

Remember when your first little baby was born

- Joy, innocence, potential
- But there is more to the story. PARADOX: Christ brought joy through his suffering.

Imagine Mary, seeing this baby and knowing something was coming.

- Michelangelo—Mary with Jesus climbing down from her lap. Fingers between the cloth. She knew.

The Christ Child in the Glen – the baby to change the world

- Moonlight dazzling
- Baby dazzling

Christmas talk  
on  
Christ

Christ was born into the world as the Son of Mary. In this life He received not of the fulness at the first, but went from grace to grace until, in the final triumph of the resurrection, He gained the fulness of all things; and all power was given Him both in heaven and on earth. He has all truth, all power, all knowledge; He comprehends all things, is infinite in all his attributes and powers; and He has given a law unto all things. —Elder Bruce R. McConkie

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- 6 He {Jesus Christ} that **ascended up** on high, as also he **descended below** all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, **the light** of truth;
- 7 Which truth **shineth**. This is **the light** of Christ. As also he is in the **sun**.....
- 8 As also he is in the **moon**, and is the **light** of the moon and the power thereof by which it was made;
- 9 As also the light of the **stars**, and the power thereof by which they were made;
- 10 And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand.
- 11 And the **light** which **shineth**, which giveth you **light**, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same **light** that quickeneth your understandings;
- 12 Which **light** proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space--
- 13 The **light** which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.

Hymns with Christ's light:

- "The Lord is My Light" The Lord is my **light**, my all and in all. There is in his sight, No **darkness** at all. He is my Redeemer, my Savior, and King. With Saints and with angels his praises I'll sing.
- "O Little Town of Bethlehem" O little town of Bethlehem, How **still** we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, The **silent stars** go by. Yet in thy **dark** streets **shineth**, the everlasting **Light** The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.
- "Silent Night" Silent night! Holy night! All is **calm**, all is **bright**. Round yon virgin, Mother and Child. Holy Infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly **peace**, sleep in heavenly peace. . . **Glories stream** from heaven afar . . . Son of God, **love's pure light**. **Radiant beams** from thy holy face. . .

Janet Lee said, “Whenever I think of letting the light of Christ show through us, I think of a rainbow or a prism that refracts light and displays many beautiful colors in the process. We need to allow his light to shine through us just as light shines through the atmosphere creating a rainbow. . . This light increases with Christlike acts whether it be taking an extra few minutes to help a friend, being kind to someone less fortunate, speaking a soft word to someone who is stressed or angry, or giving up something that we want in order to make someone else’s day more joyful, comfortable or happy.”

Since it is true that the gospel of Jesus Christ is intended to liberate us, to ease and lighten our burdens, to bring that comfort and rest found in no other way, **why is it that some of us struggle at times?**

- My greatest frustrations seem to have come as a result of my efforts to "handle it" myself, or, in other words, my failure to trust in and rely on the Lord.
- We need to attune our ears to a quiet voice that beckons us--that quiet voice that pleads with us simply to come unto Christ.

### **Coming unto Christ entails a moment of decision**

We incorporate the powers of divinity only through

- acknowledging our own inabilities, accepting our limitations, and realizing our weakness.
- **We open ourselves to infinite strength only through accepting our finite condition.**
- We in time gain control through being willing to relinquish control.
- As we submit, we come to know his will. Once we turn our lives over to the Lord, we discover that he can do far more with us than we could ever do with ourselves.

Even though my own merits are essential to salvation, **it is not by my own merits that I will ever make it.** Rather, it is by and through the merits of Christ. This transcendent truth should create not feelings of futility but feelings of humility.

Marvin J. Ashton—*BE OF GOOD CHEER*. My mother loved him.  
**“Courage for Christmas”**

Despite all that Christ offers us, “Without Richard, Christmas is going to be very difficult this year.

- Loneliness and loss of a loved one
- Courage makes it possible for memories and present pleasantries to overshadow past losses and loneliness

- GIVING, SHARING, AND PRAISING can prevail over anxiety and loss when courage fills our lives.

