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Learning a lesson

Columnist Vai Sikahema relates an experience that taught him that anger is better replaced with kindness. **M3**

Walking 22 miles

Young Women from the Cedar Hills 6th Ward retraced the steps of John R. Moyle's trips to the Salt Lake Temple. **M13**

DESERET NEWS

AARON SHILL, MORMON TIMES EDITOR, 801-333-7402

Answering the call



In the Village



ORSON SCOTT CARD

Gospel has no place for ‘mysteries’

LAST WEEK, TALKING about the Creation, I quoted from the First Presidency message that in 1931 counseled the Saints to “leave” the sciences “to scientific research” while we concentrate on the work of the church. From such advice — designed to avoid useless conflict — some people might conclude that the Lord wishes this to remain “one of the mysteries.” But “mysteries” — at least as other Christian churches use the term — have no place in the gospel of Jesus Christ. To us Latter-day Saints, the term “mystery” is similar to the mysteries in detective novels, in which each story is built around the efforts of the sleuth

Please see **CARD** on M14

New harmony



JERRY EARL JOHNSTON

The blessing of mature innocence

FOR ME, THE sweetest moments in LDS meetings happen when adults sing one of the Primary songs — when I can look around and see grandmothers and grandfathers singing “Teach Me To Walk in the Light” or “I Am A Child of God.” If I tip my head just right and listen, I can literally be spirited back to childhood, with all the grace that goes with it. The scriptures have two minds about childhood, I’ve found. There’s Paul’s famous thought,

Please see **JOHNSTON** on M5

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Senior couples surmount obstacles, gain blessings

By Trent Toone
Deseret News

The Lord’s prophet didn’t ask for a specific number, but the message was still clear. “To you mature brothers and sisters, we need many, many more senior couples,” LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson said among his opening remarks in the Saturday morning session of the church’s October semiannual general conference. While President Monson praised faithful couples who are now serving or have already served faithfully and accomplished much, the demand for senior couples continues to increase. “To those of you who are not yet to the season of life when you might serve a couples mission, I urge you to prepare now for the day when you and your spouse might do so. As your circumstances allow, as you are eligible for retirement, and as your health permits, make yourselves available to leave home and give full-time missionary service.

There are few times in your lives when you will enjoy the sweet spirit and satisfaction that come from giving full-time service together in the work of the Master,” President Monson said.

Out to pasture?

Howard and Karin Stansel are in the final days of their church education mission. For more than a year, the couple from Austin, Texas, has been teaching institute classes at universities and colleges in southern Louisiana.

The call came after Howard, a chemical engineer, had back surgery and other serious health problems. For a time, things didn’t look good. “They (the doctors) didn’t think he would live. I knew from the beginning he would live. The Lord had more for him to do,” Karin said. Following a priesthood blessing and many prayers, Howard amazed the doctors when he regained the full use of his body. His recovery confirmed Karin’s feelings about unfinished business. “To see him now, you wouldn’t know he’d had health problems. We felt like we needed to show our gratitude to the Lord and repay him a little bit,” she said. “I know it’s the Lord’s will that we serve in Louisiana.” Karin said many couples don’t realize the importance of serving. Senior couples are full of wisdom and experience that is greatly needed in all areas of the church. “So many times we feel like we have been put out to pasture, but there is still work you can do,” she said. “The Lord doesn’t forget you and wants you to work until your last breath. That is what I intend to do, let me tell you.”

A willing heart John and Jo Bingham, ages 70 and 65, recently returned from back-to-back missions in West Africa, serving a total of three years

Please see **SENIOR** on M10

More inside

Stories about three senior couples, a mission’s trials and rewards, financial plans and more. **M10, 12-13.**

Future of the LDS Church in Russia seen as very bright

Last of three articles

By Scott Taylor
Deseret News

MOSCOW — Pessimists may look at the LDS Church in Russia and see the glass half-empty, limited missionaries, past visa challenges, social ills including escalating alcoholism and divorce rates and a nation emerging from seven decades of atheism in the former Soviet Union. But the optimists — including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ leaders and members in Russia — see the church’s relatively

short history there, a second generation coming of age and a great opportunity for continued growth in years to come. A glass not just half-full but getting fuller. “You’ll find the Russian members of the church to be just like members of the church throughout the world. They’re trying to raise families, they value highly the standards we associate with the church, they have the same challenges as we do —

Please see **RUSSIA** on M8



SCOTT TAYLOR, DESERET NEWS

Vladimir and Nataly Kabanov, both returned missionaries, with some of their handcrafted greeting cards sold at Moscow flower and gift stores.



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CARD

Continued from M1

to uncover the facts that will explain why a particular victim was killed. In detective fiction, the assumption is that the mystery *can* be solved and, by the last page, *will* be solved.

This is right in line with the attitude of Latter-day Saints. It is an Article of Faith that we don't know everything yet: "We believe that (the Lord) will yet reveal many great and important things" (Article of Faith 9).

“The Lord is extending the Saints’ understanding,” we often sing, and “the knowledge and power of God are expanding.” For either to be possible, then previously there must have been things unknown or not yet understood.

Yet we *expect* to understand all things eventually, as the First Presidency message on the Creation made clear: “The scriptures tell why man was created, but they do not tell how, though the Lord has promised that he will tell that when he comes again.”

In other words, when we Latter-day Saints confront a “mystery,” we expect it, eventually, to be resolved! The only reason they are mysteries is that we don’t have enough data; once we get more information, by revelation or careful science,

the mystery will cease to be mysterious, as the boundaries of our knowledge are extended.

