Week 52 is scheduled for study Dec. 18-24, 2023. "Good tidings of great joy" nicely sums up the gospel or good news Jesus taught us during his mortal ministry.

Day 1

Consider how pondering the Savior's birth and mission can help bring a spirit of peace and sacredness to the Christmas season.

Matthew 1:18-25; 2:1-12; Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-20 - Jesus Christ condescended to be born among us on earth.

The introductory material in this week's lessons got me thinking about why it was such a big deal that we celebrate the birth of Jesus as a baby. Babies, all by themselves are lovable, cute, adorable, helpless, innocent, and fill our hearts with compassion for them. But we don't have a universal holiday to celebrate anyone else's birth but his. This got me thinking about what set him apart even as a newborn baby that we would reverence him and revere him for even being born.

The birth of Christ was the beginning of his mortal ministry. Hence, his birth heralded all the sacrifices and accomplishments of his life to come. His birth began the countdown to his atoning sacrifice that confirmed our ability to repent and made our forgiveness, resurrection, and exaltation possible. None of these things could have happened without his birth. But that doesn't answer the question that has been

gnawing at the back of my mind - what makes his birth and growth so notable? This got me thinking about who Jesus actually is.

Do people reverence you? Do they worship you? What is it about Christ that makes him so special to all of us? As I sought for answers to this last question things began to form in my head while I slept. Below are some of the things I can think of that make Jesus so notable that I should sit up and pay attention to the fact that he even entered mortality. These are things that set him apart from all the rest of us, and there was no show, no display, no bragging on his part. These were just things his advanced capabilities were able to do and bring about that none of us could have accomplished.

- Abraham 3:19

  19 And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.

The eternal truths in this verse tell us that no two of us are on an equal footing spiritually or intellectually. We are also told that Jesus is greater than all the children of God. No one can match his intellect or spiritual capacities. Even before he was born into mortality he had already surpassed us all. Jesus was already a member of the Godhead, even as a spirit. But he had not yet ascended above all things and subjected all things. He needed his experience in mortality to accomplish that.

- Jesus was so powerful and great that when Mary's relative, Elisabeth heard her approach, John the Baptist, Elisabeth's child leaped in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Ghost. How often does that happen when one unborn child hears the sound of someone approaching who is carrying the Savior of the world and leaps within his mother at the recognition of his God (Luke 1:41-42)?

  41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

  42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

- In 3 Nephi 1 in the Book of Mormon the people were all looking for the sign of the birth of the Savior. Those who were wicked decided that the time for the sign had already passed, so they kicked up a big fuss and announced that if the sign wasn't

given by a certain day they were going to kill all the believers. Nephi, the prophet, spent all day pleading with the Lord about this problem, and this is the answer he received in verses 13-14.

> 13 Lift up your head and be of good cheer; 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, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.
>
> 14 Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

Note that Jesus had not yet been born. He was still inside his mother when Jesus answered his prophet.

- Here is one last miracle associated with the yet unborn Savior. All light in the universe comes from Christ. When Jesus entered mortality the Western hemisphere was bathed in light, just as in his death that same hemisphere was plunged into darkness as long as he was in the spirit world. Here is 3 Nephi 1:19 where the sign of Christ's birth comes to pass.

> 19 And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given.

It is significant that the source of light, upon entering the world gave as a sign of his birth a day, a night, and a day of light, for he brought light and truth with him into the world in greater abundance than had ever happened before. And when he died and spent three days in the spirit world, the Nephites spent those three days in total darkness, for Christ had taken his light with him. It wasn't for the whole world, but it was for those he had promised it would happen to.

The previous bullet points all happened before Jesus was even born. What happened at his birth?

- According to prophecy a new star appeared in the heavens to announce the Savior's birth. Israel completely missed it, but there were wise men from the east

who saw the star and knew what it meant. They came searching for the Messiah who was prophesied to be born under this new star. I have always been taught that for a star to suddenly appear and then shortly disappear again that it is a star that has gone supernova. That means that Jesus created the star before the earth was formed, it lived its whole life cycle and died in a supernova then the light traveled all that distance so that it reached the earth on the night of his birth. Now that is planning!

Jesus was a newborn babe. But while he slept or cried in his mother's arms, his greatness couldn't go unannounced. Angels appeared to the shepherds and heavenly hosts rejoiced in his birth. How many mere mortals have that happen? Here is the passage from Luke 2:10-14.

> 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
>
> 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
>
> 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
>
> 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
>
> 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

- Finally, here are the words of Simeon, a righteous man who spoke by the Spirit at Christ's circumcision when he was eight days old.

