



“We Have Come to Worship Him”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

Jesus was born in humble circumstances. How does this affect your feelings for him? Dr. Brad Wilcox explores the many visitors and witnesses to Jesus Christ’s birth and intentional discipleship.

Part 2:

Dr. Brad Wilcox continues and examines the importance of pondering, temple worship, and scripture study as well as following the life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Part 1–Dr. Brad Wilcox
- 01:10 Introduction of Dr. Brad Wilcox
- 06:39 Bethlehem means “House of Bread”
- 08:45 Guest room or inn
- 11:07 Swaddling clothes
- 17:30 Shepherds for temple sacrifices
- 20:30 Abide
- 22:43 The Wise Men and a star
- 27:17 Josephus and a new start with Moses’s birth
- 32:05 Petra and the Treasury
- 34:02 Gifts enabled Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to move to safety
- 38:12 End of Part 1–Dr. Brad Wilcox

Part 2

- 00:00 Part II– Dr. Brad Wilcox
- 00:07 Micah and Herod
- 01:36 Scholarship and testimony
- 02:16 Herod
- 05:04 Nazareth
- 08:17 Joseph and Herod in juxtaposition
- 09:17 Study aids don’t replace scripture
- 12:00 Mary and Joseph present Jesus at the temple
- 15:22 Anna and Simeon
- 20:34 The spirit of prophecy and the temple
- 23:26 The Three Levels of Christmas
- 25:22 Feast days and losing Jesus
- 31:46 Youth and children should learn as Jesus did
- 37:36 Mary pondered these things
- 38:49 Dr. Wilcox shares his thoughts about progressing like Jesus
- 47:30 End of Part II–Dr. Brad Wilcox

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Biographical Information:



Bradley R. Wilcox was born in Provo, Utah, on December 25, 1959. He and his wife, Deborah Gunnell, have four children.

Bradley R. Wilcox received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Brigham Young University (BYU) and his doctorate in education from the University of Wyoming.

He has served in several Church callings, including full-time missionary in the Chile Vina del Mar Mission, bishop, mission president of the Chile Santiago East Mission, counselor in a YSA stake presidency, and member of the Sunday School general board. Most recently, he served as high councilor and stake Young Men president.

Bradley R. (Brad) Wilcox was sustained as the second counselor in the Young Men general presidency on April 4, 2020.

He is currently a professor in BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture. He is the author of the book *The Continuous Atonement* and the BYU devotional address "His Grace Is Sufficient."

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Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:15	As together we follow Him.
Hank Smith:	00:20	Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith, I'm your host, and I'm here with my wise co-host, John Bytheway. Welcome, John Bytheway, to another episode of followHIM.
John Bytheway:	00:33	Wise in my own eyes, Hank, that's about it.
Hank Smith:	00:36	And everyone else's eyes, John, you are as wise as they come. We are going to be talking about wise men today, so you fit that category perfectly. Although, I don't think you're old enough to be one of the original wise men.
John Bytheway:	00:48	Well, I knew one of them.
Hank Smith:	00:49	You knew one?
John Bytheway:	00:51	He borrowed a camel from me once. But yeah, great guys, really.
Hank Smith:	00:56	Now, John, we needed a scriptural expert to join us as we bring Christmas back. We just had the Christmas season and now we're bringing it back in scripture so we needed a Christmas scripture expert. Tell everyone who's joining us.

John Bytheway: 01:10 Hank, we're so excited to have Dr. Bradley R. Wilcox with us again. We've had Brad before, and we've been friends for years. This one seemed particularly apropos today because of the Messiah in the Manger, because we'll be talking about that. Brad Wilcox is an associate professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, where he enjoys teaching at Campus Education Week and Especially for Youth, and now we call that FSJ. He speaks at Time Out For Women events, is the author of The Continuous Atonement, The Continuous Conversion, The 7-Day Christian, the BYU Devotional, "His Grace is Sufficient." In 2018, his book, Changed Through His Grace, received the Harvey B. and Susan Easton Black Outstanding Publication for LDS Scholarship.

01:59 As a young man, Brad served his mission in Chile and in 2003 returned to that country to preside over the Chile Santiago East Mission for three years. He has served as a member of the Sunday School General Board, 2009 to 2014. Brad and his wonderful wife, Debbie, have four children, eight grandchildren. Brad is currently a member of the Young Men's General Presidency. We're so excited to have Brad back with us today. He's wearing his festive Christmas tie.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 02:30 Yeah, I've got it right here.

John Bytheway: 02:32 So Brad, tell us, when is your birthday again? What day is that?

Bradley R. Wilcox: 02:35 Well, that's why it's hard for me to put away Christmas because I have to say goodbye to the birthday too. I know everybody else is ready to move on, but I'm still wearing my Christmas tie.

John Bytheway: 02:46 Was that tough as a kid? Did you have a different pile for birthday gifts and a different pile for,

Bradley R. Wilcox: 02:51 I've talked to people who've said that it was hard, but my mom and dad just always made it fun. They had a sign in the house that said Happy birthday to Jesus and Brad. So I always felt like I was in pretty good company. And it was funny because my mom did have a tradition of putting up two trees. So she had one that was a Christmas tree, one that was my birthday tree. And then the idea was that my brothers were supposed to put a present for me under each tree. And that worked fine until the year where that my brother got smart and bought me a pair of gloves and he put one under the Christmas tree and one under the birthday tree.

03:33 And then everything from then on just went downhill. In fact, a year ago he brought me a pair of socks and put one under the Christmas tree and one under the birthday tree. It's pretty funny. My cousin gave me a card one year that said, "Being born on Christmas is quite unique because you never know who brought you; the stork or Santa Claus." So I don't know, it's always added a little extra sparkle to the season and it's always been fun, but that's why I'm still wearing my Christmas tie and I always love celebrating Christmas and my birthday with the only update on your bio, John, nine. Nine grandchildren.

John Bytheway: 04:16 Awesome.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 04:17 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 04:18 That's great.

Hank Smith: 04:18 Congratulations. Yeah, I bet that's the best part of Christmas is having those grandkids around.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 04:23 It's a lot of fun. Gets crazy around the Wilcox house, but it's a lot of fun.

John Bytheway: 04:29 And Brad, how many years now have you been serving in the young men's general presidency?

Bradley R. Wilcox: 04:34 Let's see, we were called in 2020.

Hank Smith: 04:36 I remember you telling me that you were actually at home when you were sustained in general conference because of COVID. They didn't have anybody in the conference center.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 04:47 Yeah, they were actually using the little theater and they just had the people who were speaking. And so originally they told us, you can come with your family, but just your immediate family. And then they called and said, no, you can just come with your wife. And then they called and said, no, your wife can't come, just you. And then they said, no, you can't come.

Hank Smith: 05:05 You stay home. That's got to be a unique, yeah.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 05:09 It was a very different conference, but as we look back, it was so memorable because so many people needed that uplift. So many people tuned in because they were so scared and so fearful and conference brought a lot of peace as people listened to the prophets and the church leaders and recognized that, hey, we're going to make it through this. We received a

beautiful blessing during that conference from President Nelson, if you remember right. And we all stood in our living rooms and did the Hosanna shout, do you remember that?

