had to turn around my negative thoughts. I reread Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf's 2010 Christmas Devotional message "Seeing Christmas through New Eyes"...Elder Uchtdorf teaches us using the Grinch story...

*Every Who
Down in Who-ville
Liked Christmas a lot ...
But the Grinch,
Who lived just north of Who-ville,
Did NOT!*

The Grinch, that memorable character from a classic children's story by Dr. Seuss, had a heart that "was two sizes too small," and he hated everything about Christmas. Through the course of the story, however, he undergoes a dramatic transformation when he learns that there is more to Christmas than decorations and gifts.

Perhaps the Grinch's story is so memorable because, if we are honest, may be able to relate to him. Who among us has not felt concern over the commercialization and even greed of the Christmas season? Who hasn't felt overwhelmed by the packed calendars, the stress of finding gifts, the pressure of planning meals and events? In fact,

psychologists tell us that during this season of cheer and goodwill, many feel sorrow and depression.

We know what the Christmas season ought to be—we know it should be a time of reflection on the birth of the Savior, a time of celebration and of generosity. But sometimes our focus is so much on the things that annoy and overwhelm us that we can almost hear ourselves say in unison with the Grinch: “Why, for fifty-three years I’ve put up with it now! I MUST stop this Christmas from coming! ... *But HOW*

Elder Uchtdorf teaches three ways we can see Christmas through new eyes.

1. We can Rejoice in the Birth of Our Savior.
2. We can ponder his influence in our lives today
3. We can look steadfastly for His Coming.

On the Church’s website in the Light the World one by one video, it depicts the journey of Mary and Joseph leaving their home in Nazareth traveling unto Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. We see Mary after giving birth holding her newborn son, the Son of God checking his hands for five fingers and his feet for five toes. This newborn child was like other earthly newborn and yet unlike any newborn every before and ever since. Jesus was born, the joy in heaven was so great it could not be contained, an angelic host parted the veil, proclaiming unto Shepherds “good tidings of great joy.”... praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men”

Christ Jesus was visited by Wise Men who rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they saw the young child with Mary his mother they fell down and worshiped him; they open their treasures, they presented unto him gifts. This started the tradition of gift giving during the Christmas season. This allows me to think of the wonderful family traditions I have experienced during the Christmas season.

I grew up in a wonderful home. Every year we would hang a molded plastic Santa face from the very highest dormer on our family home. Every year during windy snow storms the Santa face would be blown off the house and end up down the street in a neighbor's yard. Each time out comes the ladder and back up on the dormer the Santa decoration would go. When I was old enough the job of retrieving the Santa decoration fell to me. I would chase the Santa down and climb up the ladder placing back on the nail. To this very Christmas season, my sisters and I talk about the recurring Santa face chase and the fond memories we have of the rescue and recovery tradition.

Another family tradition we have is to cut a live Christmas tree. Since I was very young my Dad and I would dawn snow gear, snow shoes and an axe. We would take hot chocolate, sometimes soup and head out to the mountains. After I got married, the tradition carried on with my wife and children. We take sleds and I pull the girls behind the truck. My wife Sarah absolutely does not approve of the 'dangerous sledding.' In a recent trip, I cut down a tree that was definitely too tall. I put the tree in the stand, carried it in the house it was too tall so out to the garage to cut some off the bottom. This cycle repeated three times to the dismay of my wife. Upon the third time into the house with the tree, my wife had lost her patience. My answer was simple, instead of taking the tree out for a fourth time I marched out to the garage and grabbed the lopping shears. With some frustration I lopped off the top foot of the tree. My wife and I laughed and enjoyed a stunted tree for the entire Christmas season. I do not want to give my age but for over 40 years it has been a tradition to have a mountain grown natural tree in our home. Each tree represents so much to me.

These traditions are so special to our family and they are made possible by that spectacular night in Bethlehem. The birth of the Son of God, the creator, our Messiah the babe born in a manger.

Second, we need to ponder the influence of our Savior in our lives today. Christmas is a time to reflect on his life and His involvement in our daily lives. I think of my life, I have so many blessings. The 4th verse of the Hymn “Count your Blessings” says

So amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged; God is over all
Count your many blessings; angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.
Count your blessings;
Name them one by one.
Count your many blessings;
See what God hath done.

I especially like the last line before the chorus; count your blessings angels will attend. Christmas is a time for remembering the Son of God and renewing our covenants to take upon us His name. The season is a time examine our thoughts, feelings and actions. It is a time for remembrance, gratitude and forgiveness. It is a season to ponder the Atonement of Jesus Christ and its meaning to us individually. The Atonement is infinite and individual.

A young man who had lived in our ward recently passed away. I thought so fondly of the scout camps I was on with him and the other young men. I thought of his wife and his mother who are left behind. I could not escape the feeling of love that Jesus Christ has for this young man. Christ's atonement is a blessing in our daily life. He influences me every day and I celebrate his influence in my life.

And finally, we need to look steadfastly to His coming. President Russell M. Nelson has continually instructed us to stay on the covenant path. We are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints. The term latter-day saint is significant. While Christmas is a season typically for looking back and celebrating the birth of our Lord, it is also a great time to look to the future. Elder Uchtdorf teaches us: “we live in the

11th hour before the coming of the day of our Lord. Let us therefore look forward to that blessed day when the King of King descends with a shout, takes away death, dries up tears and ushers in a new era of peace, joy and learning...let us prepare for that blessed day when He will come again”

Elizabeth and her four cousins were all born within a 10-month period. Our family has Christmas photographs with all five babies lined up on the couch. As the children grew, we quickly identified a trend that happened each time we gathered together during Christmas time. The baby Jesus from my mother-in-law’s Nativity would go missing. Once we found Jesus in the Barbie mansion in the play room. Baby Jesus had been placed there, along with Mary and one of the Wise men. My daughter, Kathryn, explained that she wanted Jesus to live with a king, in a nice house. Even as a little girl, Kathryn knew Jesus was special and wanted him to be treated special.

Sarah’s mother has many trinkets at her house. For years we wondered why the children that paid little attention to my mother-in-law’s other things and had such a fascination with Jesus. But maybe Kathryn had it right. Jesus is special.

2 Nephi 31: 20-21 reads:

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

“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.”

Brothers and Sisters, I pray that during this Christmas season we are able to see the divine nature of the story of our Savior's birth and that we feel a sincere love in our heart for His life, his teachings and his saving atoning sacrifice. As we strive to be like the Savior we can be a little better every day, just a little bit better every day then we grow closer to Christ. I testify that God lives, I testify that Jesus Christ is our brother and our savior. I bear witness that the gospel of Christ is restored on earth today. I testify Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. I testify that the Book of Mormon is true. I love you, I know your Bishopric loves you and the Stake Presidency loves you. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.