

Time for the Savior at Christmas

NEIL L. ANDERSEN

What a marvelous choir! What a beautiful orchestra! What an amazing congregation! “Joy to the world, the Lord is come; Let earth receive her King!”¹ “Glories stream from heaven afar; Heav’nly hosts sing Alleluia! Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!”²

Merry Christmas, my fellow disciples! Thank you for who you are and for the goodness of your lives. Thank you for choosing to believe in Jesus Christ and to follow Him. Thank you for trusting in the divine gift of our Savior and Redeemer!

I want to thank President Worthen for his introduction and President and Sister Worthen for their many years of devoted service. I also thank Elder and Sister Gilbert for joining us. You may not be familiar with the Church commissioner of education. Under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder Clark G. Gilbert directs the work of Church education, from the universities to the institutes and seminaries. Elder Gilbert is a General

Authority Seventy who has served as president of BYU–Pathway Worldwide and BYU–Idaho.

I am so grateful to have my wife, Kathy, here with us. She has blessed my life more than any other person on earth since our days at BYU, and I love her with all my heart. I treasure the day I met her here at BYU. I have asked her to help me with a small part of my message.

Celebrating the Birth of the Savior

Let’s turn our attention to the Savior.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . .

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

*In him was life; and . . . the light of men.*³

[And] *we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—*

Neil L. Andersen, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on December 7, 2021.

*That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created.*⁴

[Sister Andersen:]

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. . . .

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*⁵

[Elder Andersen:]

How wonderful to be together today to celebrate the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. With you, I witness that He is the Son of God. He declared:

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

*And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*⁶

Nothing could be more true!

Let us always be valiant in the simple faith that He is who we claim Him to be: the Creator, the long-awaited Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, our Savior, and our Redeemer.

A Hypothetical Conversation

Now, in your mind's eye, I want you to imagine a hypothetical conversation you might have beyond the veil after you have graduated from your mortality. While we know few details

about the next life, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that, in the eternities, the “same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there.”⁷ I would hope that this would include our interactions with others in the spirit world. We know that there are “those who [have] died in their sins, without a knowledge of the truth,”⁸ who have lived at different times during the earth's history and who have not had the light of the gospel. Many of them will receive the gospel when it is taught to them and will join those who here on the earth were valiant in their testimony of Jesus.

Now, picture in your mind's eye an imaginary future conversation between you and a small group of the faithful. You lived in the twenty-first century, but all others in this conversation lived on the earth in other centuries in various conditions and circumstances. They lived with no knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ in their mortality, but since being in the spirit world, they have been taught, they have repented as needed, and they have received the gospel.⁹ You are talking to each other about your experiences in mortality. Their attention turns to you. They are intrigued by your life.

They begin by saying, “How remarkable that you lived in the twenty-first century when the restored gospel was upon the earth.” Then they ask, “Where were you during the worldwide pandemic in 2021?”

“I was at BYU,” you respond.

“You were at the Lord's university? How amazing!”

They marvel at how blessed you were, perhaps asking what it was like to live with thousands of disciples of Jesus Christ and with hundreds of teachers grounded in the love of the Savior and brilliant in the learning of the world. They talk of your good fortune.

Distractions and Seductive Voices Attempting to “Choke the Word”

While you accept that it was a beautiful time to be on earth, you try to put it into perspective. “No matter what you think,” you begin, “it was not an easy time to follow Jesus Christ. There were distractions and confusion. There was commotion and seductive voices constantly trying to pull us from the truth.”