- John Bytheway: 05:48 And to have him announce temples, just let everybody know, yeah, the work goes on. We're not stopping that either, so we're going to announce new temples while we can't even attend them. That was cool.
- Hank Smith: 06:00 So Brad, we just had Christmas and now we're going to have Christmas again here in our text because this week we're on Matthew 2 and Luke 2, which is the Christmas stories. How should our listeners go into these chapters?
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 06:14 Let's just dive right into Luke 2 and then we'll switch over to Matthew. But we'll just do the same thing that everybody did on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day in their homes. They start, they're reading Luke 2, and then they switch over to Matthew. It's what my dad did every year as we reviewed the Christmas story. So yeah, let's go ahead and start in Luke 2.
- Hank Smith: 06:35 We'll have Christmas in January here.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 06:39 Well, as we look at Luke 2, it starts of course, as we've all got memorized from having read these verses so often it starts with Augustus taxing the world and they had to go to the town of their heritage. And so of course they went to Bethlehem. Now earlier in the scripture, we find out that both Mary and Joseph descend from that Davidic line. And so both of them are legitimately going to the town of their heritage, their legacy. This is the town of David. It's interesting that Bethlehem means both house of bread is what the word means. But it's also, if you go over to Jerusalem, you find out that Bethlehem is one of the sources of water for Jerusalem. So I've always thought it's interesting that in Bethlehem then we have the House of Bread, and from that place comes the bread of life.
- 07:41 And we also have the source of the living water because Jerusalem was fed with water from Bethlehem, especially anciently. So it's kind of a beautiful thought as we think about, O little town of Bethlehem, it wasn't on the trade routes. And when we talk about the inns that were so full, then we have to remember they weren't full because of the trade route everybody's passing through Bethlehem. It was a little village off to the side of all the action. Actually, the American Bible Society says there were three types of inns in Jesus' day. There was the type of inn, like a Marriott today where you can go and get room and board, and if you're rich enough, you could pay for

those services. That's what we read about in the Good Samaritan. But those would not have been the inn that would've been in Bethlehem.

08:44 Similarly, anciently, for those that couldn't afford the Marriott, then there were opportunities to stay in big common places. So you basically could buy a little place on the floor and listen to a bunch of strangers snoring, but at least it was warm and at least it was away from the dangerous animals and thieves if they were sleeping alone out under the stars. But that wouldn't have been in Bethlehem either because it wasn't on the trade route. So the inn that's being talked about here is coming from a Greek word *kataluma* and that means guest room. It's the same word that was translated as upper room when they talk about the last supper. This was a guest room and that gives added meaning because if you stop and think about it, yeah, all the inns were full, the guest rooms were full, all the relatives were coming in for this occasion. But wouldn't relatives have made room for a pregnant lady who's about to deliver a baby? Joseph Smith translation changes the word inn to inns, plural, which means

Bradley R. Wilcox: 10:00 that nobody had room for them, nobody would make room for them. Tyler Griffin often says because they were extended family, maybe they had done the math, maybe they knew when Joseph and Mary were married and now they saw that this baby was being born and enough time had not passed. As we read in Luke 2, there's an interesting phrase that we all have memorized and it says, "There was no room for them in the inns." But remember it's "inns" instead of "inn," according to Joseph Smith, and maybe we should read this, "There was no room for them in the inns." There would've been room for others. There would've been room for another newlywed who was having a baby, but not for them, because they were being greeted with such judgment and such condemnation. They were being rejected by relatives. So that definitely makes it a lot more personal when we think about that.

11:07 We also read in that same verse that she brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. Now we understand that they went to a stable. When I was a little child ... I grew up in Ethiopia, Africa, and when we came back from Ethiopia, my parents took me through the holy land with my brothers so that we could be there and see it. And so I have wonderful memories, but just little kid memories. Just little kid memories. Under the Temple Mount, even today, there's a place that they call Solomon's Stables. It's basically the arches that are under holding up what's now the dome of the rock. They don't let tourists go there now, but back when I was

there, as a young child, we got to go down and climb around down in those Solomon's Stables and it was really cool to be there.

12:01 But all I remember is having to go to the bathroom so bad, so bad, and there was no place. I wasn't thinking about the place; I was thinking just like a little kid. And the same thing when we went to Bethlehem. I was so upset that there wasn't a stable. And instead there was this big church over a cave. And I thought, "No, Jesus wasn't born in a big church." And I was so frustrated because I wanted to see that stable. But of course, the church is built over where the stable would've been and the stable probably was a cave. And the manger, a stone manger. In French manger is "manger," which means to eat. How beautiful that Mary brought forth that firstborn son and put him in a stone manger because he was going to be the bread of life, the living water, and they needed to partake of that.

13:03 Let's turn to John 6:56 and it says, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." So Mary is putting food, nourishment in the manger for us to come and be invited to partake, being invited to eat. I speak Spanish, but I don't speak French, so I hope I said that word right, "manger." Well, let's look at one more thing from that verse seven in Luke 2. It says she wrapped him in swaddling clothes. It's not uncommon for people to wrap babies in swaddling clothes today. They kind of take a length of cloth and just wrap that baby up like a burrito. My daughter-in-law would always do that with her kids because you don't want the baby to scratch himself. You don't want the baby to poke himself in the eye. And I think from what I'm told, it helps the baby feel ...

14:03 I would feel trapped, I think. But they say it helps the baby feel safe and secure, kind of as if the baby's in the womb again. So there's a beautiful thought in her wrapping the baby with swaddling clothes. But I assume that most babies back then were wrapped in swaddling clothes. Why would that be a sign to the shepherds, that this baby would be wrapped in swaddling clothes? Why would that be a sign to them? Jack Welch has done some fascinating research and he talks about how when couples were married anciently in Jewish weddings, they would tie a band around their arms loosely, symbolizing their union. And that's where we get the term "tying the knot." Isn't that interesting? Well then this band would often be embroidered with symbols from the family's heritage with colors representing the family. So this would be something special that a bride would save from the wedding.

- 15:07 Just like brides today will save their wedding dresses or save ... well, now they even can save the flowers that they had. Have you seen that, where they kind of bubble wrap the flowers? So in the same way Mary and Joseph may have saved these bands, and Jack Welch says that when the baby was new, often they would wrap the baby not just in swaddling clothes, but they would wrap the bands, this band from the wedding, around the baby. Now, if that's the case, and we don't know whether it was or wasn't, but if that's the case, then surely this would've been a sign. Today they worry about swapping babies. They'll put a little wristband around the baby's wrist or around the baby's ankle because they don't want to swap babies in the hospital. So maybe there was a practicality in wrapping this family band around the baby because it would say, "Hey, this is my baby. It's not your baby. Don't get mixed up."
- 16:09 But also, symbolically, this speaks of the heritage. They were coming to Bethlehem because that was the town of their heritage. So these bands may have been blue and white, the same blue and white we see in Israel today-
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 16:26 ... which were the colors of the royal lineage of David. Maybe they would be embroidered with lions or lambs because David was a shepherd lion, the royal symbol of royalty in Judah. So who knows? Maybe these bands were special and unique enough that when the shepherds would come to see, then they would recognize that this is the son of David and the son of God.
- Hank Smith: 16:55 That's verse 12. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes with certain symbols on them. There's probably a lot of babies with swaddling clothes, but I can't imagine there's too many babies lying in an animal trough.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 17:06 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 17:06 Brad, do you remember when Sister Becky Craven, she spoke at one of those first presidency Christmas devotionals, and she talked about swaddling clothes and it was almost like ... I think it was an ad lib. She just looked at all of us and said, "Every once in a while, all of us could use a swaddle."
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 17:22 Yeah, kind of like a good hug. Just wrap me up like a burrito.
- John Bytheway: 17:28 Yeah, that was beautiful.

