

# “Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet”

JAMES A. CULLIMORE

**M**y young brethren and sisters of this great school, I am delighted to greet you this very first day you’re back to school from your holidays. I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and are on the road to a successful and happy New Year.

This is such a special time of the year—this holiday—Christmas and New Year. I trust we have been greatly blessed by the spirit of Christmas and the Christ child and that we may have that spirit to be with us and bless us in our lives all the year.

It would be interesting to know what your resolutions are in the New Year; and although one should not wait until the New Year to repent, it does furnish a good time to make a change. I like these verses in reference to the New Year.

## *A Clean New Book*

*Midnight strikes, and the old year is gone.  
We close the tablets we’ve written on:  
And, torn ‘twixt hope and doubt and fear,  
We open the book of an unlied year.*

*An unlied year. Ah, stained with tears  
Are the well-thumbed volumes of other years.  
Soiled by blunders and black regret  
Are the pages we read with our eyelids—wet.*

*Close in our hearts, as the leaves are turned  
Is the record of passions that flared and burned;  
And panics and sorrow, and ghosts that leer,  
Look out from the page of the dying year.*

*But fresh in our hands—once more—is laid  
A clean new book, by the Master made;  
Unmarred are the pages lying there  
Twelve new chapters, fresh and fair.*

*It is ours to write the daily tale  
Of how we conquer or how we fail;  
Of struggle and effort and hope that wakes  
Like a sun in the heart when a bright day breaks.*

*Once a year, when the glad bells ring,  
And the old year nods to a baby King,  
Fresh in our hands, with the title clear  
And the leaves uncut, is an unlied year.  
[Author Unknown]*

Florence French wrote these verses:

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*James A. Cullimore was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 4 January 1977.*

*I would like to change the picture  
I painted yesterday;  
The harsh tones would be muted,  
The background be less gray.*

*The leafless trees of winter  
Would take on tints of spring;  
The silent, ice-bound river  
Would be a sparkling thing.*

*The scarlet tanager would replace  
The starling's somber shade;  
The pink of wild rose fill the space  
Where drifting leaves pervade.*

*I cannot change the picture  
I painted yesterday,  
But I can make a new one—  
And I'll begin today.*

A man who had been in the penitentiary applied to Henry Ford for employment. He had decided to tell Mr. Ford about his past as he applied. He had not been honest on several occasions as he had applied and after he was hired and working, his employer had found out he had been in the penitentiary and let him go. So now as he started to tell about his past, Mr. Ford stopped him and said, "I don't care about your past; start where you stand."

Berton Braley put these thoughts to verse:

*Start where you stand and never mind the past;  
The past won't help you in beginning new;  
If you have left it all behind at last  
Why, that's enough, you've done with it, you're  
through; . . .*

*Forget the buried woes and dead despairs;  
Here is a brand-new trial right at hand;  
The future is for him who does and dares;  
Start where you stand. . . .*

*What has been, has been; yesterday is dead*

*And by it you are neither blessed nor banned;  
Take courage, man, be brave and drive ahead;  
Start where you stand.*

Repentance is one of the greatest principles of the gospel.

There is another important event that is often lost track of in the busy holiday season, or only little is made of it. I refer to the birthday of the Prophet Joseph Smith on December 23. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we recognize Joseph Smith as a prophet of God through whom the Church was restored in this dispensation. No one is more revered by us save Jesus Christ himself. Even though we revere him as our Prophet and the founder of the Church, it is unlikely that we fully comprehend his true greatness. May I share with you a few of the attributes and virtues that made him one of the greatest men ever to live upon the earth.

John Henry Evans wrote of him:

*Here is a man who was born in the stark hills of Vermont; who was reared in the backwoods of New York; who never looked inside a college or a high school; who lived in six States, no one of which would own him during his lifetime; who spent months in the vile prisons of the period; who, even when he had his freedom, was hounded like a fugitive; who was covered once with a coat of tar and feathers, and left for dead; who, with his following, was driven by irate neighbors from New York to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, and from Missouri to Illinois; and who, at the unripe age of thirty-eight, was shot to death by a mob with painted faces.*

*Yet this man became mayor of the biggest town in Illinois and the state's most prominent citizen, the commander of the largest body of trained soldiers in the nation outside the Federal army, the founder of cities and of a university, and aspired to become President of the United States.*