To emphasize your situation, you describe some of what you were facing. “For example,” you say, “on the Amazon Marketplace there were 354 million products available and 81,000 Alexa skills.¹⁰ There were 60 million songs to choose from on iTunes and 25,000 TV shows and 65,000 films.¹¹ We were barraged by so many distractions and enticing invitations that it was difficult to keep our bearings. Just on the Apple App Store there were more than 4.3 million apps and games.”¹²

You point out that the entertainment often did not point toward unselfishness but rather pushed toward indulging in one’s own pleasures. You continue, “Even though BYU was a very special place, we felt at times like Lehi’s ‘great and spacious building’¹³ was sitting right on top of us. And do you remember the Savior’s beautiful parable of the sower? We felt He was speaking about our world when He said, ‘The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word.’¹⁴ Do you remember when John referred to the word as Jesus Christ?¹⁵ There were so many distractions, so many temptations, so much confusion and commotion, and so many seductive voices all around us that we had to be vigilant to not let them choke the word or choke our faith in Jesus Christ and our determination to be valiant to Him.”

“What did you do? How did you survive?” they ask. “The more we hear about your mortality, the more concerned we become.”

A Prophet’s Pleading

You respond: “One thing I remember was October general conference of 2021. The prophet of God, President Russell M. Nelson, pleaded with us. He even used the word *plead*. In his closing comments at general conference, he said, ‘I plead with you today to counter the lure of the world by making time for the Lord in your life—each and every day.’ He warned us, ‘If most of the information you get comes from social or other media, your ability to hear the whisperings of the Spirit will be diminished.’ He then added, ‘Even Saints who are otherwise faithful can be derailed by the steady beat of Babylon’s band.’ He reminded us that ‘nothing invites the Spirit more than fixing

your focus on Jesus Christ.’ And he admonished us, ‘Talk of Christ, rejoice in Christ, feast upon the words of Christ, and press forward with steadfastness in Christ.’ He then repeated, ‘My brothers and sisters, I plead with you to make time for the Lord! Make your own spiritual foundation firm and able to stand the test of time by doing those things that allow the Holy Ghost to be with you *always*.’ And he gave us this beautiful promise: ‘[The Savior] will lead and guide *you* in your personal life if you will *make time for Him* in your life—each and every day.’¹⁶ It was a very important teaching from the Lord’s prophet, and we at BYU did not ignore it. We intently followed his counsel and pushed aside so many of our distractions and the seductive voices. We did as the prophet recommended: we made time for the Lord each and every day.”

“What did you do? Can you give us some examples?”

We will have examples, but first let’s pause our conversation and stand and sing with much enthusiasm “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful”¹⁷—because you are the faithful!

[The congregation sang the hymn along with the choir and the orchestra.]

Making Time for the Lord

That was wonderful! Thank you! Now, back to the conversation.

You respond, “How did we make time for the Lord? Listen as we were interviewed by Brother Bradley R. Wilcox, one of our favorite professors.”

[A video was shown of students’ responses to the question “How do you make time for the Lord?”¹⁸]

Brother Brad Wilcox: “What are you doing every day to take time for the Lord?”

Student #1: “Go, pray, and offer, saying, ‘Lord, this is everything that I did today. Help me to be better tomorrow.’”

Brother Wilcox: “Do you know why I’m talking to you?”

Student #2: “I do.”

Brother Wilcox: “Really? Have you seen the video?”

Student #2: “I did see the video.”

Brother Wilcox: “Awesome!”

Student #2: “And I was thinking, ‘Is this gonna . . . ? There’s no way this happens to me.’ But here we are, Brother Wilcox.”

Brother Wilcox: “Here we are.”

Student #3: “I go exercising every day.”

Brother Wilcox: “And how does that draw you closer to the Lord?”

Student #3: “Sometimes while I’m just running, I literally feel His voice.”

Student #4: “I think it is because when we put in time for the Lord, it is when we can actually feel more of His presence and those blessings in our lives.”

Student #5: “I’m making sure that I study the Book of Mormon every day, especially because nothing has brought me closer to the Savior than the Book of Mormon.”

Brother Wilcox: “Well, Bailey, your efforts are making me feel joy just listening to you.”

Student #6: “I’m glad.”

Brother Wilcox: “Thank you.”

Student #7: “I recently started setting aside time every day to study and memorize ‘The Living Christ’ document.”

Brother Wilcox: “Wow!”

