

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:34

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Cuppa' Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host, Karin Peter. Today's episode is our festive holiday episode here at Cuppa' Joe. And our guest is Wendy Eaton. Wendy is a regular guest here and we're de, delighted that she's with us today. She works at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, and, where she is the administrative assistant to the Historic Sites Foundation, and where she does a lot of research on the different topics that we've been talking about. And has been doing a regular series with us, uh, Women in Community of Christ History which is connected to our topic today for our festive holiday episode. So, hi, Wendy.

Wendy Eaton 01:22

Hello, Karin.

Karin Peter 01:24

I'm so glad to be with you a, again to do this. We have never done a festive holiday episode on Cuppa' Joe, so, this is a first and hopefully we'll have another one, uh, next year. So, Wendy, you have done a lot of research on, uh, women in Community of Christ church history. And, so, for folks that haven't listened to our series on Women in Community of Christ History, tell us why you do that.

Wendy Eaton 01:50

I do that because I love hearing the story from a perspective that's easier for me to connect to. When it's all male leader voices all the time, it sometimes gets, it drags you down a little bit. And hearing the stories from a woman's perspective puts it in, it's a different light that shines on some of the history because, of course, the roles of women and men were pretty different back in this time period. And it's one of the women that we've talked about in the past, Audencia Smith Anderson, who contributed a lot of the information that I have today as well as some of her sisters. So, we'll get to hear some of her siblings in this, in these Christmas stories.

Karin Peter 02:39

Wonderful. So, we are going to have some holiday cheer here, uh, that comes out of church history. So, let's get started.

Wendy Eaton 02:47

So, just to set the stage, because it's so important to put history in context when you're studying it. And I won't claim to be an expert on the history of Christmas in the United States, but I have done a little background reading. So, in the 1800s, when the church is organizing and getting itself up off the ground, Christmas is not the big event and holiday that we would recognize today. And, in fact, in my opinion, there are three collected works, three printed works that really kick off American Chri, United States Christmas. Two of them are American authors and one is a British author, Charles Dickens. So, people might recognize his name, and, of course, A Christmas Carol. That's first printed in 1843. So, I

don't know if that early church members would have been aware of this published work, but probably within the decades after they would have been. And then the two American authors, one is Washington Irving. One of his books is called The Sketchbook. It's a collection of short stories about his travels and five of those stories are about Christmas in especially the United Kingdom. So, like Dickens, it's going to have a, a British influence, but it's also some of the first stories and traditions that we can start to recognize. The other published work is a poem, 'Twas the Night Before Christmas, which is attributed to Clement Moore. It's first printed anonymously. And this is one of those fun trivia things that I love. When it's first printed, it's Joseph Smith Jr.'s 18th birthday. So, it's December 23, 1823, when it first comes to a newspaper in eastern New York. So, again, I don't know if the Smith family would have been aware of this story, but it's certainly being printed not too far away from where they live. So, we're gonna focus more on Joseph Smith III, though, because there's just bare minimum about the earliest church with Christmas. When Joseph III is a very small child, this is one of those very bare minimum stories that I've come across, there's recorded in his father's journals, a couple instances of Christmas, but it's, there's very little talked about. This first one, Joseph Smith III is three. He has one other sibling, his older sister, Julia, who's four. And in their father's journal, it simply says that in December 1835, they enjoy spending Christmas together at home. So, that is the earliest that I have come across. I would make the assumption that as he's a teenager, things really changed for Joseph Smith III and a lot of this goes back to the German influence that I know I've talked about before within church history. In Nauvoo, when the Latter Day Saints leave in the 1840s, one of the biggest groups of immigrants that moved into this town are Germanic, from Germanic countries. And they bring with them the traditions that we would recognize today. I think, right off the top of my head, the Christmas tree. That is one of those big things that we would connect to how we recognize the holiday as it's celebrated today. So, I don't know how much his family may have been celebrating this at home when he's a teenager, but he is probably starting to see it around town.