*He wrote a book which has baffled the literary critics for a hundred years and which is today more widely read than any other volume save the Bible.*

*On the threshold of an organizing age he established the most nearly perfect social mechanism in the modern world, and developed a religious philosophy that challenges anything of the kind in history, for completeness and cohesion. And he set up the machinery for an economic system that would take the brood of Fears out of the heart of man—the fear of want through sickness, old age, unemployment, and poverty.*

*In thirty nations are men and women who look upon him as a greater leader than Moses and a greater prophet than Isaiah; his disciples now number close to a million; and already a granite shaft pierces the sky over the place where he was born, and another is in course of erection over the place where he received the inspiration for his Book.* [John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith, An American Prophet*, p. v]

*Joseph Smith occupies a unique place among the prophets—his birth and his name, Joseph, were known nearly four thousand years before he came to the earth. Joseph who was sold into Egypt said of the great latter-day prophet:*

*“Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the lord unto me; a choice seer will I raise up. . . .*

*. . . Behold; that seer will the Lord bless. . . .*

*“And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by this hand, but the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation.*

*“Yea, thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing. . . .” (2 Nephi 3:7, 14–16).*

*Not only was the Prophet Joseph’s birth known, but after his death, the Lord caused to have written and included as scripture the following:*

*“Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. . . .” [Leon Hartshorn, *Classic Stories from the Lives of Our Prophets*, p. 1]*

*He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord’s*

*anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood . . . [D&C 135:3]*

Dr. John A. Widtsoe said of the Prophet Joseph:

*Since I struggled as a boy to find the Church and the message of Joseph Smith I have been overwhelmed by the greatness of the Prophet. He towers above all men by his great teachings.*

*Of course he was a man with the frailties of the flesh, but he so lived that God spoke to men through him. Indeed, he is the biggest man in the history of the world since the Savior lived among men nearly two thousand years ago. He was a magnificent type of man.*

*The Prophet stands unique among the religious leaders of the world, for in practically all of his work in the restoration he had witnesses. Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, as examples, each established his work without witnesses, but not so Joseph Smith.*

*There were witnesses to the Gold Plates and the Book of Mormon, in the visitation of heavenly personages, and in the receiving of many of the revelations. His work was inaugurated not by himself alone, but by and with witnesses.*

*His teachings clear up so many misconceptions, that any man who honestly investigates the Prophet and his work, must come to a conviction that he was indeed a Prophet. [Church Section, *Deseret News*, January 30, 1952, p. 3]*

*Possibly few tributes have been given of the Prophet greater than that of Josiah Quincy in his *Figures of the Past*.*

*It is by no means improbable that some future text-book, for the use of generations yet unborn, will contain a question something like this: What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen? And it is by no means impossible that the answer to that interrogatory may be thus written: Joseph Smith, the Mormon*

*Prophet. And the reply, absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious commonplace to their descendants. History deals in surprises and paradoxes quite as startling as this. The man who established a religion in this age of free debate, who was and is today accepted by hundreds of thousands as a direct emissary from the Most High, — such a rare human being is not to be disposed of by pelting his memory with unsavory epithets. [Josiah Quincy, Figures of the Past, p. 376]*

A Russian historian once visited the United States for something over a year studying the history of great Americans and American institutions. As he was about to board his ship to return to his native land, newspapermen interrogated him. One of them asked him this question: “In your study of great Americans during this past year, which of them do you consider to be the greatest?” His answer is most startling. He said, “You have only had one truly great American, one man who gave to the world ideas that could change the whole destiny of the human race—Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet.”

