

CHAPTER NINE

SPECIAL WITNESSES OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

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Two events within holy writ exceed all others in importance—Christ's birth and His Resurrection. If it could be legitimately shown that the testimony of either was suspect, the very foundations of Christianity would be cracked. Of necessity, the Nativity story must establish the divine sonship of Christ, while the Easter story must establish His victory over death and the actuality of His Resurrection. The testimony of these two stories must stand unimpeached if the world is to be held responsible to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, the Son of God, our Savior and Redeemer.

This chapter will confine itself to a brief review of the Nativity story. Attention will center on the testimony of those who in the providence of heaven were chosen to be the special witnesses of the birth of God's Son. We find within the New Testament account of Christ's birth the testimony of twelve witnesses. Each will be briefly examined. Of the four Gospel writers, only Matthew and Luke tell the story. Would that they all had, but two are sufficient to comply with the law of witnesses. Of the twelve witnesses within our two Gospel accounts, we have the testimony of heaven and earth, of man and of woman, of the wicked and of the pure, of the youthful and the aged, of the humble within society and of those who would command audience with kings. Indeed, as we shall see, our story is of all stories most perfect.

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TWELVE WITNESSES OF CHRIST'S BIRTH

Gabriel. Properly, our first New Testament witness of the birth of Christ is a messenger from the presence of God. Appropriately, he makes his initial appearance in the temple to a faithful priest of the Aaronic order, one who is performing the ritual function in behalf of his nation of burning incense on the altar within the holy place. In the performance of this duty, Zacharias represented the combined faith of Israel. His prayer was their prayer, and that prayer was for an everlasting deliverance from all their enemies at the hands of their promised Messiah. The ascending flames of incense symbolized the ascension of that united prayer. As Zacharias prayed within the holy place, so his fellow priests and all within the walls of the temple united their amens to his appeal.¹

In response to Israel's prayer, an "angel of the Lord" appeared before Zacharias. He stood "on the right side of the altar of incense" and identified himself as Gabriel, one who stood "in the presence of God" (Luke 1:11, 19). By modern revelation we know Gabriel to be Noah, he who "stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood"² and holds the keys of "the restoration of all things." The keys held by Gabriel make of him an Elias to prepare the way before the Lord (see D&C 27:6-7). The name Gabriel, by which Noah performs his angelic duties, means "man of God," though it has been interpreted as "God is my champion," or "God has shown himself valiant."³

Gabriel is mentioned twice in the Old Testament; both instances are appearances to Daniel. The first was to interpret Daniel's vision of the ram and the he-goat, and the second was while Daniel prayed, confessing his sins and those of his people. In the second instance, Gabriel revealed that after seventy weeks (a symbol for an unknown period of time), Israel and Jerusalem would be restored and an atonement made for their sins. Gabriel promised that an everlasting righteousness would be accomplished in their behalf (see Daniel 8, 9).

Six months after his visit to Zacharias, Gabriel also visited Mary to announce to the beautiful virgin girl of Nazareth that she was to become the mother of God's Son (see Luke 1:26, 32). Thus the pattern of Gabriel's visits appears to be that of "fellow-servant" of the Saints, bearing messages of comfort and glad tidings.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions, Gabriel is spoken of as an archangel.⁴ The Ascension of Isaiah announces "Gabriel, the angel of God, and Michael, chief of holy angels," as the two angels who were to open

the sepulcher of Christ.⁵ Jewish theology accords Gabriel a place second only to that of Michael, as do the Latter-day Saints.⁶ We, of course, know Michael to be Adam (see D&C 27:11).

