

A Brightness of Hope

A Christmas program for Sunday worship service

“A Brightness of Hope” is a Christmas program written for LDS church worship and is appropriate for sacrament meeting. It requires a speaker, a mixed choir, a children’s chorus, and organist. It also has closing remarks intended to be read by the presiding bishopric member.

The author has listed the music used in earlier performances of this program. These anthems and hymns are suggestions only and can be substituted by other appropriate music. Depending on what music is used, the program is 30 – 35 minutes in length.

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Mixed choir *Star Carol*, words and music by John Rutter (4:00)

Speaker Joseph went from Galilee into the City of David to be taxed with Mary his wife, who was great with child. While they were in Bethlehem, the days were accomplished that Mary should deliver her child, and she brought forth her first born son, and Joseph called his name Jesus.

We celebrate Jesus’ birth at the onset of winter, although historical evidence suggests that he would more likely have been born in the spring. Yet winter seems an entirely appropriate time to celebrate the hope that Jesus’ birth brought to the world. As we wait through the dark and frigid winter for spring to return, Christmas represents the hope of renewal, of light, of warmth, of abundance, and of life.

The scriptures tell us that Christ was born
to heal the broken hearted (Luke 4:18);
to publish peace (Mosiah 12:21);
to light a path in darkness (Ether 3:14);
to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4 and Mosiah 14:4);
and
to give his life as ransom for our souls (Matthew 20:28).

This message offers “strong consolation,” in spite of the bleakness that surrounds us. The prophet Ether taught that this “hope for a better world” can be “an anchor to [our] souls.” As an anchor, hope keeps us “sure and steadfast” in our faith, prompts us to “abound in good works,” and leads us “to glorify God.” (See Hebrews 6:18-19 and Ether 12:4.)

Christmas gives us a reason to “be of good courage,” for we are promised that the hearts will be strengthened of all those who “hope in the Lord.” (Psalm 31:24.)

Congregation *Joy to the World*, no. 201 (2:20)

Children’s chorus *Away in a Manger*, words anonymous, music by William J. Kirkpatrick, arranged by David A Zabriskie (2:30)

Speaker When Christ was born, an angel appeared to shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem. Seeing that the shepherds were afraid and confused, the angel declared, “Fear not, I bring you good tidings of great joy...For unto you is born this day...a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” Instead of doubting, the shepherds chose to hope, to believe for a moment that the angel spoke the truth. They followed the angel’s directions with haste until they found the infant in a manger.

With amazement and wonder, the shepherds told the people of Bethlehem what had the angel had said. First of all, the angel had said a baby would be found wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger; and, indeed, the shepherds found this to be true. But even greater was that the angel said that this baby was the Savior, their Redeemer, Christ the Lord. This was truly wonderful news. The shepherds returned to their fields, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen. They were no longer afraid; they had found hope in Christ. (Luke 2:8–20.)

Mixed choir *Sing, Sing, Sing*, music by Michael Praetorius (1:00)

All My Heart This Night Rejoices, words from Paul Gerhardt, translated by Catherine Winkworth, music by Johann George Ebeling (2:30)

Congregation *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, no. 208 (2:30)

Speaker Soon after his birth Jesus was taken to the temple in Jerusalem. A man named Simeon had been persuaded by the Spirit to go the temple that day. Simeon was full of hope and expectation: he had been promised by God that he would not die until he saw Christ. On looking at Jesus in the temple, Simeon recognized the baby’s divinity and rejoiced. “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation,” he said, and he blessed the Jesus and his parents.

Also at the temple was Anna, a widow for over eighty years. She could have relented to the infirmities and loneliness of her age, yet she spent her days at the temple in fasting and prayer. When Jesus was brought to the temple, she recognized the child and thanked God. Her joy could not be contained; she had to share it with her neighbors. She told people throughout Jerusalem about the promise of redemption through the baby who was Christ. (Luke 2:25–38.)

That day in the temple, Anna and Simeon gazed on a newborn baby and saw past mortality. They saw eternal life because they had hope in Christ.

Congregation *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, no. 209 (1:45)

Mixed choir *If This Child Were Born Today*, by Berta Poorman and Sonja Poorman (3:20)

Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers, words by Laurentius Laurenti, translated by Sarah B. Findlater, 14th century Swedish folk tune, arranged by Sharon Elery Rogers (3:00)

Speaker Three learned men saw the star of Bethlehem and recognized it as a sign that a new king had been born. They placed their hope in the revelations of earlier prophets and set out to find the child and worship him. On their quest, they went through Jerusalem, asking about the King of the Jews. When the ruler at that time, King Herod, heard these things, he also determined to find the child, but not to worship him. Herod was greedy to keep his kingdom and secretly planned to destroy Christ. He told the wise men to send him word when they found the child.

By following the star, the wise men came upon Jesus. With “exceeding great joy,” they presented him with generous gifts and showed him the greatest respect. But they did not tell Herod where they had found the boy. Warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the wise men went back to their countries by another route. In this choice, they were truly wise, for they shielded themselves and the innocent Christ child from King Herod’s deceit. (Matthew 2:1–12.)

The three wise men made a safe and successful journey because they acted with sacrifice, generosity, obedience, and goodwill, which traits, ultimately, came from their hope for a new king.

Mixed chorus *Christmas Jubilation*, words by John Greenleaf Whittier, music by John T. Longhurst (2:10)

Congregation *Far, Far Away on Judea’s Plains*, no. 212 (1:30)

Speaker The apostle Neil A. Maxwell compared hope to a kaleidoscope. “Those with true hope,” he said, “often see their personal circumstances

shaken...again and again. Yet with the 'eye of faith,' they still see divine pattern and purpose." ("Brightness of Hope," Ensign, Nov. 1994, 34.)

Elder Maxwell said that the eye of faith, true hope, sees beyond worldliness. It makes us "more loving even as the love of many waxes cold; more merciful, even when [we are] misunderstood or misrepresented; more holy, even as the world ripens in iniquity; more courteous and patient in a coarsening and curt world; and more full of heartfelt hope, even when other men's hearts fail them."

The Christmas story is an example of true hope. It shows us how those who looked to Christ and believed in Christ gained strength to overcome fear, infirmity, and tyranny. And it promises us that we, too, can be filled "with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13.)

Closing remarks On one occasion, President Howard W. Hunter stressed the need for all Latter-day Saints to cling to the brighter hope of Christ, "to rejoice a little more and despair a little less, to give thanks for what we have and for the magnitude of God's blessings to us."

"For Latter-day Saints this is a time of great hope and excitement," he said. "We need to have faith and hope, two of the greatest fundamental virtues of any discipleship of Christ. We must continue to exercise confidence in God... He will bless us as a people... He will bless us as individuals..."

President Hunter continued to say, "With the gospel of Jesus Christ you have every hope and promise and reassurance. The Lord has power over his Saints and will always prepare places of peace, defense, and safety for his people. When we have faith in God we can hope for a better world—for us personally and for all mankind."

Herein is the hope and promise of Christmas: "Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life." (2 Nephi 31:20.)

Congregation *Once in Royal David's City*, no. 205 (1:45)