The Prophet was tried and tested and suffered many indignities. He was falsely arrested 42 times but was always cleared by the law of the land. He was tarred and feathered. He spent nearly six months in Liberty Jail in terrible conditions and with food not fit for humans. Parley P. Pratt says of one of these occasions:

*In one of those tedious nights we had lain as if in sleep till the hour of midnight had passed, and our ears and hearts had been pained, while we had listened for hours to the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of our guards, Colonel Price at their head, as they recounted to each other their deeds of rapine, murder, robbery, etc., which they had committed among the “Mormons” while at Far West and vicinity. They even boasted of defiling by force wives,*

*daughters and virgins, and of shooting or dashing out the brains of men, women and children.*

*I had listened till I became so disgusted, shocked, horrified, and so filled with the spirit of indignant justice that I could scarcely refrain from rising upon my feet and rebuking the guards; but had said nothing to Joseph, or any one else, although I lay next to him and knew he was awake. On a sudden he arose to his feet, and spoke in a voice of thunder, or as the roaring lion, uttering, as near as I can recollect, the following words:*

*“SILENCE, ye fiends of the infernal pit. In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die THIS INSTANT!”*

*He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained, and without a weapon; calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards, whose weapons were lowered or dropped to the ground; whose knees smote together, and who, shrinking into a corner or crouching at his feet, begged his pardon, and remained quiet till a change of guards.*

*I have seen the ministers of justice, clothed in magisterial robes, and criminals arraigned before them, while life was suspended on a breath, in the Courts of England; I have witnessed a Congress in solemn session to give laws to nations; I have tried to conceive of kings of royal courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms; but dignity and majesty have I seen but once, as it stood in chains, at midnight, in a dungeon in an obscure village of Missouri. [Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, pp. 210–211]*

One of the tests of a true prophet is whether his prophecies come true.

Elder John A. Widtsoe in his book, “Joseph Smith the Prophet,” makes an interesting statement about the prophecies of Joseph Smith. He says: “From the revelations printed in the Doctrine and Covenants are found 1,100 statements that may be classed as prophecies of the future. Nearly 700 are of a

*spiritual nature; the other 400 deal directly with the things of the earth."*

*I will mention only five of his well-known prophecies to which we've all made reference time and again. He predicted that three witnesses should see the golden plates and should testify of their experience. He prophesied to Stephen A. Douglas in 1843 that the time would come when he, Stephen A. Douglas, would aspire to the presidency of the United States, but that if he ever turned his hand against the Latter-day Saints he would feel the weight of Almighty God upon him. The rest is history. Douglas did turn his hands against the saints, he went down to political defeat and died an embittered man.*

*In 1832 the Prophet Joseph Smith prophesied that war would shortly come to pass, beginning in the rebellion of South Carolina and that the Southern States would be divided against the Northern States, etc. He prophesied in that same revelation that the time would come when war would be poured out upon all nations. World War One and World War Two and what has followed after have been a vindication of his place as a foreteller of events. In 1842 he prophesied that the saints would be driven to the Rocky Mountains and some would assist in making settlements and building cities and see the saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.*

*But beyond being merely a foreteller of future events, what is it that characterizes a true Prophet of God? First he is God's mouthpiece of that day and to his group. Second, he restates the ancient truths, and seeks to hold the people to unchanging laws of the gospel. Third, he receives additional revelations from the Lord to meet the problems of the progressive unfolding plan. Such new truths emanating from Deity come only through the Prophet of the day. Such a man was Joseph Smith, in every sense a Prophet of God. Yes, truly as Prophet Amos has said, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing save He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the Prophets." [Church News, Deseret News, December 10, 1955, p. 13]*

Miracles as great as those in the meridian dispensation were accomplished by Joseph Smith during his life. President Wilford Woodruff gives an account of some of these healings.

*While I was living in this cabin in the old barracks, we experienced a day of God's power with the Prophet Joseph. It was a very sickly time and Joseph had given up his home in Commerce to the sick, and had a tent pitched in his door-yard and was living in that himself. The large number of Saints who had been driven out of Missouri, were flocking into Commerce; but had no homes to go into, and were living in wagons, in tents, and on the ground. Many, therefore, were sick through the exposure they were subjected to. Brother Joseph had waited on the sick, until he was worn out and nearly sick himself.*