Bradley R. Wilcox:	17:30	So that would be a very unique sign to them. And these shepherds, again, we have to remember that they were not ordinary shepherds. In Alma 13:26, in the Book of Mormon, we read that, Christ's birth shall be made known unto just and holy men by the mouth of angels." So these shepherds were just and holy men. We learn from Bruce R. McConkie and James Talmage that they were the shepherds who were watching over sheep that were bound for the temple. And why did they need to watch over them at night? Well, because the sacrifices had to be of the first born.
	18:16	So the shepherds needed to pay special close attention because these were shepherds that had to witness the birth of the first born and be able to verify that this sacrificial lamb was indeed the first born. And when we think about that, then how appropriate for God to call these shepherds, not just any shepherds, but these just and holy men, and there were probably women among them as well, to come and witness the birth of the firstborn of the father in the spirit. These were not ordinary shepherds, not ordinary shepherds at all.
John Bytheway:	19:02	Oh, Brad, thank you. This is great. There's a word in verse eight that I've come to notice recently. "There were, in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." The word "abiding," if it weren't there, it would still make sense. "There were, in the same country, shepherds in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." But they were abiding. And Sister Chieko Okazaki, who was in the General Release Society presidency, 1990 through ... great speaker and writer, she talked about the word "abide" and how it means to stay, to continue, to endure without complaint, to be where you're supposed to be type of a thing. And she said something really beautiful about this, remarking on about the shepherds. She said, "I hope we can all feel the strength of abiding in our fields, keeping watch over our flocks." And then she said, "Let's be where we are supposed to be so
John Bytheway:	20:00	angels know where to find us. And I thought it was just a beautiful thought. That's from her book, Stars, on page 96. There's so many different ways that's been put. Stay on the covenant path, abide over your fields and watch your flocks, your calling, your responsibilities, your family. Be where you're supposed to be so that the Lord can find you. And then now, after I said that, start to think of the word in other places where the disciples on the road to Emmaus-
Bradley R. Wilcox:	20:30	Abide with me.

- John Bytheway: 20:31 Yeah. Said, abide with us. It is toward evening. And Jesus did for a while and then he left. And now it's as if the Savior is asking us to abide with him. We go to the sacrament table. We promise to take upon us the name of Christ and always remember him and keep his commandments. We're promising to abide with him. And then what do we hear that they may always have his spirit to be with them. He's going to abide with us. There's a lot behind that wonderful little word there of just abiding. And I thought Sister Okazaki pointed that out beautifully.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 21:06 And when we were on our mission in Chile and presiding over a mission, my wife and I would have a special conference at Christmastime because the missionaries feel so far from home. But we always would sing, Angels We Have Heard on High. And afterwards, we would share with the missionaries the thought that it's only as you're out in the field. Like you say, abiding, keeping watch over the sheep, that the angels did come to those that were busy tending sheep and that these missionaries were away from home. They were away from their family traditions, but they were tending sheep. And so we confidently promised them that they would see God's hand, that they would feel the angels close and that they would hear angels song. So I can't sing that Christmas song anymore. I can't sing it without always thinking of missionaries who are out tending sheep all over the world and hoping that they will hear the angels from on high.
- John Bytheway: 22:16 Oh, that's nice. And we just got done with the last book of the Old Testament just a few weeks ago of Malachi where he asks, "Will you be able to abide the day of his coming?" Because the great and terrible day is coming, and if we're prepared, we can abide. We can continue and remain in that day when Jesus comes again. It's kind of a fun word, fun to see all the different places it shows up and has kind of special meaning there.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 22:43 Before we continue in Luke two, let's switch over to Matthew two and we can read about the wise men. It says in verse one, "There came wise men from the East to Jerusalem." Now we don't know how many. Bruce R. McConkie says that the tradition of three wise men is probably because of the three gifts that we mentioned. But there could have been more wise men who were coming. And just like the shepherds were special and the shepherds were not ordinary, these wise men were not ordinary travelers. They were not scholars or astrologers, but... And you can read this in the Bible Dictionary. It says, "they were spiritually sensitive and knowledgeable prophets on a divine errand." These were prophets. Joseph Smith teaches us that they were not just seeking a king, they were seeking the

Messiah because they knew that he would come. God led Lehi and his family to the Americas. So is it not possible that he led other faithful Israelites to other parts of the world?

24:01 Wherever the wise men were, they, like Lehi and Nephi, knew about Christ. And they were looking forward to his coming. So the wise men were Israelites who lived, as millions did, in one of the nations to the East. They had been led away from Jerusalem. And they were looking forward to the coming of Christ, and they would return to be able to bear witness that Christ had indeed come. So that's interesting that says that they came and they were seeking a star. I think it's fascinating that the whole world celebrates the star. It's a symbol of Christmas. We have come to know that they were searching and that they would find Jesus, and the star led them. And every Christmas pageant in all Christendom celebrates the wise men following the star.

25:10 But in the Bible, we only read of the star in the New Testament. We don't read about it in the Old Testament. There's not one mention of the star in the Old Testament. Just as Nephi and Lehi and their descendants were looking forward to the coming of Christ, then there were other pockets of Israelites who were also looking forward to the coming of Christ. Now, how did the wise men know the star was the sign of Christ's birth? The current Old Testament has no such prophecy. There is a verse in Numbers that does talk about a star, but not directly. So as you search through the Old Testament, you're not seeing this prophecy that they're talking about in the New Testament. Even though Christians all over the world are celebrating this, they're actually demonstrating and acknowledging that there has to be other scriptures and other revelation in addition to the Bible.

26:20 Because here they're talking about something that's not necessarily stated clearly in our current Old Testament. So I think it's very satisfying to think that all Christianity is singing about a star that's not found in the Old Testament, but it's found in the Book of Mormon. Samuel the Lamanite prophesied in Helaman 14, five, "There shall be a new star arise such an one as ye never have beheld." Now, of course, the wise men would not have read about the star in the Book of Mormon scriptures. But just as prophets in the Americas knew about the star, then there had to be additional scripture, and there had to be a revelation of the star to these wise men to know that that's what they were looking for. Beautiful.

John Bytheway: 27:17 Brad and Hank, when I was growing up, we used to watch the Ten Commandments movie. Remember Charlton Heston, the Ten Commandments?

Bradley R. Wilcox: 27:25 Yeah. They used to show it on TV. You didn't have a video of it. You had to just watch it on TV.

John Bytheway: 27:32 And they showed it around Easter, oddly. It always showed the Ten Commandments and Charlton Heston being Moses. And I think Don Knotts read for that part, but didn't get it. Anyway.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 27:42 Don Knotts, your hero.

John Bytheway: 27:45 I don't know why. They're so similar. But-

Hank Smith: 27:48 You could do it, John. You could do, "Now let my people go."

John Bytheway: 27:53 Why you know, Ramses he's my brother. Let my people go. I'll throw you in the Mayberry jail. So at the very beginning of the movie, the Seti, the father of Ramses in the movie, he's with his priests and the priests say, "Hey, there's word of a deliverer among the slaves." And one of the priests goes, "A star proclaims his birth." And it's interesting that if you watch the beginning of the movie, it says, "We're taking this from the Old Testament and the works of Josephus." And we've mentioned him on the podcast before, this Jewish historian that wrote about three volumes." It was interesting to me that there was a new star for Moses, evidently, according to Josephus. And Moses is such a strong type of Christ that it's kind of fun to see when the real deliverer comes that Moses foreshadowed there would be a star. That's a fun little note in the movie, the Ten Commandments from Josephus. A star at the birth of Moses.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 28:51 That's beautiful.

Hank Smith: 28:52 Speaking of this star from Matthew chapter two, verse two, Neal A. Maxwell said this. He said, "The same God that placed that star in a precise orbit millennia before it appeared over Bethlehem in celebration of the birth of the babe, has given at least equal attention to the placement of each of us in precise human orbits so that we may, if we will, illuminate the landscape of our individual lives so that our light may not only lead others, but warm them as well." The way, he looked at the star and thought, "Man, the Lord must have placed that in its orbit long before it happened." He's saying the Lord does that with each of us in our lives, places us in our precise human

orbit. So I need to thank both of you for being in my orbit. I feel very blessed to cross planetary paths with you.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 29:47 It's a beautiful thought that God governs so closely the crossroads in the intersections of our lives. And the older I get, the more I can look back and I can see the truth of that. Not just hope that it's true, but I can see the truth as I see the people that God has woven into my life and the lives that I've been able to interact with in ways that have been so impactful.

