

## Children

Neil L. Andersen, *Ensign*, Nov. 2011

As we look into the eyes of a child, we see a fellow son or daughter of God who stood with us in the premortal life.

It is a crowning privilege of a husband and wife who are able to bear children to provide mortal bodies for these spirit children of God. We believe in families, and we believe in children.

When a child is born to a husband and wife, they are fulfilling part of our Heavenly Father's plan to bring children to earth. The Lord said, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."<sup>1</sup> Before immortality, there must be mortality.

The family is ordained of God. Families are central to our Heavenly Father's plan here on earth and through the eternities. After Adam and Eve were joined in marriage, the scripture reads, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."<sup>2</sup> In our day prophets and apostles have declared, "The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force."<sup>3</sup>

This commandment has not been forgotten or set aside in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>4</sup> We express deep gratitude for the enormous faith shown by husbands and wives (especially our wives) in their willingness to have children. When to have a child and how many children to have are private decisions to be made between a husband and wife and the Lord. These are sacred decisions—decisions that should be made with sincere prayer and acted on with great faith.

Years ago, Elder James O. Mason of the Seventy shared this story with me: "The birth of our sixth child was an unforgettable experience. As I gazed on this beautiful, new daughter in the nursery just moments after her birth, I distinctly heard a voice declare, 'There will yet be another, and it will be a boy.' Unwisely, I rushed back to the bedside of my absolutely exhausted wife and told her the good news. It was very bad timing on my part."<sup>5</sup> Year after year the Masons anticipated the arrival of their seventh child. Three, four, five, six, seven years passed. Finally, after eight years, their seventh child was born—a little boy.

Last April, President Thomas S. Monson declared:

"Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it's growing ever wider. . . .

"The Savior of mankind described Himself as being in the world but not of the world. We also can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings and remain true to that which God has commanded."<sup>6</sup>

Many voices in the world today marginalize the importance of having children or suggest delaying or limiting children in a family. My daughters recently referred me to a blog written by a Christian mother (not of our faith) with five children. She commented: "[Growing] up in this culture, it is very hard to get a biblical perspective on motherhood. . . . Children rank way below college. Below world travel for sure. Below the ability to go out at night at your leisure. Below honing your body at the gym. Below any job you may have or hope to get." She then adds: "Motherhood is not a hobby, it is a calling. You do not

collect children because you find them cuter than stamps. It is not something to do if you can squeeze the time in. It is what God gave you time for.”<sup>7</sup>

Having young children is not easy. Many days are just difficult. A young mother got on a bus with seven children. The bus driver asked, “Are these all yours, lady? Or is it a picnic?”

“They’re all mine,” she replied. “And it’s no picnic!”<sup>8</sup>

As the world increasingly asks, “Are these all yours?” we thank you for creating within the Church a sanctuary for families, where we honor and help mothers with children.

To a righteous father, there are no words sufficient to express the gratitude and love he feels for his wife’s incalculable gift of bearing and caring for their children.

Elder Mason had another experience just weeks after his marriage that helped him prioritize his family responsibilities. He said:

“Marie and I had rationalized that to get me through medical school it would be necessary for her to remain in the workplace. Although this was not what we [wanted] to do, children would have to come later. [While looking at a Church magazine at my parents’ home,] I saw an article by Elder Spencer W. Kimball, then of the Quorum of the Twelve, [highlighting] responsibilities associated with marriage. According to Elder Kimball, one sacred responsibility was to multiply and replenish the earth. My parents’ home was [close to] the Church Administration Building. I immediately walked to the offices, and 30 minutes after reading his article, I found myself sitting across the desk from Elder Spencer W. Kimball.” (This wouldn’t be so easy today.)

“I explained that I wanted to become a doctor. There was no alternative but to postpone having our family. Elder Kimball listened patiently and then responded in a soft voice, ‘Brother Mason, would the Lord want you to break one of his important commandments in order for you to become a doctor? With the help of the Lord, you can have your family and still become a doctor. Where is your faith?’”