As to Luke's account of Gabriel's appearance and prophecy to Zacharias, we are compelled to say the story is perfect. How more properly could the birth of the Son of God be announced than by a heavenly Elias, one from the presence of God Himself? One who comes first to consecrate the birth of the earthly Elias who will announce the Messiah to the chosen nation. To whom ought our heavenly emissary appear? Why, to a priest, of course, for the sacerdotal office itself was a prophecy that the Son of God would yet come. What of the place? Jerusalem must be our answer. The holy city from which the word of the Lord was to go forth. Not Hebron, not the hill country of Judea where Zacharias lived. Where within the city? The answer is obvious to all: the temple, the place where God is to be sought. Most specifically, where within the temple? The holy place at the altar of incense, the symbolic place of the ascending prayers of Israel. At what time of day should this heaven-sent announcement come? At the solemn hour of public prayer, that time designated for those of faith to plead with the heavens that their Messiah be sent. And finally, what confirming sign? The striking of Zacharias dumb. What better symbol of the day when every tongue of disbelief shall be silenced?

Zacharias. Who, then, was this Zacharias to whom Gabriel appeared? He was a descendant of Abia (Hebrew, Abijah). His name meant "remembered of Jehovah."⁷ He was married to a woman named Elisabeth, whose fathers, like those of Zacharias, had also been priests (see Luke 1:5). Her name was that of Aaron's wife, of whom she was a descendant (see Exodus 6:23). It means "God is my oath," or "consecrated to God."⁸ Thus this noble couple, "consecrated to God" long before their births, were, in the Nativity story, to be "remembered of Jehovah," as the promise was granted to them that they at long last should become the parents of a child—a child destined to be the earthly forerunner of the Messiah. Of the parents of John the Baptist, we read, "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). Zacharias and Elisabeth honored the law of their fathers not only in letter but in spirit. Their righteousness entitled them to God's favor. Zacharias, who held that priesthood which entitled him to receive the ministering of angels, was worthy of, and received, that sacred privilege.

Elisabeth. As we read of John, that he would be "filled with the Holy

Ghost, even from his mother's womb," it tells us something of the purity of the temple in which his body was housed (Luke 1:15). Indeed, Elisabeth was a prophetess in her own right. None could tell the story more beautifully than Luke.

When Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

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

And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For, lo, as soon as the voice of the salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. (Luke 1:41–45)

John the Baptist. What a marvelous scene it must have been—John, yet within his mother's womb, filled with the Holy Ghost and leaping for joy in an unspoken testimony of the divine sonship of the unborn child that Mary carried; Elisabeth greeting her cousin Mary in the spirit of prophecy and Mary responding by that same spirit. Again we are compelled to say, how perfect! The testimony of two women: the aged Elisabeth and the youthful Mary; each bearing a child conceived under miraculous circumstances, rejoicing together.

As Christ was born the rightful heir to David's kingdom, so John was born the rightful heir of the office of Elias that he had been promised by Gabriel. Robert J. Matthews identifies that heirship in this language:

The things of the law of Moses, especially with regard to the qualifications of the priests and their functions in the offerings of various animal sacrifices, were designed by revelation to prefigure and typify the Messiah and to bear witness of him. Heavy penalties were affixed to the performance of sacred rites and duties without the proper authority. It was, therefore, essential that when the Messiah came in person as the Lamb of God, John, the forerunner and witness of the Lamb, should be of the proper lineage to qualify for the mission. If it was necessary for a priest to be of the lineage of Aaron in order to labor with the sacrificial symbols, which were only prefigures of the Messiah, how much greater the necessity that John, the forerunner

of the Messiah in person, be of the proper priestly lineage and authority.⁹

Mary. There could be no more perfect mortal witness of Christ's divine sonship than His mother, Mary. From Gabriel she received the promise that she would conceive in her womb "the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32). Following that marvelous event, she testified, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name" (Luke 1:49). Nephi gave us the most perfect scriptural account of this sacred event. Our eternal Father, he told us, condescended—that is, He came down from His royal court on high and in union with the beautiful virgin girl of Nazareth fathered a son "after the manner of the flesh" (1 Nephi 11:18). "And it came to pass," Nephi wrote, "that I beheld that . . . after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!" (1 Nephi 11:19–21). Alma, testifying of the birth of Christ, said, "He shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God" (Alma 7:10).

