

# AKRON OHIO STAKE

## Stake Presidency Message: Original Christmas

As Christmas draws close, we wonder how the 2020 sea change might alter the Holy Season too.

In the now seemingly distant Christmases past, we were merrily and freely congregating and singing, gathering with friends and family, going to and fro, celebrating, sharing, embracing, being embraced.

In their place now are an invisible vermin, half-seen faces, six-foot rules, second guesses, limited religion, closing in, closing down, loss of livelihood, loss of life, detachment.

Then, add to the list national enmity, tearing down, toppling over.

In such shadow, what kind of Christmas would we have? What kind of Christmas could we have?

Earthly travel restrictions notwithstanding, let us see if we can transport ourselves (or be transported, as in *Mr. Krueger's Christmas*) back to the first Christmas.

In the Holy Land, it took place amid apostasy, bondage, massacre, and crucifixions. In the land of the Nephites, as it happened, the faithful were slated for execution (3 Nephi 1:9). It's instructive for us to know that the Prince of Peace arrived in the middle of tumults and violence, that the King of Righteousness condescended into extreme wickedness (2 Nephi 10:3). Primal Christmas was a fearful scene where the protagonist did not fear.

Now observe the Christmas Child fleeing to Egypt. While the powers from below certainly seemed to be able to move His itineraries, it was the undeterrable Holy One of Israel who went on to move everlasting geography. For whereas there was but one path—with no escape route—for humankind, that of becoming like the devil and ending up where he is (2 Nephi 9:8-13), there is now an open gate to heaven (Helaman 3:28). The disproportionality between what the adversary could accomplish and what the Savior achieved gives us proportionate gospel perspectives.

We then notice, just a few decades before the singular event, Alma, in torment, remembered hearing of “the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world,” caught hold upon the thought and cried to the Savior for mercy (Alma 36:17-18). Only the coming of the Lord was not yet. But to Alma, it was as if it had already occurred. Perhaps, by the same token,

original Christmas is ever-present (and what a present!) and accessible to all who seek to know it, B.C. or A.D. For as with Alma, originally experiencing the coming of Jesus made all the difference. As such, Original Christmas is personal, it is transformational, and it has the power to turn exquisite pain to exquisite joy (Alma 36:20).



President Wen

And our mind begins to see that in the birth of Jesus not only were all the “hopes and fears of all the years” (LDS Hymns no. 208, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*) met, every promise of the Son of God coming into the world made by every prophet was every whit fulfilled. Verily, a Savior was promised, and a Savior came—despite how amazing and astounding that it actually happened. Thus, in that first Noel, all the other yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies and promises made to us are recertified, once again authenticated and doubly sealed. And our heart begins to perceive that Original Christmas carries a peace and assurance that would stand unshakable against even the commotions of the end time.

And that was all before we contemplate the motivation behind and the reason of Christmas in the first place: A Father and a Redeemer's infinite love for us.

This is the Christmas we can have in the quietude or disquiet of this year or any year—even authentic Christmas, which cannot be dimmed by the darknesses of the world.

What may be obscured, yet, is our sight. After all, on a cloudy night, or when we do not look heavenward, even lights from a local mall can outshine the Christmas star. But then, if we single our eye (D&C 88:67) to the eastern sky (Matthew 2:2), we'll come to know that which shines over Bethlehem only looks like a star because we are countless light-years from it. That star, in reality, is a sun, even the brightest sun in the whole expanse of space and time.

And so it is, we may experience the brightest Christmas in the darkest of times, because Christmas, even unceremoniously, as originally, is the fearlessness, life, power, joy, peace, assurance, glory, and the pure love of Christ.

## Self-Reliance Groups

Thanks to all who participated in the new Emotional Resilience groups and in the Personal Finance group. There is so much helpful information, and I am sure that everyone gained insightful knowledge to further them toward their goals of self-reliance.

We will be starting new virtual groups in January, so please let me know if you are interested in any of the following groups:

- Emotional Resilience
- Personal Finance
- Starting and Growing My Business
- Find a Better Job
- Education for Better Work
- Life Skills (for older youth and young single adults)

*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

John 10:10

*Without self-reliance one cannot exercise these innate desires to serve. How can we give if there is nothing there? Food for the hungry cannot come from empty shelves. Money to assist the needy cannot come from an empty purse. Support and understanding cannot come from the emotionally starved. Teaching cannot come from the unlearned. And most important of all, spiritual guidance cannot come from the spiritually weak.*

Marion G. Romney, "The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance," Ensign, Nov. 1982, 93

*Whatever causes us to be dependent on someone else for decisions or resources we could provide for ourselves weakens us spiritually and retards our growth toward what the gospel plan intends us to be.*

Dallin H. Oaks, "Repentance and Change," Ensign or Liahona, Nov. 2003, 40

*Self-reliance is the ability, commitment, and effort to provide the spiritual and temporal necessities of life for self and family. As members become self-reliant, they are also better able to serve and care for others.*

Handbook 2

Contact your ward Self-Reliance Specialist, or myself (contact information in header above), for more information on joining a self-reliance group or Pathway. If you have any other questions or concerns, please let me know.

For more information on becoming or helping others become more self-reliant, see: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/self-reliance/blog>

The Lord has declared, It is my purpose to provide for my saints. D&C 104:15

## Family History Corner

by Sister Jeanne Peugh, Director



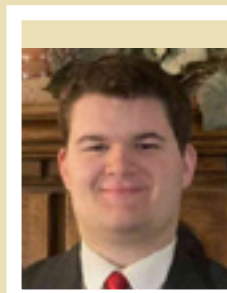
## Gift of Peace

A gift is something that is given willingly to someone. The sweetest gift given at Christmas will always be the one our Savior Himself gave us: His perfect peace. He said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." (John 14:27) "The Lord's peace carries on an assurance of being right with the Lord, it carries a clarity of mind and heart that allows us to think and feel clearly in any situation, no matter how chaotic. The Lord's peace is sweet to the soul." (Howard W. Hunter)

How do we help others find this Gift of Peace? We can help by sharing with others our knowledge and understanding of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We can bring others peace by giving gifts of kindness and love. We can give the gift of helping others find their ancestors. It has been wonderful to read all the gifts of gratitude that have flooded social media. Has it not been a Gift of Peace?

As we move into this Christmas season, let us consider what gifts we want to give that will help others find the Gift of Peace.

### MISSIONARY UPDATE



**STEPHEN KREMER**

Leaving

December 2020

Arizona Mesa  
Mission