> 25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.
>
> 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.
>
> 27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
>
> 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
>
> 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

All these things happened without the direct participation of Jesus. He was either unborn at the time or still newly born. He was still a baby. Yet he was so great, so powerful, so glorious that manifestations of his greatness either followed him or preceded him, even as a baby.

The manual talks about the promise that comes with being a newborn baby. Heaven itself couldn't be kept back from rejoicing in the birth of God's only mortal son. Miracles accompanied his birth. It is up to each of us to answer the question why. My personal answer is that his righteousness, power, love, and greatness is so great that nothing could have held back these rejoicings and the celebration of his coming into mortality. His entry into mortality is one of those hinge points that changes everything that comes after that point. Nothing would ever be the same again after Jesus finished his work in mortality, and all heaven rejoiced in what was happening and in what was to come.

Jesus wasn't just another baby. He was the creator and ruler of the universe who entered into mortality to redeem all of God's children who also entered mortality. He truly was a God made flesh who came to save us from permanent separation from God.

Day 2

Consider how pondering the Savior's birth and mission can help bring a spirit of peace and sacredness to the Christmas season.

1 Corinthians 15:21-26; Colossians 1:12-22; 1 Peter 2:21-25 - Jesus Christ fulfilled His mission and made it possible for me to inherit eternal life.

Here is a point I find interesting. Have you ever considered (what I thought to be odd) that even though Jesus had not yet been born, people could repent of their sins and be forgiven? No atoning sacrifice had been made up to this point, but for thousands of years people were repenting and being promised eternal life because of their

righteousness. This brings up a pattern of God that demonstrates His knowledge of all things, even those things that haven't yet happened.

When God knows that something will most assuredly happen and that there is no way it will fail, He sometimes treats situations as though this future event has already happened. Such is the case with the Savior's sacrifice and resurrection of His children. Even though no sacrifice had yet been made, and no resurrection accomplished, God forgave sins. And as soon as Jesus was personally resurrected, all those who had been awaiting a well-deserved eternal reward, from Adam on down to Christ's day, were given resurrected bodies. Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection, so all others, no matter how worthy, had to wait until he had accomplished what everyone was waiting for. After that it is up to Christ as to when each of us will receive our resurrection. But God has treated the whole plan of salvation as being a fact that the atonement and resurrection would take place at the appointed time.

I find it fascinating that because God treats all time as an eternal continuum, we can be forgiven of sins even before any payment for our sins has been made. The entire plan of salvation was a "done deal" before the first of any of it took place. If God didn't know that it would be a success He wouldn't have laid it out before His family in the first place. When He told us about the plan and asked who He should send as our Savior, Jesus was already the one He had in mind, because He knew Jesus would be successful in the mission of being the one to save His family and bring all those back home who wanted with all their hearts to return. There never was a question about whether it would all work out as hoped, because it was a sure thing. This is why we can put our trust in Christ in all things. God already has.

FHE/Personal Study

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Look for Jesus Christ

If the Christ was like any other human, the idea that all things testify of Christ would seem the height of vanity and conceit. But when we remember that Jesus faithfully stated over and over again that he did nothing but what the Father wanted him to do, the whole picture changes. The plan of salvation is our Father's plan, not that of Jesus.

The creation of the universe was done under the direction of the Father, not on a whim by Christ. When God tells us that all things bear witness of Jesus, I can only assume that it wasn't Jesus's idea to make us think of him all the time, but that of our Father in Heaven. It was God, after all, who told us that none of us can return to Him unless we do so through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

When all things are supposed to remind us of Christ, I can only assume that it is for our benefit that they do so, and not because someone was conceited. According to Moses 1:39 God states "this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass
the immortality and eternal life of man." If it doesn't lend itself to bringing us home, it doesn't get done. When God says that all things testify of Christ then those things have a purpose, and that is to strengthen our faith in Christ, our Redeemer and Savior.

Finding the connection of "all things" and Christ can be tricky. You can look at a sunset and be grateful that God loves us enough to provide us with daily beauty in nature. Examining a disease-causing microbe under a microscope may teach us how through tiny, almost invisible things, mighty things like plagues, as well as many blessings, are brought to pass. Or we might even see Christ in a stranger's unexpected kindness. We can see Christ by people's attitudes, by their behaviors, in objects, the natural behavior in the world around us, in the cycles in nature, like the changes and the effects of the seasons or in the beauty and individuality of a single snowflake. Christ and his influence can be known in so many ways, but we must be looking for the connection or we will pass through life blissfully ignorant of our God around us and in all things.

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