

# LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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## “I Marveled”

In the two final revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, two different prophets employ the same two-word phrase:

“I . . . marveled” (D&C 137:5-6).

“I marveled” (D&C 138:25).

The second of the prophets, President Joseph F. Smith, also repeats a similar two-word phrase:

“I wondered” (D&C 138:28).

“I wondered” (D&C 138:29).

For both prophets, marveling proved prelude to divine disclosures; wondering invited revelation:

“Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me . . .” (D&C 137:7).

“And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and my understanding quickened . . .” (D&C 138:29).

The revelations that followed include some of the choicest morsels of Restoration doctrine—precious precepts regarding the justice and mercy of God, divine declarations regarding the redemption of His children and the completeness of His plan.

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Marveling and wondering are, it seems to me, central to every academic discipline. They lie behind every artistic expression, every scientific discovery, and every mortal reflection of the infinite Light of Christ. At the back of all that is beautiful, good, and true, somebody marveled; somebody wondered.

We would do well, in all our university work, to cultivate the gift of marveling and to foster our sense of wonder.

Both are easy for me to neglect in my administrative role. The English word *bureaucracy* fuses the Greek word for *governance* with the French word for *desk*. A bureaucrat governs from a desk.

This is an uninspiring notion, and it strikes uncomfortably close to home. I spend the overwhelming majority of every workday sitting at tables for meetings or working at my (standing) desk. I need to get out more.

And yet even a desk is not deprived of poetry, nor a table devoid of wonder. Enclosed in a desk’s simple design are the fruits of the centuries—the hallmarks of civilizational development and engineering innovation. My desk has a history that stretches back to the writing slabs of classical antiquity, the massive lecterns of the Middle Ages, and the endless mechanical variations of the Enlightenment. My desk permits me to keep material company with Cicero and Aquinas, Jane Austen and Voltaire.

Apart from the marvels of my desk itself—including the magical lever that raises and lowers it at my whim—are the wonders that rest atop it. These include the obvious paraphernalia of modern technology—laptop, monitors, speaker, phone—but also unobtrusive marvels like a case full of pencils and pens. All my life, I—like History—have taken the pencil for granted. But it, too, has a fascinating history, which I have been reading about in an absorbing book called *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance* by the Duke engineer Henry Petroski. I’m not sure what led Professor Petroski to wonder about his pencil, but there are multitudes contained in this seven-inch sorcerer’s wand.

All of us, I suspect, were initially thrust into the academy by an impulse of wonder and awe. We marveled. We wondered. And we went to work. It would be good for us, if needed, to wonder and marvel anew.

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Christmas, for most, is the ultimate season of wonder. It reverses, for children of all ages, the disenchantment of the world. Our Christmas anthems rightly ring with words of wonder:

*With wond'ring awe the wisemen saw / The star in  
heaven springing . . .*

*How silently, how silently / The wondrous gift is  
giv'n!*

*Shepherds, why this jubilee?*

*And His name shall be called Wonderful . . .*

At the beginning of the biblical Christmas story, two very faithful people ask very similar questions with very different results.

Told by an angel that his aged and hitherto infertile wife, Elisabeth, will bear a son, Zacharias asks: "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years" (Luke 1:18).

Told by the same angel that she, though unmarried and a virgin, would also bear a son, Mary asks: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34).

In response to her question, Mary receives a thorough and revelatory response (see Luke 1:35-37). In response to his question, Zacharias is struck dumb—"because," the angel explains, "thou believest not my words" (Luke 1:20).

The difference seems to lie in the postures from which the questions are posed. Mary spoke from a believing heart: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Zacharias asked with a doubtful heart and

an implicit request for a sign: "*Whereby* shall I know this?" (Luke 1:18; emphasis added). Zacharias questioned; Mary marveled.

Perhaps there is a lesson in this for us as we strive to help our students find faithful answers to their inevitable questions. There is a difference between questions and questioning. There is a difference between doubting and marveling. May we mark and model that difference.

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Something there is in the story and songs and spirit of Christmas that pierces my soul with an infinite light—with wonder and yearning and awe. Sometimes I try, always unsuccessfully, to capture such stirrings in verse. I close with one such effort, and with my warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas to all of you, my colleagues and friends.

### **And Is It Thee, My Little Lord?**

And is it thee, my little Lord,  
Who spake the demiurgic Word,  
Who by thy sovereign, dread command  
Called forth the stars and seas and land?

And is my Father's Firstborn Son,  
Who on the plains of heaven won  
Our vast, premortal victory,  
Now veiled in flesh, enwrapped in thee?

And is it thee, my tiny King,  
Of whom the ancient prophets sing,  
With trumpet blast or gentle lyre,  
Their psalms of fierce, fatidic fire?

And are these precious, infant hands,  
Now warmed by humble swaddling bands,  
The same that by thy word and will  
Made Red Sea part and sun stand still?

And is this roving foot that strays  
The same fore-marked in former days  
To stride where mortals dare not tread,  
To crush the subtle serpent's head?

And must these palms and feet that flail  
Be punctured by a Roman nail?  
And must the Dame that smiles on thee,  
Then weep beside the hateful tree?

And yet the glory of this night—  
This newborn Star of matchless light—  
Portends beyond that rayless day  
And limns a great stone rolled away.

And I shall see thee yet full grown,  
Resplendent on thy Father's throne,  
While angels, then as now, attend,  
And I again before thee bend.