Joseph. We have no scriptural record of any words spoken by Joseph, the foster father of Jesus. Despite the lack of words, Joseph's testimony as to Christ's divine sonship is most eloquent. He was, we are told, a "just man," meaning that he lived the law of Moses with exactness and honor. We know that he dreamed dreams and entertained angels. Further, we know that as he was faithful in keeping the law of Moses, so he faithfully heeded each divine direction that was given to him. Surely his unquestioning obedience is evidence of belief. It included taking Mary, who carried another's child, as his wife and knowing "her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son," naming Him Jesus, fleeing by night with Mary and the holy child to Egypt, remaining in Egypt until directed to return, and then living in Galilee rather than in Judea upon their return (see Matthew 1:19–21, 25; 2:13–23). Each action witnessed anew Joseph's conviction that this child was indeed the Hope of Israel, the Son of God.

The Shepherds. On the eve of Christ's birth in the stable at Bethlehem, there were in the fields not far distant shepherds watching over their flocks. The fact that they were in the fields by night gives us some

indication of the season of the year in which Christ was born. It was the custom among the Jews to take their sheep to the fields about the time of Passover and bring them home at the coming of the first rains—thus they would be in the fields from about April to October.¹⁰ Of these shepherds, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has suggested:

These were not ordinary shepherds nor ordinary flocks. The sheep there being herded—nay, not herded, but watched over, cared for with love and devotion—were destined for sacrifice on the great altar in the Lord’s House, in similitude of the eternal sacrifice of Him who that wondrous night lay in a stable, perhaps among sheep of lesser destiny. And the shepherds—for whom the veil was rent: surely they were in spiritual stature like Simeon and Anna and Zacharias and Elisabeth and Joseph and the growing group of believing souls who were coming to know, by revelation, that the Lord’s Christ was now on earth. As there were many widows in Israel, and only to the one in Zarephath was Elijah sent, so there were many shepherds in Palestine, but only to those who watched over the temple flocks did the herald angel come; only they heard the heavenly choir.¹¹

That the testimony of one Apostle does not stand alone relative to the character of these shepherds, I cite that of another, Alma, who announced the principle that angels would declare the glad tidings of the Messiah’s birth to “just and holy men” (Alma 13:26).

The special witness that these “just and holy men” bore relative to the birth of Christ was not limited to the night of the Savior’s birth but was for each of them a lifetime calling. Their story was to be told to family, friends, and neighbors. It was to be told in the courts of the temple, and from there it was to find itself told among all the nations of the earth.¹² Luke tells us that after the shepherds had seen the “babe lying in a manger,” they “made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child” (Luke 2:16–17). Such was the commission of the angel who stood before them that holy night declaring “good tidings of great joy,” which were to go “to all people” (Luke 2:10).

The Heavenly Choir. When the heavens were opened to the shepherds, they first saw an angel of the Lord—we would suppose Gabriel—saying: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11). Then “suddenly,” according to

the King James account, “there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13–14).

In the telling of the Christmas story, there is an occasional objection to the idea that Christ’s birth was heralded to the shepherds by a heavenly choir. This objection is on the grounds that the text of the Bible does not say their message was sung. In response, I first observe that there are responsible Bible translations that report the heavenly host “singing the praises of God”;¹³ second, it would be contrary to the order of worship in heaven for the host to do other than sing, as a host of scriptural texts attest;¹⁴ and third, we have record of the appearance of heavenly choirs on other occasions of rejoicing.¹⁵ Musical ability ranks among the talents with which one might be born and which one can take with him into the world to come. Elder McConkie frequently preached the doctrine that those with great musical talents are laboring on the other side of the veil to prepare the music and the choir that will attend the return of Christ.

As to the choir that sang to the humble shepherds of Judea, perhaps they had engagements the world over to herald the Savior’s birth among the scattered remnants of Israel. “Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations,” Alma wrote, “yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us” (Alma 13:22).

The Christmas hymn “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” is an announcement of the very hour of the appearance of the heavenly choir to the shepherds. This hymn has as its roots a text from the Wisdom of Solomon, a part of the Old Testament Apocrypha. The passage states that the “night in its swift course was now half gone” and refers contextually to the destruction of the firstborn of the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus. This, however, has not prevented Christian writers from seeing it as a reference to the time of Christ’s birth (see Wisdom of Solomon 18:14–15).