John Bytheway: 30:17 Brad and Hank, you'll love this. This is also Elder Maxwell. He said, "Just as the rising generation is here now by divine design, so are we who have been placed just ahead of them. Our lives and theirs have and will intersect many times before it is all over and not by accident."

Bradley R. Wilcox: 30:38 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 30:39 And I think that's exactly right. I'd love to read this to young men leaders that there's a reason you're there where you are. All this talk of this rising generation, well, they put you there too, to be in their orbit.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 30:51 We hear a lot about intentional parenting and intentional discipleship. And isn't it beautiful to think that God is an intentional parent? That He's very intentional in what He's doing in our lives? And we can see that in this appearance of that star. In Matthew 2, if we go to verse 10, it says, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." And then in verse 11, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child." So obviously, they're coming a little later. Jesus is a young child now, and they bring them gifts. Elder Oaks, in the First Presidency devotional just recently before Christmas of last year, said that, "These gifts may have been the reason that Mary and Joseph could afford to go to Egypt." These gifts I had always thought of as just being very symbolic. But President Oaks reminded us that there may have been some practicality in these gifts, as well.

32:05 If you've ever been over to the Holy Land, we often take tours and visit Israel. But sometimes, you can go over into Jordan, as well, and visit a place called Petra. It's a remarkable place. And this Petra was a trade center. It was the place where people would come from the east to come to Israel, and it's where the Israelites would've gone through on their way to the east. And it was in its heyday during the time of Jesus Christ. So, as you visit Petra, people say, "Oh, well, Petra's a nice historical place, but

there's no connection between Petra and the Bible." But there is a connection.

32:53 Because as you think about where the wise men were coming from, they were coming from the east, and so they brought gold, frankincense, myrrh. Where did they get the gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Probably in this world trade center of the time at Petra. That's probably where they got these gifts and then carried these gifts on to the Christ child. So, maybe we don't know whether the wise men went through there or were from there. We don't know. But it certainly would make sense that they would have passed through there. And that was a place that was very famous for the trade of frankincense. Even today, it's a famous place where people will go and get frankincense. And then, because it was this trade center, there would've also been gold and myrrh and other valuable things in abundance. So, maybe when we visit Petra, we are visiting, in a way, a sacred place.

Hank Smith: 34:02 So, Elder Oaks said perhaps these gifts enabled them to move to Egypt. That sounds much better than the song where it says "A child, a child shivers in the cold. Let's bring Him silver and gold." And I thought, "He doesn't need silver and gold."

John Bytheway: 34:16 He's shivering in the cold.

Hank Smith: 34:19 Let's bring Him a blanket. But this makes sense. If a child, a child is under threat, He needs money to move. That makes more sense.

John Bytheway: 34:26 I've heard other scholars, as well, talk about that this financed their flight into Egypt tonight, just going along with talking about orbits and intersections. Isn't it wonderful the Lord had provided a way? Because we're going to learn later on that Joseph and Mary, when they brought their sacrifice to the temple, they brought the one that was available to the poor. But the Lord helped them find a way to finance that flight into Egypt to save the Savior's life.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 34:51 Despite their poverty.

John Bytheway: 34:53 Another evidence of the Lord working things together for them, I think.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 34:57 And you know, can't speak about the wise men without speaking about Herod who was so fake when they first came to him and said, "Oh, yes. Tell me where He is so that I can worship

Him. And then, the wise men were warned to not return to Herod, but to go home another way. My son-in-law, Landon, served his mission in Uruguay at the same time that his parents were serving as mission leaders in Chile, and they got to call on Christmas. In the olden days, missionaries couldn't call home as often as they do now. So, a call home was something very special and anticipated because you finally got to talk with your parents and not just communicate through email or earlier letters. So, he had a chance to call his parents. And the call, as they were talking, his father, Larry Laycock, who's a wise man himself, said "Landon," he reminded him of this story.

35:59

He said, "When the wise men left after they encountered Jesus, they went home another way." And he said, "Landon, you're about to go home from your mission. And just remember that your mission was meant to change you. Your mission was meant to give you an encounter with Jesus Christ that would change you. And you are not meant to go home and just pick up where you left off and go back to your bad habits, back to your earlier life, back to your circle of friends. You are meant to go home another way." And those words have become so important to me. As I reflect now on that experience with my son-in-law and his father, that gives me a new vision of how this story isn't just about wise men going home changed, but this story is about how we can go home with a testimony of Jesus. We can move forward another way because we've encountered Christ.

John Bytheway:

37:12

Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- John Bytheway: 00:00 Welcome to Part Two with Brother Bradley R. Wilcox, Matthew 2 and Luke 2.
- 00:07 It's interesting to me that Herod gathered his chief priests and scribes together. Now, these are priests and guys who know their scriptures and said, "Okay, where is it that Christ should be born?" Well, we talked about this when we did the book of Micah. There's a reference to Bethlehem. So they knew their scriptures. This would've got my margin. They knew their scriptures, but apparently they didn't have the Holy Ghost. Jesus was in their midst and they knew it not.
- 00:34 The wise men knew it. These guys that came from miles away knew it. These guys didn't know it. And it's great to know the scriptures, but boy, to have the Holy Ghost and to have revelation and know what was right there, and this is news to Herod, it's news to the chief priests and scribes. But the wise men knew why they were coming. Mary knew. Joseph knew. And I've always thought, "Wow, that's a warning there. You can intellectualize yourself and get real smart. But what about the Holy Ghost? What's that going to teach you?"
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 01:06 And if we go back to what it says in the Bible dictionary that these wise men were prophets, well then the prophets knew. The chief priests and the scribes didn't know. Do we trust more in the high priests and the scribes of the world who are so knowledgeable, or do we trust prophets? Because the prophets in the Americas knew. The prophets here, the wise men knew. And do we trust prophets to guide us to Him?
- John Bytheway: 01:36 I love this idea because I remember Dr. Robert L. Millet that we've had on the program before telling... I mean, it was a revelation. I didn't know this. I didn't know that there were Bible scholars who were not Bible believers. And he said in his PhD program at Florida State, some people studying the scriptures to an extent, they lost their testimonies. And I thought, "How does that happen?" Because they got so into the academic part of it that they kind of lost the spirit. And I thought, "How interesting. They knew exactly where Jesus

would be born from their scriptures, but they had no idea from their own revelation."

- Hank Smith: 02:13 Let me read to you something that Joseph Fielding McConkie, he said this about Herod, and I just was struck by the language. He says, "A fiend in a 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. 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.
- 03:00 Such is the irony of history that the most wicked man to ever sit on David's throne was its occupant in the very day when He came whose throne it was. And who in due course would reign in righteousness thereon. It was to this man, who personified the wickedness of the world and the corruption of the earth, that the Wise Men of the East went and bore their testimony that Israel's rightful king and ruler had been born."
- 03:28 And then he says this, " The question as to whether Herod really believed 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 had no such effect on the prince of darkness and his murderous wrath."
- 03:52 And listen to this. "As Satan's chief apostle, Herod, with all the cunning of Hell, sought to destroy the Christ child. Of a truth, the kingdom of God will never go unopposed in the days of Earth's mortality, the period of Satan's power." He said there was an opposition, kind of a witness, going after him the moment he's born.
- John Bytheway: 04:15 In fact, there was a joke that people told back then, I think. It was safer to be Herod's pig than one of Herod's relatives.
- Hank Smith: 04:23 Right. Because pretending to be a Jew, he wouldn't kill a pig, but he would kill a relative.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 04:29 Hank, that is such a powerful description. I know you provide references for your listeners as to where they can find those quotes.

Hank Smith: 04:38 Yep.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 04:39 But just tell us really quickly, where is that reference? I want to write that down.

Hank Smith: 04:44 That's from Special Witnesses of the Birth of Christ, Joseph Fielding McConkie. It's a Sperry Symposium classic.

