



## WORDS IN SEASON FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

**T**O THE Latter-day Saints everywhere, Greeting and Benediction; to all mankind peace and good-will. The Saints have double cause for rejoicing at this festive season. While the Christian world celebrates the advent upon earth of the Divine Nazarene, in which we join with them, at the same time we commemorate the birthday of the great Prophet of the nineteenth century, who was born December 23, 1805, and the natal day of the world's Redeemer is dated Dec. 25.

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, we regard as also the Son of God. Joseph Smith was His servant and authorized representative. We honor them both. But Jesus was the Christ, the incomparable One, the incarnation of Deity. Joseph was human, appointed and directed by the Savior, and not an object of human worship. We follow him as he followed Christ, from whom he received all the doctrines, precepts, ordinances and authority that we recognize. We rejoice and are thankful for their earthly lives and the mighty work performed by each of them in his particular sphere during their short sojourn in the flesh, and Christmas is a fitting time for these celebrations, which we hold in unison with all Christendom, though we differ from its various sects in some things, as they differ from each other.

Diversity of opinion does not necessitate intolerance of spirit, nor should it embitter or set rational beings against each other. The Christ taught kindness, patience and charity. In His doctrine of the fatherhood of God He implied the brotherhood of man. The message we have to bear is universal—for every nation, kindred, tongue and people. While it is to be declared to all, it is to be enforced upon none. The free agency of man is a fundamental in the creed of the Latter-day Saints as received from the Prophet Joseph Smith as he obtained it from Jesus the Christ. Free will, free thought, free speech, free action to the line of the liberty of others form an essential part of our faith and practise.

Obedience to law, human and Divine, is to be rendered by all people. Governments and their appointed authorities must be respected in their respective spheres, and the rights of individuals must also be maintained with due regard for the regulations of society as established by the majority in each nation or part thereof. This includes political liberty to the fullest lawful extent. Endeavors to suppress it or to use coercion for its restriction are wrong and contrary to both civil and religious law. As the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we take opportunity once more to proclaim our adherence to these principles.

We claim no authority, and have no desire, to use the power of the Priesthood which we hold, to dictate or compel any member of the Church, or other human being, to unite with or oppose any political party or faction or to interfere with the freedom of the citizen, as frequently charged against us, nor do we believe in or attempt the restraint of trade and commerce or the suppression of enterprise, corporate or personal. We do not favor the establishment of monopolies, but believe in the freedom of capital within lawful limits, and desire the promotion of such organizations as aid in the development of natural resources and the production of anything and everything that tend to the improvement of mankind socially, nationally and universally.

The advancement of the civilized world in art, science, mechanics, commerce, intercommunication by railroads, telegraphs, telephones, navigation and the modern appliances and inventions receive our hearty commendation and wherever possible our support. We are not in favor of casting obstacles in the way of these great enterprises, but deplore the disposition to hamper and obstruct them exhibited by some unwise individuals and organizations. We believe in the liberty of labor and the right of working people to combine for their own protection and advancement when it does not infringe upon the rights of other people, organizations or associations. The advancement of mankind along the lines of true liberty and the upbuilding of communities, states and nations we hail with delight, and congratulate our people, in common with others, in the great progress which is exhibited from year to year as time rolls on and each Christmastide brings such matters into consideration as cause for rejoicing.

As a religious body the Latter-day Saints have reason to be glad over the spread of "the gospel of the kingdom" among the nations of the world. We are keeping about two thousand missionaries each year in the service of the Church, traveling, preaching, distributing literature, defending the faith, carrying their message from house to house, delivering it in the public streets and in halls and chapels, bearing their own expenses while thus laboring for the welfare of humanity, receiving no compensation nor other financial aid except for their return passage home on sea and land. Their relatives and friends may make merry at this Christmas season, over the splendid opportunity their absent ones have obtained of gaining experience which will be of benefit to them beyond price. By this means prejudice is giving way among the various nations in Christendom, correct information concerning the latter-day work and its promoters is being diffused, many thousands of converts are being made, and faith in the principles we hold is promoted among hosts of people who have not the courage of their convictions sufficient to embrace the truth, but are nevertheless well disposed towards the Church and are ready to defend it when assailed by its opponents.

The confidence of the Saints in the divinity of the latter-day work is increasing, and efforts to destroy it in relation to the leaders of the Church are signally failing. The condition of the Saints is visibly improving as each Christmas comes round with its festivities and family gatherings. The people are better housed and clothed and fed, and blest with comforts and conveniences beyond their former experiences. Good meetinghouses are being erected, education is fostered, the societies established for general improvement are increasing in efficiency; returned missionaries mingling among the people bring to bear the attainments they have gained abroad, and as a rule use them for the public good and advancement.

There have been some instances of departure from the straight path marked out in the revelations of God to the Church which have had to be investigated and condemned. These have arisen from assumption of authority, contrary to the plain and pointed declarations of the First Presidency, causing trouble and evil without justification or excuse. These, while not so numerous as rumor declares, have been sufficient to cause disquietude in the minds of some people and to cause doubts to arise as to the attitude of the Church leaders on these questions; but we are happy to state they are being rapidly removed, because of the action that has been taken and the emphatic and repeated declarations of the President of the Church. This is a cause for congratulation and rejoicing, for justice must have its own, though it should be tempered with mercy, and the wilful transgressor should be discovered and receive judgment, which is frequently the only means to repentance and reform. The laws of the Church and the pledges of its officials must be vindicated and the truth be maintained inviolate.