Simeon. Our attention now turns to Jerusalem and its temple. There an aged man, described by Luke as “just and devout,” one who in faith had awaited the coming of the Messiah and who had received the promise of the Lord that he would not die until he had seen the Savior, was moved upon by the Holy Ghost to go to the temple. His is the first testimony

within the sacred walls of the temple of which we have record that announced the birth of Christ. Appropriately, he bore the name Simeon, which means “hearing” (see Genesis 29:33). Indeed, God had heard his righteous plea, and now his prayer was to be answered.

Thus Simeon was there to greet parents and child as they entered the temple—Mary for the ritual of cleansing, and Joseph to pay the tax which redeemed the firstborn from priestly service. Simeon took the child in his arms and, praising God, said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of the people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2:29–32). Simeon’s declaration, which came by the spirit of prophecy, reached far beyond the understanding and hope of those of his nation—for he saw the universal nature of Christ’s ministry and attested that He was Savior to Jew and Gentile alike. Had his words fallen upon the ears of a Pharisee, they would have been greeted with shouts of heresy!

Then Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary and said to Mary: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel: and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Would that we knew all else that he spoke, including the words of blessing pronounced upon the couple in whose custody the Child was placed. Always—as we shall see throughout this whole work—there was more uttered orally to those who then lived, usually far more, than was recorded and preserved for those who should thereafter hear the accounts. At least we know that Simeon foresaw that Jesus and his message would divide the house of Israel; that men would rise or fall as they accepted or rejected his words; that he was a sign or standard around which the righteous would rally; and that Mary, who now had joy in the growing life of the infant Son, would soon be pierced with the sword of sorrow as she saw him during his waning hours on the cross of Calvary.¹⁶

Anna. In the providence of God, the marvelous testimony of Simeon was not to stand alone. Anna, an aged widow, a devout and saintly woman who worshiped constantly in the temple with fasting and prayer both day and night, now approached the holy family. As Simeon was a prophet, so she was a prophetess, and her voice now joined his as a special witness of

the birth of the Christ. Anna, whose name means “full of grace,”¹⁷ bore testimony to all in Jerusalem who “looked for redemption” (Luke 2:38). Through the countless hours she had spent within the walls of the temple, she was undoubtedly well known to those of the holy city who also faithfully sought the coming of the Messiah. All such would hear her testimony of His birth (see Luke 2:36–38).

The wise men from the east. There has been more speculation about, and more legends created concerning, the so-called Magi who visited Joseph and Mary in their house in Bethlehem than about almost any other biblical event. There is an air of mystery here that appeals to the speculative mind, and the fictional accounts—as to who they were, whence they came, and the symbolic meaning of what they did—fill volumes.

They are presumed to be kings because of the richness of their gifts; it is said they were Gentiles, showing that all nations bowed before the newborn King; it is thought they were masters of some astrological cult that could divine great happenings from the stars. They are even named, identified, and described; their ages are given and the color of their skin; and one can, or could in times past, at least, even view their skulls, crowned with jewels, in a cathedral in Cologne [Germany]. They are thought to have dealt in magic, to be magicians of a sort, and they have become great heroes of the mystical and unknown.¹⁸

In the scriptural account, Matthew alone makes reference to the coming of the Wise Men. He simply says, “There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1). The more terse the text, it seems, the more voluminous the traditions. We do not know their number, we do not know whether they rode camels, we do not even know if they traveled together. Yet if we are to assume that the Lord will continue to follow the pattern we have seen in His choice of each of the others who have been privileged to testify of the birth of the Savior, we can safely say of them that they were devout, just, and holy; that they knew of Christ’s birth by the revelation of heaven; and that they were destined to be lifetime witnesses of it. It would follow, then, as night follows day, that they came from a people of faith and would return to that people to testify of that which they had done and seen. All evidence within the story sustains such a conclusion.