Wendy Eaton 06:42

When he decides the time is right to step up into the role that he had been designated to succeed his father in church leadership, the United States is on the brink of the Civil War. And after that war is when you see the next big jump in Christmas celebrations within the United States. And I think a lot of this has to do with the aftermath of the war and people trying to get back to a more positive light. And in many publications of the church, you start to see references to Christmas and Joseph Smith as President, he is the editor of many of these publications including one called Zion's Hope. So, I've talked about Autumn Leaves before, the newspaper or magazine for teenagers. Zion's Hope was for children. So, some of our lifelong Community of Christ members may be familiar with Stepping Stones, uh, Sunday School material that was printed for many, many years. Zion's Hope is somewhat of a precursor to the Stepping Stones publication. And in Zion's Hope, the earliest issues, we have references to Christmas and letters to the editors from children about how their congregation has celebrated Christmas and things like that. Whenever Joseph contributes to the paper, he signs his pieces from Uncle Joseph, which I think is just absolutely charming. In one of these early issues, December 1, 1875, he writes to the readers, who he calls the Little Hopes, and he writes to them, We wish all the Little Hopes a Merry Christmas whether in the chilly North or the genial South where the orange trees bloom and the grasses perennially wave and snowflakes never fall. But in the midst of your glee, never forget the dear, dear Savior who's coming into the mortal state you may be celebrating. But remember that present earthly pleasures are short lived, while the pleasures of that life

which you may attain unto are forevermore. So, a lot of children's publications in this time period are a bit moralizing to my taste. But the sentiment is in there. He's wishing the youngest church members, some probably not even eight years old, this Merry Christmas from their church President and I think it's just a really nice touch that he puts out to the children of the church.

Wendy Eaton 09:28

So thankfully, Joseph's children pick up this task of talking about Christmas on the family level because Joseph doesn't write much about it for the next couple decades. He's probably too busy with church leadership. But especially his daughter, Audencia Smith Anderson, and she writes about family Christmases, so I'm pretty excited to bring to you more of her stories. And so this is from the November 1924 Autumn Leaves article that she writes about her father, so, this is 10 years after his death, and this is kind of a memorial back to his life. She covers all the aspects of it. But she writes so beautifully about Christmas. And this isn't one specific family Christmas. This is kind of a collection of various Christmas celebrations. And I hope you like these words as much as, as I've enjoyed them. So, Audencia writes in this article, I wish I might take you all with me to dear old Liberty Hall, say on a winter's evening. A large round table under the hanging lamp is the center of study of pencil games. Mother, Bertha, sits near with writing, mending or sewing. Older children are getting lessons in reading while younger ones romp on the floor with marbles or toys. On the other side of the glowing coal hard base burner, her knitting needles never still, sits old Grandma Black, bent, tiny with an incessant cough, but a most indomitable will to be of use. Many were the warm woolen stockings her nimble fashion, her nimble fingers fashioned. I remember how it pleased father for her to knit his rights and lefts, shaping them as the shoe is shaped with the straight edge for the side of the large toe. To complete this picture, you must see some of the large papers spread out on the floor to catch the litter around father, sitting there patiently shaping and scraping and sandpapering new bows and arrows for the boys. In the autumn days when the winter supply of wood was hauled in, how carefully would be selected the particular pieces of hickory he designed for this use. Put away to be seasoned, in due time they were brought out and transformed by his clever hands into bows, arrows, kites, sleds and what not, acceptable things to gladden the hearts of eager bright-eyed children. Liberty Hall on Christmas Eve, how many pictures are conjured up? Whispered secrets, spicy odors, sparkle of tinsel, pungent smells of evergreen, bulky packages, mysterious trips here and there, smiles, songs, popping corn, stories. Oh, how the chain of memory is bright and long there. Babies rolling on the floor, curly-haired children wide eyed at the unusual bustle and excitement. Shy youngsters looking at life eagerly, but with reserve, blossoming maidens, young mothers, boxy grandpas dancing impromptu jigs on the hall floor, roly poly boys daring the slide down the banisters. Oh, what other scene is so rich with life's pleasures as a family homecoming at Christmas time? It's a beautiful descriptive words (. . .).

Karin Peter 13:16

It is. That is lovely. As you were reading, I'm thinking, Oh, this would be so lovely to publish in the holiday episode of the current Herald. I mean, it's just such a lovely description of their, of their beloved family gathering.