*On the morning of the 22nd of July, 1839, he arose reflecting upon the situation of the Saints of God in their persecutions and afflictions, and he called upon the Lord in prayer, and the power of God rested upon him mightily, and as Jesus healed all the sick around Him in His day, so Joseph, the Prophet of God, healed all around on this occasion. He healed all in his house and door-yard, then, in company with Sidney Rigdon and several of the Twelve, he went through among the sick lying on the bank of the river, and he commanded them in a loud voice, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come up and be made whole, and they were all healed. When he healed all that were sick on the east side of the river, they crossed the Mississippi river in a ferry-boat to the west side, to Montrose, where we were. The first house they went into was President Brigham Young's. He was sick on his bed at the time. The Prophet went into his house and healed him, and they all came out together. As they were passing by my door, Brother Joseph said: "Brother Woodruff, follow me." These were the only words spoken by any of the company from the time they left Brother Brigham's till we crossed the public square, and entered Brother [Elijah] Fordham's house. Brother Fordham had been dying for an hour, and we expected each minute would be his last.*

*I felt the power of God that was overwhelming His Prophet.*

*When we entered the house, Brother Joseph walked up to Brother Fordham, and took him by the right hand; and in his left hand he held his hat.*

*He saw that Brother Fordham's eyes were glazed, and that he was speechless and unconscious.*

*After taking hold of his hand, he looked down into the dying man's face and said: "Brother Fordham, do you not know me?" At first he made no reply; but we could all see the effect of the Spirit of God resting upon him.*

*He again said: "Elijah, do you not know me?"*

*With a low whisper, Brother Fordham answered, "Yes!"*

*The Prophet then said, "Have you faith to be healed?"*

*The answer, which was a little plainer than before, was: "I am afraid it is too late. If you had come sooner, I think it might have been."*

*He had the appearance of a man waking from sleep. It was the sleep of death.*

*Joseph then said: "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?"*

*"I do, Brother Joseph," was the response.*

*Then the Prophet of God spoke with a loud voice, as in the majesty of the Godhead: "Elijah, I command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to arise and be made whole!"*

*The words of the Prophet were not like the words of man, but like the voice of God. It seemed to me that the house shook from its foundation.*

*Elijah Fordham leaped from his bed like a man raised from the dead. A healthy color came to his face, and life was manifested in every act.*

*His feet were done up in Indian meal poultices. He kicked them off his feet, . . . and then called for his clothes and put them on. He asked for a bowl of bread and milk, and ate it; then put on his hat and followed us into the street to visit others who were sick. . . .*

*As soon as we left Brother Fordham's house, we went into the house of Brother Joseph B. Noble. Who was very low and dangerously sick.*

*When we entered the house, Brother Joseph took him by the hand, and commanded him, in the name of Jesus Christ, to arise and be made whole. He did arise and was immediately healed. . . .*

*While waiting for the ferry-boat, a man of the world, knowing of the miracles performed, came to him and asked him if he would not go and heal two twin children of his, about five months old, who were both lying sick nigh unto death.*

*They were some two miles from Montrose.*

*The Prophet said he could not go; but, after pausing some time, he said he would send some one to heal them; and he turned to me and said: "You go with the man and heal his children."*

*He took a red silk handkerchief out of his pocket and gave it to me, and told me to wipe their faces with the handkerchief when I administered to them, and they should be healed. He also said unto me: "As long as you will keep that handkerchief, it shall remain a league between you and me."*

*I went with the man, and did as the Prophet commanded me, and the children were healed.*

*I have possession of the handkerchief unto this day. [Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from my Journal*, pp. 62–65]*

Few men have been privileged to see God the Father and Christ while in mortal life as did the Prophet Joseph Smith. Few have been so honored with the many manifestations as he was. Quoting President George Albert Smith, President Harold B. Lee said of the Prophet Joseph in a general conference of the Church: ". . . Many have belittled Joseph Smith, but those who have will be forgotten in the remains of mother earth, and . . . their infamy will ever be with them, but honor, majesty, and fidelity to God, exemplified by Joseph Smith and attached to his name, will never die" (Conference Report, October 7, 1973, p. 166).

There are those who would say, I can accept everything in the Church except that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God; or, I can belong to your church if you would do away with the principle of continued revelation. It is difficult

for me to understand how one could accept the gospel without accepting him who was the instrument in its restoration, or reject the principle of continued revelation, upon which the Church is founded. It is important that each of us come to know for ourselves, individually, that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of God, that he did see God and Christ, and was an

instrument in the establishment of the Church in this dispensation.

May I leave you with my witness of this fact, that I know that he did, that day in the grove, see God the Father and the Son, and that he was their instrument in the establishment of this work. I leave you with this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.