John Bytheway: 04:53 It's also an entire book. Can you see me holding it up?

Hank Smith: 04:57 Yeah. We'll put it in our show notes. You can go to FollowHim.co and we'll put that quote and its reference in our show notes.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 05:04 Yeah. And again, likening that to our day. Are we surprised that there's opposition to the church moving forward as we prepare for the second coming? No, we shouldn't be surprised at all. Well, as we finish with the Wise Men, we look at verses 19 and 20 and 21. It talks about how they went to Egypt, and then it was time to come back to the land of Israel and they went into the Galilee.

05:36 Now, it makes sense that they would go to a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophets. He shall be called a Nazarene. Nazareth was where Mary was from. Joseph was logically from that same area since they were already engaged to each other. So they were going home. But there may have been more reason than just going home to go to Nazareth. Part of the reason that they may have gone to Nazareth is because it wasn't ruled by Herod's son, Herod Archelaus. His area was divided into three areas that were ruled by three of his sons Herod Philip up in the north after Herod's death. So then Herod Philip ruled in the north and then in the Galilee area was Herod Antipas. And then in the south where there was Jerusalem, it was Herod Archelaus. But he, like his father, was so cruel that the Jews finally went to the Romans and said, "We would rather have a Roman rule over us than a so-called Jew who is so cruel.

06:52 That's why we get Pilate entering the scene because Pilate comes as prefect and the Romans take out Herod Archelaus and put this Roman prefect in his place, which the Jews felt was a better situation than being ruled over by somebody who was as

cruel as his father. So maybe they were going back to Nazareth because they didn't want to be under the rule of Herod Archelaus. And that might be one of the reasons.

07:25 But I think we also have to recognize that Herod Antipas was the governor of this part of the Galilee, and he was building a palace. He was building a Roman style city in a place called Sepphoris, and that's close to Nazareth. So maybe they went to Nazareth because there was work. There would be work for a carpenter. Now the word carpenter comes from the Greek word *tektōn*, which is a builder. Maybe Joseph would've been able to find work in stone or even in wood as Herod built this palace. And that may have been the work that drove them to Nazareth, so that Joseph could provide for his family.

Hank Smith: 08:17 And of course, in all of this, Matthew sees fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in every move that they make. He says, "This fulfills Old Testament prophecy." That's Matthew's go-to move. I've often wondered if Matthew put these two men side by side, Joseph and Herod, to just show us how different men can be. You can be kind and good, and hardworking, and obedient to revelation. Or you can be evil and selfish, and completely governed by your emotions and your fears and insecurities. I don't know if Matthew did that on purpose, but man, you can really see a contrast between Joseph and Herod in these two chapters.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 08:59 They both stand on two ends of a continuum and they are dramatic, beautiful examples of one or the other. And we stand in the center of that continuum, and must choose which way are we going to head? Are we moving to be more like Joseph or are we moving to become more like Herod? It's a big wake-up call for all of us as we read these scriptures.

09:27 Now let's go back to Luke two and let's do what rarely happens after Christmas. And that is read the rest of the chapter. Luke 2 part 2, let's go ahead and read that. Mark Pace, the General Sunday School President, a wonderful man. I've traveled with him. I admire him so much. And he has faced so many challenges in his life regarding health. He just goes a million miles an hour serving despite some of the health challenges that he's faced. And I admire him. The reason I bring him up is that President Pace says that as helpful as podcasts like this are, as helpful as discussions are, there's nothing like sitting down and reading the text yourself. I experienced that this morning because I knew we were getting ready for this scripture block.

- 10:25 So I sat down and I read Matthew 2 and I read Luke 2. And just as I sat there alone, not speaking on a podcast, not being interviewed by Hank and John, but just sitting there alone with the scriptures, I was able to feel a beautiful spirit and the spirit teaching me. And I hope that listeners will never get so dependent on discussions about the scriptures, that they don't take that time to read beyond what's being discussed in the podcast. I did that this morning and as I was reading, I kept thinking of what President Oaks did. He said, "It wasn't just the wise who sought Jesus. It wasn't just the humble, the shepherds, the Wise Men, but it was the holy who sought Jesus." And he was referring to these temple workers that you read about if you go beyond what's typically read at Christmastime.
- 11:29 So this morning, as I read about the Holy who sought Jesus, it was just a really tender experience. I want to encourage listeners, along with listening to insights that are shared, be sure you read so that those insights can come to you from the Holy Ghost as I felt this morning preparing for this podcast.
- 11:52 Anyway, that's just a little aside, but let's go ahead and talk about this time as the days of her purification, because Mary obviously had to spend, according to Jewish tradition, 40 days in isolation after giving birth. Maybe that was good, that she didn't have to be entertaining a bunch of visitors. Maybe a little isolation was a good thing. But 40 days, she had to be isolated, and then they were able to take him to the temple.
- 12:28 In verse 23, it says, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." Now, that was only firstborn sons, and not sons that were born later, but they were considered holy. That's one of the reasons that they had to pay this sacrifice. Joseph came, Mary came, and it was, this sacrifice was part of her ritual cleansing. But Joseph came to pay a tax, so to speak, that was required of the first born, so that they would be excused from priestly service, so that they would not have to spend their life in priestly service. He's actually paying this tax excusing Christ from priestly service, and yet Jesus is born to become the high priest of good things to come. He is born to become the high priest that would part the veil, and enter into the Holy of Holies, and there make it possible through his blood to be able to have all of us go through the veil into the Celestial Kingdom.
- 13:42 So it's kind of interesting. That was a thought that I pondered this morning as I was reading, that Joseph was excusing him from this priestly duty, but he was literally born to it. Thus the

frankincense. The high priest on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, would go into the Holy of Holies, and he would take coals, with the frankincense, the smoke going up to heaven, and he would take that with him along with the blood of the sacrifice into that Holy of Holies. What an appropriate gift that the wise men brought. Gold for a king, myrrh, which they used to embalm or to prepare dead bodies for a savior, and frankincense, which was used in the temple to symbolize the sweet smell of forgiveness, and the smoke rising like prayers to heaven. And here they're bringing frankincense to the one who is going to be the great high priest.

- Hank Smith: 14:50 This is fantastic. So that wasn't a secular law they were following. This is a Law of Moses law.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 14:56 It says in 24 to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord. And this sacrifice was for Mary, but it was also a sacrifice offered by Joseph. And as John mentioned earlier, a pair of turtle doves, two young pigeons, because they were very poor and couldn't afford the more expensive sacrifice.
- 15:22 But let's talk about these two. Maybe, Hank, tell us a little bit about the first who sees Jesus, and then John, you could tell us a little bit about this Anna, who is the prophetess who sees Jesus. When I was younger, I used to think they were husband and wife, but they weren't necessarily husband and wife. They were just two temple workers who had been looking forward to this day. Talk us through those verses, Hank.
- Hank Smith: 15:52 Yeah. Let's go. This is verse 25. "Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. The same was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Ghost was upon him, and it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." And so when Mary and Joseph come to bring the child Jesus, he takes him up in his arms, and holds him, and blesses God, and says in verse 29, "Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace," or I'm taking that as he says, "I can pass away now, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of the people." Can you imagine someone taking your baby and saying, "Can I just hold your child for a minute?" And then handing it back saying, "I think I can die now. I have seen what I had been promised by the Holy Ghost that I would see."