Wendy Eaton 13:32

And there's so much of it. And, so, this is probably 1880s time period when her mother is still alive. And so many of these things she describes are things that we would recognize from our own childhood

Christmases. It's so fascinating to me, as traditions grow and change, that so many of these things that she talked about from over 100 years ago, are still very much parts of our Christmas celebrations today. So, I have one other tidbit with Audencia that I want to bring up. And it's not specifically connected to her father, but he was probably aware of this. So, as we discussed in other episodes, Audencia composed music. She did have a talent for this. Her cousin, Elbert, who is David Hiram Smith's only child, wrote a hymn in the early 1900s, Silvery Star, Precious Star. And he asked Audencia to compose the music for it. And this hymn continues to be part of our hymnal today. It's one of those hymns that has carried on through the years. And it's just as lovely as that other hymn that we talked about, There's an Old, Old Path.

Karin Peter 14:52

I'm looking at it now. And so for our listeners, if you have a Community of Christ Sings hymnal, it's number 419.

Wendy Eaton 15:00

It's one of those hymns that I remember. I used to go to Wednesday evening prayer services with my dad when I was fairly young. I was the only child who showed up to those. But in the Christmas season, we always sang that one. It was almost every single week that we would gather that would be a part of our prayer service gathering. So, it has a special place in my heart, too. So, we'll move just beyond Audencia's childhood a little bit here, and I'm, I'm pretty sure I talked about in our episode on Ada Clark about the birth of their first child, but it's such a great story, and it's so Christmas that I want to share it again. So, 1898, this is Joseph and Ada's first Christmas together as a married couple, and the two decide to host some friends for Christmas dinner. The ladies that they had invited were all widows, had no one to share Christmas dinner with. So Joseph hitched up his sleigh equipped with sleigh bells and drove out into the snow of Lamoni's streets to pick up these ladies while Ada finished up the preparations at home. They enjoyed this quiet dinner before Joseph drove the women back home. And then the next day, Ada and Joseph welcomed the arrival of their firstborn child. This becomes a family tradition for Joseph and Ada. And based on later letters, it seems that the family, for as long as they were able to, would welcome those who would spend the holiday alone to join them for dinner. This practice went with them when they moved from Lamoni to Independence, Missouri. And I had the opportunity to read two letters from Joseph to two of his daughters, not Audencia, others, other girls. And this is his last Christmas, 1913. Both letters would have been dictated as Joseph was pretty much completely blind by this point. He's often in quite a bit of pain after just a short time of work, but his jolly nature shines through these letters. One is to his daughter, Carrie, who would be a daughter from his first wife, Emmaline. And then one is to his daughter, Lucy, his youngest child who was born to his second wife, Bertha.

Wendy Eaton 17:30

These are, there are some slang terms in these letters that would have been acceptable at the time, but we might shy away from today. So, I just want to warn you that you might hear me say some things that I wouldn't normally say, but these are the words that he composed in these letters. The first letter to Lucy is long, so I'm not going to read it in its entirety. He opens with comments as he's dictating that it's the very last day of the year. He's updating Lucy on the comings and goings of her siblings that had visited for Christmas. And then he continues with a Christmas dinner. We had a Christmas dinner,

which as far as I'm concerned, I can describe as very pleasant. I had Sister Whaler on my left and Sister Gerrard on my right. They were our only guests. Two widows, the first named having lost her husband just a few days ago. I occupied my usual space at the head of the table and my excellent other half, Ada, was at the other end and the boys were scattered between us. (It would have been three boys.) We had the universal Missouri chicken, very excellently cooked, and I have my favorite part from two of them. Very toothsome, as also were the dressing that accompanied, cranberry sauce. We enjoyed this dinner very much, though it was a little lonesome in mourning for some in attendance. Everything was lovely. It's not necessary that I tell you further what the menu was, though I think we had Irish and sweet potatoes and plum pudding made by the irrepressible Holly Bushnell which she sent to us with her Christmas regards. Kindly remember me to all of Richard's folks and Carrie's. Yours, Poppa. Then he adds a postscript, I'd almost forgotten to bear testimony to the efficiency of that wonderful scarf or blanket or shawl or rug, whatever the proper name belongs to it, which you so kindly knit with fingers that left with me of remembrance. It is occupant of my chair when I am out of it as a rule and also occupant of it when I'm in it as a rule. It is well adapted for its purpose and I assure you that I use it well. So, she had knit him a woolen shawl of some kind to keep (Probably called a throw blanket now.) So, as he's working in his study, and he, he continues with this postscript, the postscript is also really, really long, but he continues with it. When you knit it, when you knitted it, your kind heart must have infused a good many kilowatts of electrical love into that little rug, so that it is a potent agent for comfort to the man for whom it was designed. May you live long enough to wear the rug out if it please God. You may rest assured, I shall use it well. So, he's pretty thankful for this rug, or blanket or shawl that his daughter had made for him. The other letter is to Carrie. It's much shorter, so I'm going to read the whole thing. And so this is the same Christmas time 1913. He opens the letter with an original poem, which is full of his, again, characteristic charm and wit. My dear daughter, I dreamed a dream the other night when all around was still, I thought I saw the cookies rare come tumbling down the hill. In other words, I dreamed after thinking of what I could send you and what you would send me that you sent me a whole lot of cookies. So when they put the box in front of me with the saying that it was from Carrie, I instantly said, I know what it is. It's cookies. And sure enough. So, he was quite happy with his gift of cookies as well as his gift of a blanket. I could just picture him sitting in his easy chair wrapped up in this blanket eating cookies and maybe a cup of tea or coffee.