Elder Mason continued: “Our first child was born less than a year later. Marie and I worked hard, and the Lord opened the windows of heaven.” The Masons were blessed with two more children before he graduated from medical school four years later.<sup>9</sup>

Across the world, this is a time of economic instability and financial uncertainty. In April general conference, President Thomas S. Monson said: “If you are concerned about providing financially for a wife and family, may I assure you that there is no shame in a couple having to scrimp and save. It is generally during these challenging times that you will grow closer together as you learn to sacrifice and to make difficult decisions.”<sup>10</sup>

Elder Kimball’s piercing question, “Where is your faith?” turns us to the Holy Scriptures.

It was not in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve bore their first child. Leaving the garden, “Adam [and Eve] began to till the earth. . . . Adam knew his wife, and she [bore] . . . sons and daughters, and [acting in faith] they began to multiply and to replenish the earth.”<sup>11</sup>

It was not in their Jerusalem home, with gold, silver, and precious things, that Lehi and Sariah, acting in faith, bore their sons Jacob and Joseph. It was in the wilderness. Lehi spoke of his son Jacob as “my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness.”<sup>12</sup> Lehi said of Joseph, “Thou wast born in the wilderness of [our] afflictions; yea, in the days of [our] greatest sorrow did thy mother bear thee.”<sup>13</sup>

In the book of Exodus, a man and woman married and, acting in faith, had a baby boy. There was no welcoming sign on the front door to announce his birth. They hid him because Pharaoh had instructed that every newborn male Israelite should be “cast into the river.”<sup>14</sup> You know the rest of the story: the baby lovingly laid in a little ark made of bulrushes, placed in the river, watched over by his sister, found by Pharaoh’s daughter, and cared for by his own mother as his nurse. The boy was returned to Pharaoh’s daughter, who took him as her son and called him Moses.

In the most beloved story of a baby’s birth, there was no decorated nursery or designer crib—only a manger for the Savior of the world.

In “the best of times [and] ... the worst of times,”<sup>15</sup> the true Saints of God, acting in faith, have never forgotten, dismissed, or neglected “God’s commandment ... to multiply and replenish the earth.”<sup>16</sup> We go forward in faith—realizing the decision of how many children to have and when to have them is between a husband and wife and the Lord. We should not judge one another on this matter.

The bearing of children is a sensitive subject that can be very painful for righteous women who do not have the opportunity to marry and have a family. To you noble women, our Heavenly Father knows your prayers and desires. How grateful we are for your remarkable influence, including reaching out with loving arms to children who need your faith and strength.

The bearing of children can also be a heartbreaking subject for righteous couples who marry and find that they are unable to have the children they so anxiously anticipated or for a husband and wife who plan on having a large family but are blessed with a smaller family.

We cannot always explain the difficulties of our mortality. Sometimes life seems very unfair—especially when our greatest desire is to do exactly what the Lord has commanded. As the Lord’s servant, I assure you that this promise is certain: “Faithful members whose circumstances do not allow them to receive the blessings of eternal marriage and parenthood in this life will receive all promised blessings in the eternities, [as] they keep the covenants they have made with God.”<sup>17</sup>

President J. Scott Dorius of the Peru Lima West Mission told me their story. He said:

“Becky and I were married for 25 years without being able to have [or adopt] children. We moved several times. Introducing ourselves in each new setting was awkward and sometimes painful. Ward members wondered why we [didn’t have] children. They weren’t the only ones wondering.

“When I was called as a bishop, ward members [expressed] concern that I did not have any experience with children and teenagers. I thanked them for their sustaining vote and asked them to allow me to practice my child-raising skills on their children. They lovingly obliged.

“We waited, gained perspective, and learned patience. After 25 years of marriage, a miracle baby came into our lives. We adopted two-year-old Nicole and then newborn Nikolai. Strangers now compliment us on our beautiful grandchildren. We laugh and say, ‘They are our children. We have lived our lives backwards.’”<sup>18</sup>

Brothers and sisters, we should not be judgmental with one another in this sacred and private responsibility.

“And [Jesus] took a child ... in his arms [and] said ...

“Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth ... him that sent me.”<sup>19</sup>

What a wonderful blessing we have to receive sons and daughters of God into our home.

Let us humbly and prayerfully seek to understand and accept God’s commandments, reverently listening for the voice of His Holy Spirit.

Families are central to God’s eternal plan. I testify of the great blessing of children and of the happiness they will bring us in this life and in the eternities, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.