Christmas is intended to be a joyous time, a time for all to reflect upon the fact that the Lord has come. We are beneficiaries of this priceless gift: His life, His example, His love, and His redeeming grace.

I wish for my friends and associates and family to accept the gift of courage for Christmas—the courage to be Christ-like:

- the courage to be childlike in faith, in belief, and in joy;
- the courage to be honest with God, with self, and with all humanity;
- and the courage to place others ahead of themselves.

Him only will I serve (Luke 4:8)

How rewarding when we solemnly declare that the birth of Jesus is real, significant, and an eternal blessing for all mankind.

Courage is

- the capacity and ability to decide before anything else is really decided, to predetermine to move forward joyously in our worthy pursuits
- enables us to see ourselves and our own situation in a proper light and to share with others in a meaningful way.
- Makes it possible for us to anticipate and prepare ahead for whatever comes.

You cannot walk through life on mountain peaks.

There are rivers and valleys along the way. Deep and treacherous, cruel and challenging

- Illness, death, disappointment, and discouragement as well as honor, wealth, and public acclaim often require great courage to ensure proper survival.
- With God's help, we can accomplish all things.

I would like to give five gifts of courage for Christmas with the hope they can help you to immerse yourself in Christ and his message for us.

1, THE COURAGE TO CHOOSE

- Choose whom ye will serve
- Jesus choose appropriately, chose to carry out earthly mission
- We choose right over the convenient.
- Choose RIGHT over CONVENIENT
- Choose Jesus Christ to be our best friend

- Give the courage to think, ponder, and pray over decisions, choose the right and accept the consequences without hesitation or fear.

## 2. THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE

- Courage to remain true and faithful. “Be ye doers of the word...”
- Courage to continue when others of lesser stature and commitment would fall by the wayside.
- Courage when enemies threaten, belittle, misrepresent, slander.
- Continue bearing witness of the Savior. He lives. He suffered for our redemption.

## 3. THE COURAGE TO CARRY OUR CROSS.

- Carry cross of burden, tragedy, or success with dignity.
- All have crosses to bear. Some hidden. You don't know.
- The heaviest cross can be to shoulder another's burdens.
- Bear and move ahead without hesitation. (What makes us hesitate?)
- “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Matt. 16:24
- Some crosses are self-inflicted. (Too much to do at Christmas.) I'm not good enough.
- Carry our crosses well with Christ's help

## 4. THE COURAGE TO BE CLEAN

- All our thoughts, remarks, dress, grooming---clean
- Be clean in attitudes and thought processes, music

## 5. THE COURAGE TO COMMUNICATE PROPERLY

- Communicate good cheer, peace great joys of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Communicate love, affection, warmth, an happiness.
- Share a smile, handshake, good word
- Communicate with our Heavenly Father
- Family members—even though difficult

(Last page of Ashton book)

Let the light of the gospel and the light of Christ shine from your souls. Pray for this, and don't let the pressures and stresses of this celebration of Christ's birth darken that light that you choose to carry.

# “Be of Good Cheer”

By Marvin J. Ashton  
General Conference—April 1986

Over the last number of weeks as I have contemplated this occasion, I have been strongly impressed to share some thoughts about the Lord’s invitation to “be of good cheer”—yes, to be of good cheer without fear. With world conditions of riots, protests, arms buildups, wars and rumors of war, mistrust, poverty, disappointments, terrorism, tragedies, etc., there has never been a period in history when there is a greater need to accept another of the Lord’s eternal promises.

“Behold, this is the promise of the Lord unto you, O ye my servants.

“Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come.” (D&C 68:5–6.)

Good cheer is a state of mind or mood that promotes happiness or joy. Some like to think good cheer is found in a bottle, a six-pack, an injection, a pinch under the lip, rationalization, or self-deceit. Incidentally, it has been my observation over the years that those who try to drown their sorrows with drink only sicken their tomorrows. With God’s help, good cheer permits us to rise above the depressing present or difficult circumstances. It is a process of positive reassurance and reinforcement. It is sunshine when clouds block the light.