Student #8: “I’ve been working on putting down my phone, because I find I am always on my phone, like in line or in class. So I just put down my phone, I say hi to people, and I try to have meaningful conversations.”

Brother Wilcox: “How often have you heard a prophet say, ‘I plead with you?’”

Student #9: “Not very often, and I think that adds a lot of emphasis on what he wants us to do.”

Student #10: “So, we actually talked about this yesterday.”

Brother Wilcox: “Where did you talk about it?”

Student #10: “In my English 212 class.”

Brother Wilcox: “That is so cool!”

Student #10: “Yeah.”

Brother Wilcox: “That’s what Elder Andersen wanted. He wanted classes to talk about it. So, what did you talk about? What are you doing?”

Student #10: “A goal that I have is to have a significant spiritual experience, at least one every day.”

Student #11: “I take time for the Lord through listening to music.”

Brother Wilcox: “Love that!”

Student #12: “Goal setting. Do you want more?”

Brother Wilcox: “Oh, . . . no. I’ll come back. That’s a good answer though!”

Student #13: “Going to the temple each week.”

Brother Wilcox: “Nice!”

Student #4: “She stole mine!”

Student #14: “I listen to hymns on the bus.”

Student #15: “I just talk with my family.”

Brother Wilcox: “Where’s your family?”

Student #15: “In Taiwan.”

Brother Wilcox: “So guess where we are? President Worthen’s office. We’re right here. We’re going to ask him how he’s taking time for the Lord.”

President Kevin J Worthen: “Well, it’s fairly simple. I make sure the first thing I do every morning is scripture study and prayer. I don’t even look at my phone before I start scripture study and prayer. Literally it is the first thing. I don’t want to know about texts, I don’t want to know about email, and I don’t want to know about social media. I want to get grounded in my relationship with Christ, and then, after that, I’ll look at those messages, and sometimes I’ll get back on my knees and pray again.”

Brother Wilcox: “Once you know what the day holds.”

President Worthen: “Once I know what the day holds.”

Brother Wilcox: “Then it’s like, ‘Okay, now I need another prayer.’”

President Worthen: “Exactly. But I want to anchor myself in the Savior first.”

Student #16: “It’s really helped with personal revelation. At the start of the semester, I didn’t know if I wanted to go on a mission. And now I’m planning on going, which is such a huge thing.”

Brother Wilcox: “Hey, you look great. This tells me that you’re in Men’s Chorus.”

Brother Wilcox and Student #17 together: “If I were a rich man, daidle deedle daidle.”

Student #17: “How am I doing? Am I doing good?”

Brother Wilcox: “You’re doing great!”

Student #18: “Honestly, since I’ve been back from my mission—I got home in March—it has been super hard. I haven’t been putting in the time to do daily scripture study and prayer.”

Brother Wilcox: “What are you doing about it?”

Student #18: “Since general conference, the thing I’m trying to do is just try to get back on the horse of regular scripture study and prayer.”

Student #19: “I feel like I’ve been a lot more open to revelation. Just taking that extra time in the morning before the rest of my day starts, then it’s in my head and everything, and then I feel energized both spiritually and physically.”

Brother Wilcox: “So where have you been called?”

Student #19: “Temple Square, actually.”

Brother Wilcox: “Oh, you are going to love that!”

Student #19: “Yeah!”

Brother Wilcox: *Pointing at Cosmo,* “Whoa! Look who I found here!”

Student #20: “I take time for the Lord, even through my busy schedule. I always make sure to get on my knees and pray.”

Student #21: “I take time for the Lord every day by making time for others.”

Brother Wilcox: “Now, Cosmo! How are *you* taking time for the Lord?”

Cosmo: *Holds up a sign that says, “I’m making time for the Lord.” And then Cosmo holds up a Book of Mormon.*

Brother Wilcox: “Yeah! Oh, awesome! Great book! Hey, let’s see a cheer!”

Cosmo and Students #20 and #21 (Cheer Squad members) all do a backflip together.