Bradley R. Wilcox:	16:48	All the world celebrates the wise men and the shepherds, but very few go where President Oaks took us in the first Presidency Devotional. The holy. The holy also sought him. And here is an example of a very holy man who God has governed that orbit, as Elder Maxwell taught us, and he has brought this holy man into the orbit, and he is a witness of Christ.
Hank Smith:	17:18	Almost our very first one outside of the shepherds and the wise men. We have our very first named witness, Simeon.
Bradley R. Wilcox:	17:25	Beautiful.
John Bytheway:	17:26	If you were to ask me what my favorite movie of all time is, I would say Ben-Hur. It takes about a week and a half to watch it, but they have a beautiful portrayal of Simeon in there. It's really good. The next one is Anna, and I'm glad we're talking about this. This idea of other witnesses of the birth of Christ. And President Oaks' great comment about the holy, the humble, and the wise were the witnesses. So let's start in verse 36.
Bradley R. Wilcox:	17:52	This is a woman, too. There may have been young women or girls among the shepherds, but here's a named woman who also enters the Christmas story.
John Bytheway:	18:03	Yeah. Starting in verse 36 of Luke 2. "And there was one, Anna, a prophetess," and I'm going to say something about that in a second, "the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser." I think that's probably Asher in Hebrew. "She was of a great age, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow of about four score and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming, in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.
	18:47	So this Anna is called a prophetess, and I'm going to read from our friends Andy Skinner and Kelly Ogden, their comment about this. "Another witness of the redeemer came forward, a very old prophetess and temple worker of the tribe of Asher named Anna, or Hebrew, Hannah. The Bible gives the title prophets to six women: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah, Isaiah's wife, and Anna. In addition, Philip the Evangelist had four daughters who did prophesy."

- 19:20 "As Alma teaches, 'God imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, and not only men, but women also.' Alma 32:23." Of Deborah, Daniel Ludlow wrote, 'The reference to Deborah as a prophetess does not mean she held the priesthood office or calling of a prophet. Her gift of prophecy would have been essentially the same that is available to every worthy person who has received the gift of the Holy Ghost.' Joseph Smith said, quote, 'Every man who has come into this church, and every woman for that matter who has received the testimony of the spirit of the Lord is a prophet or prophetess.' That every man should be a prophet, because every man in the church should have the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy."
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 20:04 We also read in Revelation at the end of the New Testament that the gift of prophecy is a testimony of Jesus. And she now had a sure special witness of Jesus. Anna means "full of grace." That's what the name means. And I think that's beautiful as well, that she was full of grace. She saw the one who was a grace personified.
- John Bytheway: 20:34 Beautiful. That verse in Revelation, I love that. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, so I love to say to my classes, "I'm sitting in a room with prophets and prophetesses." Small letter P, but if you have a testimony of Christ, well, where did you get it? It would have been by revelation.
- 20:52 Nephi says, "Well, if you have a hard time reading Isaiah, it's not hard for those of us who have the spirit of prophecy." And I tell my class, "Well, if you have the testimony of Christ, you have the spirit of prophecy. So don't be intimidated by Isaiah." But that's last year's topic, right Hank?
- Hank Smith: 21:07 Yup. Last year and next year.
- John Bytheway: 21:08 Yeah.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 21:09 Yeah. And although Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament, he's the Old Testament prophet who's quoted most often in the New Testament, so Isaiah's this year too.
- John Bytheway: 21:21 You just can't get away from Isaiah. Isn't it interesting they were in the temple? I like that you brought this out, Brad, that Zacharias was in the temple when the John the Baptist prophecy was given to him. Here's Simeon and Anna in the temple, serving day and night in the temple, it says about Anna.

- Hank Smith: 21:37 Let's talk about that for a second. It seems that the second half of Luke 2, you find Jesus in the temple. You've got Simeon and Anna, and later I'm sure we'll talk about his parents finding him in the temple. If I have to take any message out of the second half of Luke 2, it's get myself into the temple. President Nelson said, "The temple lies at the center of strengthening our faith and spiritual fortitude, because the Savior and his doctrine are the very heart of the temple." He later goes on in the same talk, this is October of '21, he later says, "If you don't yet love to attend the temple, go more often, not less. Let the Lord through his Spirit," and you can see the Holy Ghost is here with both Simeon and Anna in the temple, "let the Lord through his spirit teach and inspire you there. I promise you that over time, the temple will become a place of safety, solace, and revelation." That's got to be one of the messages of Luke 2, don't you think?
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 22:33 Yes. And especially when you think about how most of Christianity today is still searching for that baby in a manger. That when they think of Jesus, they think of that manger scene. When we think of Jesus, we need to let him grow up. We need to realize that he is still alive. We need to realize that we can find him in the temple, in his house. Yeah, we usually stop reading Luke 2 when we're done with the manger. But as we continue to read, then we also are seeing the importance of living in this last dispensation, where Jesus leads his church, and he is found in the temple.
- Hank Smith: 23:18 Simeon, Anna, and his parents. We've got three, four witnesses here of Jesus is found in the temple here, from Luke 2.
- John Bytheway: 23:26 Brad, you mentioned this idea about, "They're still looking for Jesus in the manger." Years ago there was a church news editorial by a man named William B. Smart, and he published a little book called Messages for Living, but just very insightful. It's something kind of we've all known, but the way he put it, he articulated it beautifully. He said, "Christmas has three levels. Number one is the Santa Claus level, and that's reindeer, and 'ho ho ho,' and hanging our stockings, and all of that, and we love it, and we enjoy it so much." But he said, "The other level is the Silent Night level."
- John Bytheway: 24:00 ... and he talked about the baby Jesus and the story of the wise men and the shepherds. But what Brother Smart said that I thought, "Wow, good point," he says, "The man who keeps Christ in the manger will in the end be empty and unfulfilled." And this idea of He grew, He grew up, and this is where for the rest of the New Testament, we'll be looking at the adult Christ. And the level three is the Christ, the Lord, and the Savior. And

there wouldn't be a level one or a level two without level three. It's just a great insight. But the line that stuck with me was, "Keep Christ in the manger." And I think most of the world wants to stay on Santa Claus. Some will acknowledge the silent night, but they don't want to go beyond that. The Savior grew, as we're going to see in the rest of Luke 2. And without level three, there wouldn't even be a level two or a level one.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 24:52

That was an interesting insight. Let's finish now by letting Jesus grow up, and read the very few verses that we have about Him as a child and Him as a young man. Let's go to verse 40. "The child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Grace enabling power of God was upon him. Now, His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover."

25:22

There were three feasts that required Jews to make an effort to come to the temple. One was the feast of the Passover. The other was Pentecost, 50 days after the feast of the Passover, when they were celebrating the first fruits of their planting in the spring, kind of an early Thanksgiving. And the other was the feast of the Tabernacles in the fall, when they were celebrating the final harvest of the year. They were also looking back to their ancestors, much like we do at Thanksgiving. We look back to the pilgrims and honor them. They look back to their ancestors who dwelt in tents and who had a tabernacle in the wilderness, and how God blessed them and guided them through the wilderness. So those are the three times they come to the temple.

26:15

Very interesting to note that the holiest day for the Jews, anciently and today, is Yom Kippur, and that is the Day of Atonement. But there wasn't a requirement to go to the temple. Instead, they celebrated that holiday by fasting, by repenting, by seeking purification. Those were some of the major festivals. But here Joseph and Mary, as dutiful Jews, were coming to the Passover. And it says he was 12 years old. And then we know that they lost him. I mean, imagine the pain of losing the Son of God.

John Bytheway: 26:55

Can you imagine?

Bradley R. Wilcox: 26:56

They were coming in a big group. And just like today, adults probably were talking with adults while the kids all went out and played together. You can't blame them for not noticing Him, because He was probably with the other children, or they assumed He was. But when they finally realized He wasn't there, then they went back and they found Him in the temple.

Look at verse 46. "It came to pass that after three days, they found Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors." Look at the footnote B. It says, "The Greek teachers." "Both hearing them and asking them questions." Look at the footnote C. It says, "Joseph Smith translation, and they were hearing Him and asking Him questions." So He wasn't just eager to learn from these men, but He was literally teaching these men. And 47 says, "All that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they saw Him, they were amazed. And His mother said unto Him, 'Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing.'"

