The Best Christmas Ever

By President Thomas S. Monson

Thomas S. Monson, “The Best Christmas Ever,” *Liahona*, Dec 2008, 2–6

Photograph by Busath Photography

At this season of the year, the airways are filled with the music of Christmas. My heart often turns to home and to Christmases past as I listen to some of my favorite Christmas songs, such as this one:

Oh, there’s no place like home
For the holidays, ’cause no matter
How far away you roam
If you want to be happy in a million ways
For the holidays, you can’t beat
*Home, sweet home.*1

One writer said: “Again Christmas, abiding point of return. Set apart by its mystery, mood and magic, the season seems, in a way to stand outside time. All that is dear, that is lasting, renews its hold on us: we are home again.”2

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) declared: “True happiness comes only by making others happy—the practical application of the Savior’s doctrine of losing one’s life to gain it. In short, the Christmas spirit is the Christ spirit, that makes our hearts glow in brotherly love and friendship and prompts us to kind deeds of service.

“It is the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ, obedience to which will bring ‘peace on earth,’ because it means—good will toward all men.”3

Giving, not getting, brings to full bloom the Christmas spirit. Enemies are forgiven, friends remembered, and God obeyed. The spirit of Christmas illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world’s busy life and become more interested in people than things. To catch the real meaning of the “spirit of Christmas,” we need only drop the last syllable, and it becomes the “Spirit of Christ.”

Remembering Him

When we have the spirit of Christmas, we remember Him whose birth we commemorate at this season of the year. We contemplate that first Christmas day, foretold by the prophets of old. You, with me, recall the words from Isaiah: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”4—meaning “God with us.”

On the American continent, the prophets said: “The time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent … shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay. … He shall suffer temptations, and pain. … And he shall be

called Jesus Christ, the Son of God."5

Then came that night of nights when the shepherds were abiding in the fields and the angel of the Lord appeared to them, announcing the birth of the Savior. Later, Wise Men journeyed from the East to Jerusalem, "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. …

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."6

Times change; years speed by; but Christmas continues sacred. In this marvelous dispensation of the fulness of times, our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given. There are deeds to be done. There are souls to be saved.

A Gift of Christmas

In the early 1930s, Margaret Kisilevich and her sister Nellie gave a Christmas gift to their neighbors, the Kozicki family, which was remembered by them all their lives and which has become an inspiration to their families.

Home to Margaret back then was Two Hills, Alberta, Canada—a farming community populated largely by Ukrainian and Polish immigrants who generally had large families and were very poor. It was the time of the Great Depression.

Margaret's family consisted of her mother and father and their 15 children. Margaret's mother was industrious and her father was enterprising—and with all those children, they had a built-in labor force. Consequently, their home was always warm, and despite their humble circumstances, they were never hungry. In the summer they grew an enormous garden, made sauerkraut, cottage cheese, sour cream, and dill pickles for barter. They also raised chickens, pigs, and beef cattle. They had very little cash, but these goods could be exchanged for other commodities they could not produce themselves.

Margaret's mother had friends with whom she had emigrated from the old country. These friends owned a general store, and the store became a depot for folks in the area to donate or trade surplus hand-me-down clothing, shoes, etc. Many of these used items were passed along to Margaret's family.

Alberta winters were cold, long, and hard, and one particularly cold and difficult winter, Margaret and her sister Nellie noticed the poverty of their neighbors, the Kozicki family, whose farm was a few miles away. When the Kozicki father would take his children to school on his homemade sleigh, he would always go into the school to warm himself by the potbelly stove before returning home. The family's footwear consisted of rags and gunny sacks cut into strips and wrapped about the legs and feet, stuffed with straw, and bound with twine.

Margaret and Nellie decided to invite the Kozicki family, by way of the children, for Christmas dinner. They also decided not to tell anyone in their family of the invitation.