This we know: the Wise Men were ignorant of the political situation in Jerusalem. Surely they would not have knowingly endangered the life of Christ by seeking His whereabouts from Herod. No one who knew Herod would have asked such a question of him. We know that they were

visionary men, for they were “warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod” and that they should depart “into their own country another way” (Matthew 2:13). We also know from the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible that they came seeking “the Messiah of the Jews” (JST, Matthew 3:2). “The probability is,” wrote Elder McConkie, “that they were themselves Jews who lived, as millions of Jews then did, in one of the nations to the East.”¹⁹ It is hard to suppose that others would come seeking the Jewish Messiah. Though men of all nations are subject to the Light of Christ, the God of heaven commissions only those within the household of faith to be special witnesses of His Son. Admittedly, an Egyptian pharaoh dreamed dreams relative to the destiny of his nation, yet none but Joseph, the Lord’s prophet, could interpret them (see Genesis 41). In like manner, Belshazzar was permitted to see the hand of the Lord as the message of his destruction was given him, yet Daniel alone could interpret it (see Daniel 5).

Who, then, were these Wise Men from the East? We can only assume that they were prophets of the true and living God, that they held the priesthood, that they knew the prophecies of Christ’s birth—including prophecies now lost to us—and that they were directed by the light of heaven in their journey.

Herod. Our concluding witness is a most unlikely and reluctant one: a fiend in human body, a man who had drenched himself in the blood of the innocent, a man whose deeds were enough to cause hell itself to shudder—none other than Israel’s king, Herod the Great. Herod had made his alliance with the powers of the world; his friends were Augustus, Rome, and expediency. He had massacred priests and nobles; he had decimated the Sanhedrin; he had caused the high priest, his brother-in-law, to be drowned in pretend sport before his eyes; he had ordered the strangulation of his favorite wife, the beautiful Hasmonaeon princess Mariamne, though she seems to have been the only person he ever loved. Any who fell victim to his suspicions were murdered, including three sons and numerous other relatives.

Such is the irony of history that the most wicked man “ever to sit on David’s throne was its occupant in the very day when he came whose throne it was, and who would in due course reign in righteousness thereon.”²⁰ It was to this man, who personified the wickedness of the world and the corruptions of the earth, that the Wise Men from the East went and bore their testimony that Israel’s rightful king and ruler had been

born. Such a testimony would not have been heeded had it come from Simeon or Anna or from simple shepherds, but coming as it did from these eastern visitors, whose credentials, whatever they were, established them as men of great wisdom, it was given credence by Herod.

Of a truth, the kingdom of God will never go unopposed in the days of earth's mortality, the period of Satan's power. The question as to whether Herod really believed that Israel's king had been born is of little moment. What is of importance, that which makes the Nativity story complete, is the evidence of the anger and wrath of hell at the birth of God's Son. The glad tidings of heaven have no such effect on the prince of darkness and his murderous wrath. As Satan's chief apostle, with all the cunning of hell, he sought to destroy the Christ child. Thus the decree went forth that "all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under," according to the time that Herod had inquired of the Wise Men, were to be slain (Matthew 2:16).

CONCLUSION

Of the restoration of the gospel in the meridian of time, the Apostle Paul said, "This thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). As was true of the spreading of the gospel, it was true of its most sacred historical events: the birth and Resurrection of Christ. As to the story of Christ's birth, Alma tells us that it was heralded by angels to those who were "just and holy" among all nations (see Alma 13:22, 26). To those in the Americas, Samuel had prophesied that there would be "great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night" (Helaman 14:3-4). Thus that people were to witness the rising and setting of the sun without the coming of the darkness of night. Further, they were promised that a new star would arise, the likeness of which they had never seen, and that it would be attended by other signs and wonders in the heavens (see Helaman 14:5-6).