Recently, while visiting with a wife who had suddenly lost a husband through a tragic death, I was touched by this lovely lady from Washington, Utah, when she said, “My heart is heavy and sad, but my soul is of good cheer.” There was a powerful inward cheer dominating the sorrowful situation. The promise, “for I the Lord am with you,” was triumphing over heartache and despair. People of good cheer soften the sorrow of others as well as those that weigh mightily upon themselves.

None of us will escape tragedy and suffering. Each of us will probably react differently. However, if we can recall the Lord’s promise, “for I the Lord am with you,” we will be able to face our problems with dignity and courage. We will find the strength to be of good cheer instead of becoming resentful, critical, or defeated. We will be able to meet life’s unpleasant happenings with clear vision, strength, and power.

All over the world we have many members who are taking the blessings of the gospel to those who will listen. Those who accept and live the teachings of our Savior find the strength to be of good cheer, for he declared, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:25.) When we apply this principle in our lives and share it with our associates, it is possible to supplant discouragement, tragedy, and gloom with hope and cheer. The fruits of cheerfulness lie within each of us, side by side with our resolution, priorities, and desires. They will never come from without. They cannot be purchased or stolen. They are above price. When I think of those about us who are well-disciplined and anxiously engaged in being of good cheer, many great examples come to mind. They lift us with their state of mind

of gladness, joy, and hope. They seem to move forward happily with an extra dimension of power and love. Let me share an example or two.

One beautiful “good cheer” lady I have loved deeply over the years is very special. For more than thirty-five years her husband has been afflicted with Parkinson’s disease.

They have raised six outstanding children. She has cheerfully cooperated in making it possible for him to function well as a father, husband, bishop, high councilor, and successful building contractor. When his mobility has reached discouraging stages of near zero, she has lifted him. Her neighbors, and they are everyone she knows, find her to be the first visitor when there is an unusual need. Her good cheer is endless. She brings peace of mind and comfort to all with whom she associates. The more I watch her, the more I realize good cheer builds contagious enthusiasm.

What a joy it is to see someone of good cheer, who, when others because of an unpleasant happening or development live in angry silence or vocal disgust, meets the situation with cheerful endurance and good spirits.

Our missionaries worldwide frequently have contacts who would be willing to accept baptism and the gospel of Jesus Christ, but who fear the process. Many are afraid to change. Other less active members of the Church resist the invitation to come back because they fear being incompatible in his paths and with new associates.

We remind all to not fear and to be of good cheer because the Son of the living God, even Jesus Christ, shall stand by you.

Just a few weeks ago, while in Bangkok, Thailand, our hearts were touched by a young lady now living in a state of good cheer she never realized possible. Meaningful change has brought great joy and happiness to her and her family. Let me share this message of good cheer as told in her own words.

“In 1975 there was a family who lived near the main road in a small village. My parents were rather poor. My father worked at the local post office, while my mother stayed home caring for the children.

“As time passed by, my mother became bored with her life as a housewife and set out to find a more exciting way of life. She turned to drink, tobacco, and gambling. Many times she would play cards all day and all night and not return to care for her children.

“Meanwhile, my father was working hard to support his family. Things at home were not going well, and many times my father and my mother would argue violently.

“One day my father came home and told my mother that if she continued on with her gambling and didn’t care for the children, he would have to divorce her. The family faced a crisis. At that time I was helping care for my three younger brothers. My parents asked each child who he or she wanted to live with, Mom or Dad. It was a very difficult decision to have to choose between my mother and my father. It was a time of much suffering and sorrow.

“It was during this time that my oldest sister first met some missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She studied about the Church and came to accept the teachings and adopt them into her life. She asked me to go to church with her. I was very sad and angry at first to think she had changed religions. I had only known the teachings of Buddha and had come to love the customs.

“But I noticed a change in my sister. She was more loving and kind and did many things to help our family. I decided to study with the missionaries. My mother listened also. Before very long, we both realized that we had done things wrong and needed to change our lives. We repented of our sins and were baptized. When my father and two older brothers saw the change in us, they decided to study also. My father had been an important officer and teacher in the Buddhist church. He spent much time studying and reading the standard works. He prayed often and sincerely to know the truth. At last his humble prayers were answered. He knew, as we did, that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was true.