Wendy Eaton 22:00

So, there are just some wonderful stories tucked away into church history about how Christmas was being celebrated by branches, the congregations, a lot of them are centered on children's pageants and Christmas trees with the, with presents to the children either tied to the tree or wrapped up under the tree. There are debates in various church publications about Santa Claus and whether we should be telling the children about Santa Claus or not. There are midnight carolings at reunions in Australia because that is the time of year when the folks down there would hold their reunions. And it's just such a jolly subject, to, to use a very holiday specific term. It's just so much fun to find these tidbits of history scattered throughout our church publications.

Karin Peter 23:01

Absolutely. Thank you for sharing those, um, with us. There's something about hearing, uh, the words written, especially in this era with Joseph Smith III. He has a gentility about him that comes out in his letter writing that, um, that is just gracious and humorous and full of wit and, and charm as you said

that, that I think, um, I think I see the influence of his personality in current Community of Christ more than I see the influence of Joseph Smith, Jr. who did not write in that same kind of way. So, I appreciate sensing the, the gracious personality of Joseph Smith III, especially here in our holiday episode with his wonderful letters to his daughters. Before we close up, do you have any last, uh, comment or anecdote that you want to share with us?

Wendy Eaton 24:00

I have one last thing that I think is so much fun. Liberty Hall, so, Joseph III's home in Lamoni, Iowa, when they became a historic site, and I believe this started in the 1970s, they honored these Christmas traditions by holding a Christmas tea. And that was held for many, many years. Unfortunately, they've had to cancel it the past couple years. But I am pretty sure that once we're able to reopen the site, they will resume these tea parties. The caretakers there really put on a show of decorating Liberty Hall in the way that Bertha and Ada probably would have. And they invite guests to come and they sing songs together. And one of our wonderful longtime volunteers, Charlie Robison, he does a first person interpretation of Joseph Smith III so he dresses as Joseph Smith III and he tells stories and share songs with the people that are gathered for this tea party. And then he slips off upstairs at one point during the party, changes into his Santa Claus clothes and comes back down as Santa Claus, which is the other beloved person from history, I guess you could say, that Charlie shares so well in his skills as an interpreter. Liberty Hall is really our only site that we could really go full board with Christmas celebrations. And I'm so glad that they do that. Because it just adds a certain level of fun to the historic sites.

Karin Peter 25:43

Absolutely. Well, maybe we'll find a photo of, uh, Liberty Hall that we can put on the, uh, post when we post this podcast. That would be lovely.

Wendy Eaton 25:54

I think I've got one somewhere.

Karin Peter 25:56

Alrighty. So, before we close up, I just want to return to the Elbert A. Smith words from Silver Star, a Precious Star. If you are not familiar with this hymn, uh, this is the first verse which the title comes from, and the refrain, Silvery star, precious star shining over Bethlehem, guiding wise men from afar in the still night leading them. Starlight and song, all the night long, (you want to break into song now Wendy from first service days?) heralds of morn, Jesus is born. So, we'll let Elbert, uh, Smith's words and Audencia's tune is in my brain, I'm sure it's in yours as well, close us out for this Cuppa' Joe. So, thanks again for joining us Wendy for this special holiday episode. I look forward to our next visit, uh, on Cuppa' Joe in our Women in Community of Christ History series. If you have any questions for Wendy, uh, you can reach her at weaton, w e a t o n at cofchrist.org. This is Cuppa' Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 27:19

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