Brother Wilcox: “That was awesome!”

Brother Wilcox: “President Nelson said, ‘I plead with you.’ ‘I plead with you.’ What does that mean when a prophet says those words?”

Student #22: “I mean personally, for me it’s more like he can see perhaps what’s coming, so he wants to make sure we understand how serious this is at this time in our life.”

Student #2: “The idea is not just making time to make time. It’s making time so that we can have an effect and have a change in our life.”

Student #17: “It hasn’t been an easy year, and I don’t think that life’s going to get any easier with the current trends of the world.”

Student #23: “When you turn your life to Christ, right? It’s the plan of happiness, and you tend to be more happy.”

Brother Wilcox: “Wonderful!”

Student #24: “In the morning, before I reply to anyone in texts or before I respond to any messages, I try to talk to God first. So I pray first thing.”

Brother Wilcox: “Good. Some people call that ‘knee-mail’ instead of ‘email.’”

Student #24: “Yeah, that’s good!”

Student #25: “From what I’ve seen lately in the world, kindness is becoming kind of a commodity that is hard to find, and as we’re turning to the Savior, we can have that be more of an instinct.”

Student #14: “I think it’s because Christmas is all about the birth of Christ. We celebrate Him and all of the things He’s done for us, and as we take time to remember more of the Savior, we kind of start to emulate Him more. We want to be more like Him.”

Student #26: “One thing I’m trying to do is that even if I can’t get an appointment for the temple that week, I try to study it on my own so that I can build my foundation more on the temple and more on Christ.”

Student #27: “I take time to go to the temple weekly.”

Brother Wilcox: “How do you even get appointments to go to the temple weekly?”

Student #27: “I set an alarm for 11:58 p.m. the day before the new month so that I can set up appointments, and I use the Provo City Center and the Provo Temples.”

Student #28: “Christmas is all about Christ and Christ’s relationship with Heavenly Father and Heavenly Father sending Him down to earth to be our Savior, so the more that we connect with Them, the more powerfully we connect with the whole purpose of Christmas.”

Student #29: “So during Christmastime you have a lot of opportunities for service, I feel. And that’s what really connects me with Christ and helps me to feel more joy.”

Brother Wilcox: “Beautiful!”

I want to thank all of you who have consciously responded to President Nelson’s appeal to “[make] time for the Lord in your life—each and every day.” This is a pattern that will strengthen your spiritual foundation not only at Christmastime but during all of your life.

What do we learn from these disciples of Christ in the video? We learn that in our world of distractions, complexities, and temptations in which we have influences pulling us in every direction, we must take responsibility for the person we want to become. Desiring to be a lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ is very important to each of us, and to chart our course, we make time for the Lord each and every day. We make prayer a part of each day. We nurture our spirits with the word of the Lord in the scriptures. We find more time for the holy temple, the house of the Lord. We curb some of our social media. Did you note in the video President Worthen’s pattern in the morning before he looks at his phone or emails? Let us prepare ourselves each day so the Lord can direct us in helping those who need our attention and our love. Christmastime is a wonderful time to solidify the habits we seek for all of our lives.

For those willing to do their very best to make time for the Lord each and every day, the promises of President Nelson will be fulfilled. Furthermore, I bless you as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ that as you shape your daily habits to include the Lord, you will feel the Savior’s love and approval. I bless you that as you increase your efforts from now through Christmas, the desire to continue these habits beyond Christmas will stay with you, and your progress as one of the Savior’s disciples will grow.

I will conclude with my testimony of the Savior. Then I would ask that we all stand and sing with this magnificent choir “Angels We Have Heard on High.”¹⁹ Please remain standing after the singing as the closing prayer is offered by our grandson Christian Hadlock.

A Witness of the Savior

I love to speak about the Savior. It was He, under the direction of the Father, who created this world for us. He separated the light from the darkness, the water from the land.

It was He who brought order and beauty, the plants and the animals.