In the nation of Christ's birth, the testimony was also to go forth in ever-widening circles. Again our story finds its fulfillment among those who were blameless in keeping the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, those who were "just and devout," those who were filled with the Holy Ghost. There is no evidence that these special witnesses were randomly chosen, but rather that they were called and prepared even before

the foundations of the earth were laid. As one evidence of their foreordination, we cite the perfect harmony of their names with the peculiar circumstances that called forth their testimony: Zacharias, the aged priest who obtained the promise of a son and whose name meant “remembered of Jehovah”; Elisabeth, whose name meant “consecrated to God,” who was the faithful wife of Zacharias, and who was destined in her advanced years to become the mother of the Elias who would prepare the way before the Christ; Mary, the mother of the Christ child, of whom Simeon prophesied that the sword of sorrow would pierce her soul, whose name meant “she shall weep bitter tears”; Jesus, the son of Mary and the Eternal Father, whose name, which meant “Jehovah saves,” was given by the angel; John, his forerunner, whose name was also announced by Gabriel, its meaning being “Jehovah is gracious”; Simeon, the aged prophet who had been promised that he would not taste of death until he had seen the Savior, whose name meant “hearing”; and Anna, the widowed prophetess whose name meant “full of grace,” who would testify to the faithful of Jerusalem of the salvation that was theirs through Christ.

As the story unfolds, every appropriate element appears in its proper place, which is all the more remarkable because of its coming from two writers, each telling different parts of the story. Properly, it begins with an angelic announcement within the holy place of the temple to a priest whose prayers have ascended to heaven in behalf of his nation imploring the very event. With equal propriety, it ends with the announcement of Herod’s satanic designs upon the life of the Christ child. Within the story, we see the heavens opened to priest and layman, to man and woman, to old and young, to the mighty and the humble, and we see each called to be a lifelong witness of the most beautiful of stories ever told.

For us of latter days, the Nativity story is more than a perfect witness of the birth of the Savior. In it we find the pattern by which the knowledge of God is to be restored and go forth once again among all the nations of the earth (see Joseph Smith–Matthew 1:31). How will it go forth? By special witnesses, witnesses called and prepared in the councils of heaven. Who will they be? The old and the young, women and men, the learned and the unlearned, but in it all they will be those who walk “in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6), those who dream dreams, entertain angels, and are filled with the Holy Ghost. So it has ever been; so it must ever be.

NOTES

1. On this matter, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written: “What prayers did Zacharias make on this occasion? Certainly not, as so many have assumed, prayers that Elisabeth should bear a son, though such in days past had been the subject of the priest’s faith-filled importunings. This was not the occasion for private, but for public prayers. He was acting for and in behalf of all Israel, not for himself and Elisabeth alone. And Israel’s prayer was for redemption, for deliverance from the gentile yoke, for the coming of their Messiah, for freedom from sin. The prayers of the one who burned the incense were the prelude to the sacrificial offering itself, which was made to bring the people in tune with the Infinite, through the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of their lives. ‘And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense’—all praying, with one heart and one mind, the same things that were being expressed formally, and officially, by the one whose lot it was to sprinkle the incense in the Holy Place. The scene was thus set for the miraculous event that was to be” (*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979], 1:307–8).
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 157.
3. *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 6:487.
4. William Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868), 1:848.
5. L. LaMar Adams, *The Living Message of Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 110.
6. Jan Comay and Ronald Broanrigg, *Who’s Who in the Bible*, 2 vols. (New York: Bonanza Books, 1980), 2:116.
7. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 189–90.
8. McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*, 189–90.
9. Robert J. Matthews, *A Burning Light—The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 18.
10. Adam Clark, *Clark’s Commentary*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.), 3:370.
11. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:347.
12. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:348.
13. See, for instance, The New English Translation and The Jerusalem Bible.
14. When the heavens were opened to Lehi, he saw “numberless concourses of angels . . . singing and praising their God” (1 Nephi 1:8). King Benjamin prayed that his spirit might “join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God” (Mosiah 2:28). Isaiah twice records the Lord’s injunction that the heavens herald the redemption in song: “Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth:

- break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified him in Israel" (Isaiah 44:23; see also 49:13). Singing is an eternal part of the divine system of worship (see Job 38:7; D&C 25:12; 133:56).
15. Temple dedications would be one such illustration. For other illustrations, see Frederick W. Babbel, *To Him That Believeth* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 57–58.
 16. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:354–55.
 17. *Webster's Dictionary of First Names* (New York: Galahad Books, 1981), 112.
 18. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:357.
 19. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:358.
 20. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:362.