28:17 49. "And He said unto them, 'How is it that ye sought me? Whist ye not that I must be about my father's business?'" Now, who is the one who taught Jesus? If we go again to the Joseph Smith translation, and we look at Matthew 3:24-26 of the Joseph Smith translation, it says, "It came to pass that Jesus grew up with His brethren and waxed strong and waited upon the Lord for the time of His ministry to come." 25, it says, "He served under His father and He spake not as other men. Neither could He be taught, for He needed not that any man should teach Him."

29:05 Now, He doesn't need to be taught, not because He doesn't have the veil over His memory ... Both James Talmage and Jesus the Christ and Lorenzo Snow ... We read in Teachings of Presidents of the Church that Lorenzo Snow also said Jesus had a veil over His memory. So who was it that was teaching Him the education of children was the responsibility of the father? So if Joseph was with his brethren, other members of his immediate family, step-siblings, then the education would've been Joseph's responsibility. So it says, "He was under His father," but we can recognize that Joseph was a stepfather. So while Joseph taught the other children and probably taught Jesus as well, it was Heavenly Father directly who was teaching Jesus through that veil, giving Him, as President Steve Lund talks about, many bursts of light through that veil. And all those bursts of light were adding up together, and He was being taught with the spirit. It says that He had the veil, but He was given the spirit in unlimited abundance.

30:23 In Doctrine and Covenants 93:13, we read, "And He received not of the fullness at first." So He still had the veil over His memory, as all humans, for a time. "But continued from grace to grace until He received a fullness." So He grew and learned. And the Holy Ghost, the messenger of God's grace, says Elder Christofferson, also taught Jesus. So He was taught by His

father, His literal father, grace to grace. He was taught through the Spirit. And He got to a point where He was at 12 years old and had such a deep understanding that not only did He want to be about His father's business, but He could be about His father's business, because He had gained that much knowledge about who He was, the plan, and His role in fulfilling the central most important part of that plan by performing the Atonement. So finally, verse 52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and man."

John Bytheway: 31:46

Brad, that verse has a special place, I know, in your heart, as part of the young men's general presidency, and the young women as well, with the new Children and Youth program. Can you tell us why that verse has an importance?

Bradley R. Wilcox: 32:00

It's important because we encourage young people today to grow in the same ways. One aspect of the Children and Youth program, along with gospel learning and service and activities, one aspect of the program is personal development. And we want them to be able to grow and develop in all areas of their life, but we need to remember that this growth is not inward. Sometimes we overemphasize goals by saying, "Oh, young people need to have goals in each of these areas of their life, intellectual, social." And we stress that pretty heavily. But we can't forget that if we are only talking about personal development, it can be a very inward-focused experience: "It's all about me, it's all about my growth, it's all about me getting better. The whole world needs to help me reach my goals."

33:03

And I think as we look at this verse in a broader context, we see that Jesus reached His goals by being about His father's business. And maybe we shouldn't be focusing on Luke 2:52 without also focusing on Luke 2:49. If we are about our father's business, if we are engaged in the work of salvation and exaltation, if we are helping young people live the gospel, care for those in need, invite others to receive the gospel and unite families for eternity in the temple, if we are doing that work, then we also are about our father's business. And the personal growth comes not from setting a bunch of arbitrary goals just to say you've done it so that leaders and parents will get off your back, but it becomes seeking personal revelation to find out what God needs you to be about.

34:07

And as we engage ourselves, as we completely immerse ourselves in the work of salvation and exaltation, then the personal growth will come for us, just as it did for Jesus. We will grow in all aspects of our lives. Years ago, people would say, "Look at the Scout book, or look at the Personal Progress book,

and find out what they want you to do." And now we don't want young people reading a book to find out what they need to do. We want them to turn to God. We want them to be about their father's business. And as they are, then God will help them to know what He needs them to do. And that's the growth, that's the personal development that we want young people today to experience.

- John Bytheway: 35:01 Oh, Brad, this is great. Elder David A. Bednar, in RootsTech ... And was that January or February of 2020? It was just before COVID hit. But he gave this just wonderful introduction to the Children and Youth program. And specifically what I wanted to say is the work of salvation, because we talk about that. I love the new Aaronic Priesthood theme, "I'm a beloved son of God and He has a work for me to do." Well, what is that work? I mean, we think of Moroni saying that to young Joseph Smith, "What is the work?" And Elder Bednar defines beautifully the work of salvation, you said it there, Brad: "Live, care, invite, unite." And what I'd like too, as you were just saying, look at that verse and it can sound very ... if we're not careful, it's all about me and my goals. But look at live, care, invite, unite, the work of salvation. The first one is about living the gospel, but all of the rest-
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 35:53 And that's important.
- John Bytheway: 35:54 ... are about others. Yeah. If you're the instrument, what would Stephen Covey say? Sharpen the saw and then go do the sawing, go do the work.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 36:02 There needs to be that balance, and I think in the youth program, we need to keep that balance.
- John Bytheway: 36:09 Yes, the idea of wisdom is important, intellectually. Stature, physically in favor with God, spiritually and in favor with man socially. How we interact with each other and to become, as you mentioned, Brad, we focus on others. It's not just what we do. What are we becoming? President Oaks, that talk he gave, I want to say October 2000, The Challenge to Become, we all know Brad, that teach me all that I must know, Naomi Randall's original words that President Kimball, the story is wanted that change to teach me all that I must do. But then Elder Oaks, we just talked about, well, when we know what to do and we do what we know, we begin to become something different. And I hope someday they change it. Teach me all that I must be based on President Oaks' talk. But this is Jesus became by increasing in these areas and that's the model for all of us.

Bradley R. Wilcox:	37:04	John, I'm glad that you have made this connection with the children and youth program because that's the goal of scripture is to make a connection in our lives to see how it applies. Sometimes we only see these scriptures that we've been talking about today as applicable in December. I think it's appropriate that we're studying them in January because these are things we should be able to keep in our hearts throughout the entire year.
Hank Smith:	37:34	That's beautiful, Brad.
John Bytheway:	37:36	Yeah. Brad, I'm glad you said it that way. When we look at verse 19, and I kind of drew a line over to verse 51, in both of those places, Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart or in 51, kept all these sayings in her heart and we love Christmas, but we want to keep it. The Beach Boys years ago did an album called Endless Summer. I love the idea of endless Christmas to keep that feeling like Mary did. President Thomas S. Monson said something so simple, so profound once that if we want to understand the spirit of Christmas, we need only remove the last syllable and it becomes the spirit of Christ and we can keep that with us. In fact, we are promised we can have his spirit to be with us every week at the sacrament table. So that joyous, glad tidings great joy, Christmas feeling doesn't have to go away. We can keep it in our hearts.
Bradley R. Wilcox:	38:31	Just like Mary did.
Hank Smith:	38:32	Yeah. The old Christian tradition is that Mary kept all these things to herself until a historian named Luke came along and got the interview of a lifetime interviewing the mother of the son of God.
John Bytheway:	38:47	That's good.
Hank Smith:	38:49	Brad, I'd like to ask you a question before we let you go. And this goes back to some things you've written in the past and your general conference talk that you gave just a year ago. Let's say I'm at home and I'm listening and I want to increase in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man, I want to be like these people. I want to be like Simeon and Anna and the wise men. I don't want to be like Herod, but yet I find myself falling back into previous sins or I find myself not making the progress that I want to make. What would you say to someone who wants to progress, wants to become everything we've talked about today, but just struggles along the way?