It was this Creator who answered the call of our Father with words full of love and humility: “Here am I, send me.”²⁰ “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.”²¹

What gratitude we must have felt in realizing that He, who was the Only Begotten of the Father, who was the beloved and chosen from the beginning, was willing to fulfill our Heavenly Father’s eternal plan of salvation for us.

Think of the heavenly hosts who in the meridian of time anticipated the beginning of our Savior’s life on earth. “Lift up your head and be of good cheer,” the Lord said to Nephi the day before His birth, “for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world.”²²

And thus, He who was the greatest came to earth without honor or applause. He showed us how to live. He taught us to become as a child, to reach beyond this world to our Father for help. He taught us to discipline ourselves, to be concerned not only with our acts but with our thoughts. He taught us how to love. He taught us to strive to become “even as [He is].”²³

His example was but a part of His gift to us. As He anticipated the approaching Atonement, Jesus acknowledged, “For this cause came I into the world.”²⁴

In Gethsemane and on Golgotha He suffered in “both body and spirit,” and it “caused [Him], even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain.”²⁵ Yet He did not shrink but offered Himself as “a sacrifice for [our] sin[s]”²⁶ and took upon Himself our “pains and . . . sicknesses.”²⁷ He bore our sins that His mercy might save us, and He bore our sicknesses that He might reach out to us in our difficulties. The Lamb without blemish “descended below all things.”²⁸ Then, on the third day following His Crucifixion, He rose from the tomb. As has been said many times before, without Easter there would be no Christmas.²⁹ But because He rose from the tomb, we joyfully celebrate His miraculous birth. Merry Christmas to you, my fellow disciples!

I testify that He lives. He is resurrected. He is our Savior and Redeemer. He guides the work of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He bids us to come unto Him that He might heal us and prepare us for the eternity that awaits us. As we celebrate this season of Christmas, I pray that we will make time for Him each and every day, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. "Joy to the World," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 201.
2. "Silent Night," *Hymns*, no. 204.
3. John 1:1, 3–4.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24.
5. Luke 2:6–11, 13–14.
6. John 11:25–26.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 138:32.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:30–34.
10. See "How Many Products Does Amazon Carry?" Trending, Retail TouchPoints, retailtouchpoints.com/resources/how-many-products-does-amazon-carry; see also Bret Kinsella, "Alexa Skill Counts Surpass 80K in US, Spain Adds the Most Skills, New Skill Rate Falls Globally," Voicebot.ai, 14 January 2021, voicebot.ai/2021/01/14/alexa-skill-counts-surpass-80k-in-us.
11. See iTunes Store, Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/iTunes_Store; see also Allison Murray, "Why Too Many Streaming Services Will Make Us Go Back to Cable," News, Streaming, Lifewire, 14 July 2021, lifewire.com/why-too-many-streaming-services-will-make-us-go-back-to-cable-5192602.
12. See a search for "how many apps are available from apple" on Google: google.com/search?q=how+many+apps+are+available+from+apple.
13. 1 Nephi 8:26, 31; 11:36. See Boyd K. Packer, "Lehi's Dream and You," BYU devotional address, 16 January 2007.
14. Mark 4:19.
15. See John 1:1.
16. Russell M. Nelson, "Make Time for the Lord," *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.
17. See "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful," *Hymns*, no. 202.
18. Video with BYU students and BYU professor Bradley R. Wilcox made for Elder Neil L. Andersen for this BYU devotional address, BYU Speeches, 7 December 2021, youtube.com/watch?v=dYHvRqdAgCk&t=1049s; see "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," 1 January 2000, churchofjesuschrist.org; also "If I Were a Rich Man," *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964).
19. See "Angels We Have Heard on High," *Hymns*, no. 203.
20. Abraham 3:27.
21. Moses 4:2.
22. 3 Nephi 1:13.
23. 3 Nephi 27:27.
24. John 18:37.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 19:18.
26. 2 Nephi 2:7.
27. Alma 7:11.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.
29. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "First Presidency Message: The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas," *Ensign*, December 2000.