Christmas morning dawned, and everyone in Margaret's family was busy with the preparations for the midday feast. The huge pork roast had been put in the oven the night before. The cabbage rolls, doughnuts, prune buns, and special burnt sugar punch had been prepared earlier. The menu would be rounded out with sauerkraut, dill pickles, and vegetables. Margaret and Nellie were in charge of getting the fresh vegetables ready, and their mother kept asking them why they were peeling so many potatoes, carrots, and beets. But they just kept peeling.

Their father was the first to notice a team of horses and a sleigh packed with 13 people coming down their lane. He, being a horse lover, could recognize a team from a long distance. He asked his wife, "Why are the Kozickis coming here?" Her response to him was, "I don't know."

They arrived, and Margaret's father helped Mr. Kozicki stable the horses. Mrs. Kozicki embraced Margaret's mother and thanked her for inviting them for Christmas. Then they all piled into the house, and the festivities began.

The adults ate first, and then the plates and cutlery were washed, and the children ate in shifts. It was a glorious feast, made better by the sharing of it. After everyone had eaten, they sang Christmas carols together, and then the adults settled down for another chat.

Charity in Action

Margaret and Nellie took the children into the bedroom and pulled from under the beds several boxes filled with hand-me-downs they had been given by their mother's merchant friends. It was heavenly chaos, with an instant fashion show and everyone picking whatever clothes and footwear they wanted. They made such a racket that Margaret's father came in to see what all the noise was about. When he saw their happiness and the joy of the Kozicki children with their "new" clothes, he smiled and said, "Carry on."

Early in the afternoon, before it got too cold and dark with the setting sun, Margaret's family bid farewell to their friends, who left well fed, well clothed, and well shod.

Margaret and Nellie never told anyone about their invitation to the Kozickis, and the secret remained until Margaret Kisilevich Wright's 77th Christmas, in 1998, when she shared it with her family for the first time. She said it was her very best Christmas ever.

If we are to have the very best Christmas ever, we must listen for the sound of sandaled feet. We must reach out for the Carpenter's hand. With every step we take in His footsteps, we abandon a doubt and gain a truth.

It was said of Jesus of Nazareth that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."[7] Do we have the determination to do likewise? One line of holy writ contains a tribute to our Lord and Savior, of whom it was said, He "went about doing good … ; for God was with him."[8]

My prayer is that at this Christmas season and all the Christmastimes to come, we may follow in His footsteps. Then each Christmas will be the best Christmas ever.

Ideas for Home Teachers

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Ask a family member to read aloud the quote by President McKay. If we are to have the best Christmas ever, we must follow in the Savior's footsteps. Have the family members trace their feet. Then invite the family to take some time after your visit to prayerfully write an act of service on each footprint that the family members could do for others. Suggest that they place the footprints so they lead to a picture of the Savior, illustrating how acts of service help us come closer to Him.

2. Invite family members to share a few memorable Christmas experiences. What made these experiences great? Read or tell the experience of the Kozicki family. Invite the family to find ways this month to serve others, helping them enjoy the Christmas season.

Illustrations by Daniel Lewis; right: *Wise Men from the East,* by Harry Anderson, © Seventh-Day Adventist Church, may not be copied

Margaret and Nellie pulled from under the beds several boxes filled with hand-me-downs they had been given by their mother's merchant friends. It was heavenly chaos, with the Kozicki children picking whatever clothes and footwear they wanted.

The Nativity, by Antonio Correggio, © Superstock, may not be copied

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Notes

1. Al Stillman and Robert Allen, "Home for the Holidays."

2. Elizabeth Bowen, "Home for Christmas," in Mary Engelbreit, *Believe: A Christmas Treasury* (1998), 27.

3. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 551.

4. Isaiah 7:14; see also Matthew 1:18–25.

5. Mosiah 3:5, 7–8.

6. Matthew 2:2, 10–11.

7. Luke 2:52.

8. Acts 10:38.

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