- Bradley R. Wilcox: 39:30 Look carefully at the words that we read earlier. It says, "The grace of God was upon him". And then we talked about how he grew in the Doctrine & Covenants that says "from grace to grace." I see that as progression improvement from one level to another, from one bestow of grace to another bestow of grace. It's not a one and done. Grace is not a gift that we get once a year and we just have to open that gift and then we've got grace. It's a power that as we receive it, then more is given. And as we receive that, then more is given. And as John just mentioned, as we go to the sacrament table, then we can keep him with us throughout the year. And it's at that sacrament table that we can feel that gift of grace bestowed again and again and again. When we go to the sacrament table, it's not to say I repent of all my sins and I will never do anything bad again because we all know that next week we're going to be back at the sacrament table.
- Hank Smith: 40:54 And the Lord plans on us coming back.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 40:56 Exactly.
- John Bytheway: 40:57 He knows. Yeah. Do this again next week, come back.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 41:01 So it's not that he's expecting perfection after we have repented. It's that repentance is a process that helps us through this perfecting process in which we are engaged. Repentance is part of this perfecting process. As we improve, as we grow as Jesus did, from grace to grace, from this gift of power to another gift of power, to another gift of power. And that is how we can ultimately go through what John said. We know in our minds we try to do, but how does that turn into becoming? I think the only way we can see that in our lives is if we look backward.
- 41:54 A missionary comes home or everybody says you've changed so much. Well that's because they haven't seen him, but he looks in the mirror and says, "I'm the same guy I was yesterday." The missionary. What does he do? He looks at his little brothers and sisters and he says, "Oh my gosh, you've changed so much." And they're like, "No, I haven't. I'm the same guy I was yesterday." So I think Hank, sometimes we need to just step back a little bit, be a little more patient with ourselves, a little more patient with each other and acknowledge the grace that will help us grow in grace.
- 42:35 Every time I take the sacrament, I renew my covenants in Spanish because that was my mission language. So I always go take the name of Christ upon me, remember him, always keep

his commandments, bless others and endure. And I review that in my mind in Spanish. But then sometimes I also add a little phrase in Spanish because the word *gracias* is thank you. And in Spanish that's very close to the word for grace, which is *gracia*. Sometimes I'll add in my prayer *muchas gracias*, much thanks. *Por tu mucha gracia* for your much grace. Because I realize that the only way I can take his name upon me, the only way I can remember him always, the only way I can strive to keep his commandments and bless others, the only way I can endure to the end is because he gives me the same thing he gave Jesus. He gives me grace. God gives me grace. And with that help, with that enabling power, that divine assistance, that endowment of strength, then I can keep going on this journey and I can keep returning to that sacrament table week after week and weakness after weakness.

- Hank Smith: 44:18 You said this in your general conference talk, life is like a cross-country road trip. We can't reach our destination on one tank of gas. We must refill the tank over and over. Taking the sacrament is like pulling into the gas station. As we repent and renew our covenants, we pledge our willingness to keep the commandments and God and Christ bless us with the Holy Spirit. In short, we promise to press forward on our journey and God and Christ promise to refill the tank. Some mistakenly received the message they are not worthy to participate fully in the gospel because they are not completely free of bad habits. God's message is that worthiness is not flawlessness, coincides with what you just told us here, that you can still struggle and be progressing and moving forward.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 45:00 And just pull into that gas station and say fill 'er up.
- Hank Smith: 45:05 Brad, thank you so much for joining us today and celebrating Christmas again with us.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 45:10 I might finally have to take off my Christmas tie now.
- John Bytheway: 45:14 No, endless Christmas. We love it.
- Bradley R. Wilcox: 45:16 Endless Christmas, endless birthday.
- Hank Smith: 45:18 I've heard it said before, you don't have to go through the pain of putting the tree back up if you never take it down. Well, we're grateful that you'd spend a few hours with us. Thank you so much for your time.

Bradley R. Wilcox: 45:31 Oh, it's been a joy to be with you. I just admire you so much. You're my friends, you're my companions, you're my colleagues, and you're my brothers. And I love being on this team with you anytime I can. And I admire and honor you for the good you're doing with this podcast. I admire your staff. I honor their sacrifice, Lisa and Jamie and David and Sister Sorensen, who has been so generous to make this even possible. She and her family are so devoted to trying to help teach people about the gospel and this is a wonderful way to do it. So I'm grateful for them. I'm grateful for all the good you're doing and getting these scriptures into the hearts and the lives of so many listeners and so many viewers. Keep up the great work. I'm just so proud of each of you.

Hank Smith: 46:30 Well, thank you for being with us. It won't be the last time you join us. We're grateful, always grateful to have you. We want to thank our executive producer, Shannon Sorensen. We want to thank our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen, and of course we always remember our founder, the late Steve Sorensen, and we hope all of you will join us next week. We have another episode of the New Testament coming up on followHIM. Today's transcripts, show notes, and additional references are available on our website. followhim.co. Followhim dot C-O and you can watch the podcast on YouTube with additional videos on Facebook and Instagram. All of this is absolutely free, so be sure to share with your family and friends to reach those who are searching for help with their Come Follow Me study. Please subscribe, rate, review or comment on the podcast, which makes the podcast easier to find. Thank you. We have an amazing production crew we want you to know about. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Neilsen, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts and Ariel Cuadra. Thank you to our amazing production team.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE SHEPHERDS' REACTION TO THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE OF THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH?



- Hank Smith: 00:04 Hello, my friends. Welcome to another followHIM Favorites. My name is Hank Smith, and I'm here with the incredible John Bytheway. We like to cover on followHIM Favorites just a tiny portion of this week's lesson. And we are in Matthew chapter two and Luke chapter two this week.
- 00:19 John, we covered quite a bit with our guest on followHIM, our full podcast, Dr. Brad Wilcox, but there's something we didn't cover that we wanted to hit in this little followHIM Favorites. That is what do you learn from the shepherds' reaction to the angels. So the angels come and tell the shepherds, "We bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Then there's this multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." What do you learn from what happens at that point?
- John Bytheway: 00:53 Well, these two verses are so good, 16 and 17, "And they came with haste." And I've thought, "Mary and Jesus weren't going anywhere," but they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. So everything like the angels said. And then look what they do in 17, "... when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child."
- 01:17 So I think that there's a Christmas carol. Sometimes you hear Go Tell It on the Mountain. That's what they did. They were, "We've got to tell everybody what the angel said. And the angel was right. We came, we saw the sign, and now we've got to tell you."
- 01:30 So Sister Bonnie Cordon in her first presidency Christmas devotional, talked about the shepherds and not only did they receive the sign and the gift, but then they sent it out and they went to tell everybody. They were like missionaries, these shepherds.
- Hank Smith: 01:45 Yeah, beautiful. There's this word in verse 15. Look at this. "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem." Let's go right now. Let's not

wait till tomorrow. Let's not wait till next week. Let's not wait till next month. Here it is, the middle of the night, abiding over their flock by night, but let's go now. They could have waited till morning. And I think there's something to be said on when you feel a prompting, when you feel that the Lord wants you to do something, let's go now.

02:13 It was Mormon, as a child, Ammaron says, "I can see that you're quick to observe." It sounds to me like Mormon watches, is careful, and acts. He's observant and then he acts. He moves when he gets a prompting. I remember Elder Bednar talking about that.

02:29 So when you feel something good, "Maybe I ought to do this. Maybe I ought to go text this person. Maybe I ought to take so-and-so a little tree. Maybe I ought to..." Remember these shepherds. Let us now go. Make haste. Let's move our feet and go do what we've been asked to do.

John Bytheway: 02:47 Yeah, we don't usually talk about that, but that's a great little thing about those shepherds. They were so lucky. They saw the angels, they got the sign, but then they acted. They did something about it.

Hank Smith: 02:59 Yeah. So I think there's a great principle there to write in our scriptures of act, go, move, tell, become a missionary. Let's do it.

03:08 We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcasts. Like we said earlier, we're with Dr. Brad Wilcox this week. We think you're going to love it. Come join us over there and then come back here next week for another followHIM Favorites.