Contrast this with the general Christian view. To them, "Mystery" describes that which *cannot* be known to the finite mind of man. It is used when Christians run up against tenets that seem to be contradictory or nonsensical, and once someone has said, "That is one of the Mysteries," the inquiring Christian is told, essentially, to stifle his curiosity and move on.

For instance, take the dilemma at the center of the Arian vs. Athanasian controversy for which so many died over the centuries, despite Constantine's effort to resolve the issue back in the fourth century. The issue is at what point Christ became divine.

Was he created by God, and therefore, though divine, distinct from and inferior to God the Father? Or was he already God before he was born into mortality, so that he is exactly equal to and part of God the Father?

To Mormons, there are several reasons why these questions either make no sense or pose no problem. We know that Christ — like all of God's children — is co-eternal with God.

We also know that human beings are not fundamentally different from God, since we all carry within us the divine

potential, and God and Christ have behind them the experience of mortality.

Here is the key: We do not see any fundamental opposition between the natures of man and God.

We can thwart God's desire to perfect us, for our free choices can create a gulf between us, which can only be bridged by the Atonement of Christ when we repent. Yet Christ did not have to become utterly different from God in order to live among us in a mortal body.

Why did the Christian world, then, tear themselves apart over an issue that doesn't even exist for us? Because they were trying desperately to resolve a fundamental conflict between two religions, one of them true, the other one utterly false.

Original Christianity, partaking of the Old Testament as well as the New, had no difficulty seeing God as man-like (and vice versa). But this is precisely the point where Christianity (and Judaism before it) had run head-on into the dogmas of neo-Platonism.

In the Symposium of Plato, the “doctrine of men” is clearly presented. In this religion of the philosophers, that which is perfect *cannot* be physical; therefore God cannot have any kind of physical form. He is perfect truth and beauty, and cannot be divided in any way, since

only in perfect unity can he
be God.

How can you reconcile the resurrected body of Christ with this bodiless God? To the Greeks, the idea of divinity in a physical body was nonsense.

When educated Christians tried to make their religion acceptable to the “wise” of the world around them, they struggled to find a formula that would allow Christ to be resurrected and separate from God the Father, while still fitting the neo-Platonic idea of God.

The answer is simple. You can't.

We believe that eventually all things can be understood and will be known as our capacity and understanding increase. Our ignorance is an impermanent condition.

Any Mormon who says “we have all the answers” really doesn’t get it. The true statement is, “There are clear answers to all questions, and someday we will learn both the questions and the answers.”

No Mystery — just mysteries.

Orson Scott Card is a writer of nonfiction and fiction, from LDS works to popular fiction. "In the Village" appears weekly in *Mormon Times*. A longer version of this column can be found at MormonTimes.com. Leave feedback for Card at www.nauvoo.com/contact_desnews.html.

PETERSON

Continued from M2

who was also revered by many Israelites as the consort of El(ohim); and the (in some accounts, virginal) mother of his children. She was symbolized by a tree, and, in fact, a representation of such a tree stood within the temple at Jerusalem during the time of Lehi.

Asherah's worship had become associated with fertility rites and immorality, though. Prophets had long condemned it and, by the time of Israel's return from Babylonian exile, Jewish opposition to Asherah was universal. And so Asherah was expunged from the history of Judaism. In our text of the Bible, filtered and reshaped as it appears to have been by reforming Deuteronomist priests around 600 B.C., hints of the goddess remain, but little survives to give us a detailed understanding of her

character or nature. An early Hebrew like Nephi, however, would immediately have understood the representation, by a tree, of a virginal mother of a divine son.

The inclusion in 1 Nephi of an authentically pre-exilic religious symbol that could scarcely have been derived by a New York farm boy from his Bible strongly suggests that the Book of Mormon is, indeed, an ancient historical record in the Semitic tradition.

For a much more detailed examination of this topic, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8-23,” online at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu.

Daniel C. Peterson is a professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at BYU, where he also serves as editor in chief of the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative and as director of outreach for the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. He is the founder of MormonScholarsTestify.org.

It seems, in fact, that the virgin actually is the tree, in some sense. Even the language used to describe her echoes that used for the tree. Just as she was “exceedingly fair and white,” “most beautiful and fair above all other virgins,” so was the tree’s beauty “far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow.” Significantly, though, only when she appeared with a baby and was identified as “the mother of the Son of God” did Nephi grasp the tree’s meaning.

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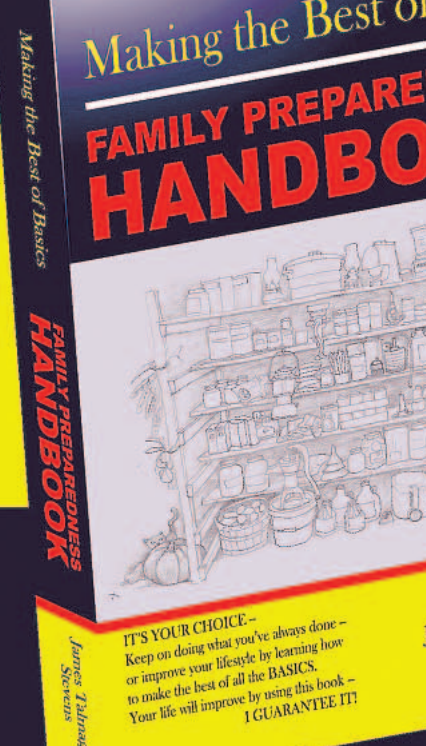


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