We take occasion to repeat that the President of the Church does not, as reported, either collect or receive the tithings of the people, nor does he use them for his personal benefit or that of his family or associates. The law of tithing did not originate with him nor, indeed, with the Prophet Joseph Smith, who introduced it to the Church by Divine commandment, as declared in Doctrine and Covenants, section 119. That was a restoration of the ancient doctrine to be found in the Bible, reaching back at least as early as

the days of Abraham, who paid his tithing to Melchisedek. In this Church it is a voluntary contribution; a matter of conscience between the individual and the Lord, and is paid to the Bishops in their respective localities and accounted for by them to the Presiding Bishopric, in whose office records are kept of every cent so contributed, which is placed to the credit of the individual tithe-payer, and subject to his or her personal inspection. The tithing is expended in the manner directed in Doctrine and Covenants, section 120, by a Council consisting of the First Presidency of the Church, the High Council composed of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric, and is not the property of the President in any sense of the term. All the accounts are audited by a committee of practical business men, appointed by the general conference of the Church and the funds are used for general Church purposes.

While it is not the business of anybody but those who contribute thereto to be informed as to the disposition of these funds, yet we state for the information of those who may properly receive it that in addition to large sums expended for the building of meetinghouses, the maintenance of Temples and the conduct of work therein, with repairs and improvements, the return of missionaries from abroad, the relief of the poor and afflicted, the erection and support of high schools, colleges and universities for educational purposes, involving a very large outlay; aid has also to be imparted to distant settlements for the building and repairs of great irrigation works and the assistance of communities whose property has been swept away or damaged by floods from the bursting of dams, etc. The Church has aided largely in the establishment of important enterprises of an industrial character which would not have been brought into operation but for the means thus invested. When successful, the proceeds have become the property of the Church, and are used for Church purposes, a strict accounting being made of every dollar thus received, and in no instance has means thus obtained become the individual property of the President or of any of his associates.

We here allude to the slanders which have been published for the purpose of misleading the public and causing doubts to arise among the Saints, in order that the truth may be understood and these false reports be officially denied. Those rumors originate from individuals who have no personal interest in the matter; the real tithepayers are generally acquainted with the facts and receive testimony from a Divine source that the principle of tithing is correct, and experience brings them abundant evidence of the Divine blessing attending its faithful observance.

The cause of education is being greatly assisted through the good works performed by the auxiliary societies of the Church—the Sunday Schools, the Mutual Improvement Associations, the Primaries and the Religion Classes, with the splendid work of the Relief Societies, all tending in the direction of faith, temperance, sobriety, chastity, virtue, unity and charity, for the building up of Zion and the preparation for the coming of the world's Redeemer, whose birth we celebrate, to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

We are for peace, and not for strife or animosity. We deplore dissension and abhor abuse. Though we submit to misrepresentation, it is none the less repellant to our sense of fairness and right, and we oppose retaliation and counter crimination. We counsel forbearance, being willing to leave our cause and our course in His hands who declares that He will repay. We prefer the olive branch to the sword, and silence when slandered to hasty rejoinder.

The attitude of this Church towards other religions is much misunderstood. We recognize the good to be found in all Christian denominations, also in many heathen forms of worship. Whatever of truth they contain and advocate, we admire and it harmonizes with the principles of our faith. The error we reject. We have truths revealed from heaven in the present age which we have to declare to all people, but we impose them upon none. We admire the self-sacrifice exhibited by good men and women of all creeds in their endeavors to benefit humanity, including the care of the indigent and afflicted, the institutions erected as asylums and refuges for the destitute, and believe that the benevolence and charity thus exhibited will be accepted of the Lord and receive their full reward.

Our message is one of love and mercy and light; not to deprive any sect or party or persons of the good they have, but to increase it and bring them nearer to God. Our religion is not hostile to real science. That which is demonstrated, we accept with joy; but vain philosophy, human theory and mere speculations of men, we do not accept nor do we adopt anything contrary to divine revelation or to good common sense. But everything that tends to right conduct, that harmonizes with sound morality and increases faith in Deity, finds favor with us no matter where it may be found.

We believe in praise and prayer both in public and in the home. Music is assiduously cultivated among us. Our choirs are far above the average. Instrumental as well as vocal music is taught by numerous professors. Family as well as secret prayer is taught to all Latter-day Saints. They are also admonished to observe the Word of Wisdom, which includes abstinence from the use of tobacco, intoxicants and stimulants that excite the nervous system and are harmful to the body; also to abstain from excessive indulgence in meat, and to be obedient to all divine commandments. In this there is no bondage, but encouragement to avoid all evil and cleave to all that is good.

As this is the season of feasting and recreation, we exhort our people to the observance of temperance in their pleasures and enjoyments. Not to go to extremes in anything, but to exercise moderation in everything. This is a special time to administer to the wants of the poor; to visit those who are in need and comfort all who mourn; to bring about unity in family associations; to bury discords and disputes; to extend mutual forgiveness of faults; to promote general harmony and good-will. We urge this upon all members of the Church.

We are grateful for the prosperity which has attended our people, for their progress and prospects, and for the success of the work in which we are engaged, at home and abroad. We invoke the blessings of heaven upon the Saints in all their abiding places and wish them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, with the assurance that when He whose right it is to reign, shall come again to earth, accompanied by the holy ones who have been true and faithful, among whom will figure prominently the Seer and the Patriarch of the nineteenth century, who were so closely united in life and mingled their blood together in death as martyrs, all they who are also true unto the end will mingle in the grand festivities of the joyful occasion of the earth's redemption and the universal triumph of righteousness and peace.

*Joseph F. Smith*  
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