“The true gospel changed our lives and restored happiness to a nearly devastated home and family. We are all very grateful and happy to now be a part of the Lord’s church and become familiar with and obey his commandments.”

Today this young lady is a missionary for the Church. She and her family are living witnesses that when people come to realize that “I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you,” a whole family can change their despair to good cheer.

In contrast to this family in Bangkok, some of us who have the happiness and good cheer of the gospel can lose it by becoming involved in iniquity and deceit. One of the most destructive forms of deceit is self-deceit.

Modern-day prophets have pled in plainness for us to avoid “get-rich-quick” schemes if we would avoid the heartaches of financial bondage. Perhaps we have not said enough about the fact that too many of us, in our moments of dreaming of grandeur, plant the seeds of economic disaster. Then at a later date when much is lost, we blame those who participated with us. It is difficult to be of good cheer when self-deceit is our companion. When we willingly expose ourselves to the winds and storms of fraud and scam, we should not be surprised when we come down with deficit disease. Over the years of listening to those who have suffered heavy money losses, I have heard many in desperation declare, “I was taken.” Often my heart, mind, and the Spirit have prompted me to share, “Yes, you were taken by yourself.” We all need to be encouraged to lift up our heads and see where our thoughts and undeclared priorities are taking us. Self-deceit permits us to blame others for our failures.

For many years President Ezra Taft Benson has reinforced his talks of love and guidance to our youth with the truth that wickedness never can be happiness (Alma 41:10.) In dating and courting, decisions of conduct, to be effective, must be made before the moment of enticement and temptation surfaces. Too often immoral conduct results from self-deceit. We have allowed ourselves to blame others for the incident of misconduct when our failure to make decisions ahead of time was not thought to be of importance. The thought that wickedness brings good cheer makes reason stare.

A constant effort must be made to lift our daily conduct so that it squares with our knowledge of truth and our standards. Self-mastery must always triumph over self-deceit for us to taste the fruits of good cheer.

One form of self-deceit is rationalization. We prevent the Lord from being with us because we stray from his paths and explain our actions by consciously or unconsciously making excuses. We say to ourselves: "I did it just to see what it was like." "Everyone else was doing it." "I didn't want to be different." "There was no other way to be accepted graciously." Or "He made me do it."

The companionship of good cheer is possible through keeping the commandments of God, not through rationalization. We must commit ourselves to principles and not live by comparison or excuses. Horace Mann wisely said, "In vain do they talk of happiness who never subdued an impulse in obedience to a principle." (from *Common School Journal*, quoted in *Horace Mann: His Ideas and Ideals*, comp. Joy Elmer Morgan, Washington, D.C.: National Home Library Foundation, 1936, p. 149.)

Self-deceit is at best only temporarily successful. Then when the gap between truth and our knowledge of the right and our behavior becomes too large, we are forced to close it with rationalization. The true test is, how do we measure up when Christlike conduct standards are applied.

Cheerfulness will never be a blending of self-deceit and rationalization. Being of good cheer permits us to rise above the moment and situation. Generally, rationalization is unconscious. We slip into it unaware and gradually. It becomes a crutch for those who choose to walk in crooked paths.

The major responsibility for good cheer lies with the individual.

Good cheer is best shared by those who will discard fear, cheerfully accept what comes and use it wisely, become converted, obey the commandments of God, avoid self-deceit and rationalization.

Being of good cheer makes it possible for us to turn all of our sunsets into sunrises.

With good cheer, carrying our cross can be our ladder to happiness. When Jesus comes into our lives, cheer lights the way. How powerful and comforting is the Savior's declaration, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33.)

He promises to stand by us. He invites us to bear record and witness of him. What a joy and honor it is for me to declare in good cheer and without fear that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, that he was the Only Begotten of the Father, that he is, and that he will yet come again in God's name. I thank God for the Savior's life, his cheerful love, and his example. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." (1 Jn. 4:18.) To all mankind everywhere I cheerfully testify that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. He will sustain us now and forever if we will walk in his paths, be of good cheer, and not fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.