

LUCY MACK SMITH
Woman of Great Faith

As the sun slanted down in bright shafts of light from the cloud overhead and spotlighted green fields and the woods beyond, Lucy pondered the significance of the magnificent vision of the Father and Son that young Joseph had just related to her.

Her soul thrilled with joy and anticipation, for significant spiritual experiences were not new to Lucy, nor to her husband, Joseph, Sr. Lucy recalled her own father, Solomon Mack, testifying of answered prayers. Her beloved husband, Joseph, had been blessed with numerous visions and dreams of spiritual import. Lucy herself had knelt in a grove to plead with the Lord that her husband would find the truth, and she had received a beautiful vision that brought peace to her soul. And when she lay near death from consumption at the age of 27, her prayer of faith to be healed was answered and she was assured that she would live to care for her family.

All these experiences were as a prelude to the appearance of the Father and Jesus Christ to Lucy's son. At last her spiritual yearnings were being fulfilled. Every particle of her being cried: "Yes, it is true!"

Lucy Mack Smith was a woman for all seasons. Through sunlight and shadow her faith in the family was of eternal scope. It showed itself in the trusting love she had for her parents and brothers and sisters; in the respect and honor she showed her beloved husband; in the inspiring way in which she nurtured the tender faith of her own children, especially young Joseph; in her faith in herself as a capable homemaker and mother; in the faith to hold family nights that were unforgettable; in her compassionate service to the Saints and her fellowmen; in the powerful testimony she bore of the truth of the Book of Mormon; and finally in her faith in her eternal family, which brought the only comfort possible in that darkest hour as she leaned over the biers of her dearest ones hewn down as martyrs. Her faith verified that they had indeed "overcome the world by love" and that a loving and merciful Father had taken them to himself that they might have rest.

Lucy's faith, like a prism, showed multi-colored lights from every facet of her life. She, like Mary, also proclaimed: "My soul did magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47)

The Lord had prepared Lucy through her intelligent and devoted mother, Lydia Gates Mack, and her honest and intrepid father, Solomon Mack, to become the culmination of her ancestors' faith in the eternal family.

Lucy was born July 8, 1775, just after the battles of Lexington and Concord. As a child she loved to hear her father tell of his adventures fighting the French and Indian wars and the Revolutionary War. His stratagems to frighten the Indians in an ambush and his daring rescue of a wounded comrade during battle were later chronicled by Lucy.

From her father came her love of liberty and country. From her father also came the power of command and decision. Solomon was away on sailing and business expeditions from the time Lucy was about nine until she was nearly seventeen, and he returned impoverished. But even though her family lacked material possessions, and wilderness conditions precluded an education for her children, Lydia Gates Mack provided a rich spiritual and cultural atmosphere for them.

Lydia had been a school teacher from a wealthy and cultured family before her marriage to Solomon Mack. This was a great blessing, for with Solomon's absences from the family, the great responsibility for her children's temporal, intellectual, and spiritual welfare devolved upon her. She not only taught them school subjects, but also called them together both morning and evening to pray; they were taught to love each other and to honor and love God.

Lucy's appreciation and love of her mother is reflected in the poignant scene of parting in 1816, as the Smith family decided to move from Vermont to Palmyra, New York. Lucy write that she had "to take leave of that pious and affectionate parent to whom I was indebted for all the religious instructions as well as most of the educational privileges which I had ever received." Her mother asked her to continue faithful in the service of God so that she might have the privilege of being reunited with her after death, for she had a premonition that they would never meet again.

Lucy inherited her mother's self-reliance, refinement, and great gift of language. She wrote valuable diaries, letters, and biographies in a day of frontier life when there was little time for writing. Her *History of Joseph Smith* relates not only brief biographies of her parents, brothers, and sisters, as well as the Prophet and her own family, but it is also an exciting, witty, poignant, and spiritually thrilling literary gem, shining in the dusty archives of history.

As the youngest of eight children, Lucy was dearly loved but not spoiled, for she had gladly accepted the burden of nursing her two older sisters, Lovisa and Lovina, during their illnesses, from the time she was thirteen until their deaths when she was nineteen. Both of her sisters, who were in their late twenties, had tuberculosis, or consumption, as it was then called.

An experience that tremendously impressed Lucy but left her with many unanswered questions was Lovisa's miraculous healing and subsequent reversal. After two years of sickness she seemed to sink into a death coma for three days, but at two A.M. she had called for Lovina and said: "The Lord had healed me, both soul and body--raise me up and give me my clothes, I wish to get up!"

Both sisters died within months of each other in 1794, leaving Lucy lonely and melancholy, for the severe religious creeds of the day gave her no comfort nor peace of mind. Her spiritual needs went unfulfilled. Thus, when her brother Stephen, seeing her depression, invited her to come to Tunbridge, Vermont, and live with him for awhile, she accepted and was grateful for new surroundings and faces. Here she met a tall, gentle-voiced young man named Joseph Smith. After a year's acquaintance, they were married on January 24, 1796, at Tunbridge.

Lucy's bright blue eyes widened in surprise as she heard the conversation turn to a wedding gift for her. John Mudgett, her brother Stephen's business partner, said: "Lucy ought to have something worth naming, and I will give her just as much as you will."

"Done," said Stephen. "I will give her five hundred dollars in cash!"

"Good," said John, "and I will give her five hundred dollars more!"

The prospect of a thousand dollar dowry to furnish her own home made Lucy feel very important and loved. It was a huge sum of money in 1796, for land could be bought for a dollar an acre, so her wedding gift represented great buying power as well as the generous love of her family. Since her strong, handsome Joseph was already a very successful farmer, Lucy wisely kept her dowry for the future.

Lucy and Joseph thanked Stephen and John, and after a visit with her parents in nearby Gilsum, New Hampshire, they returned to Tunbridge.

They prospered on their farm for about six years, and Lucy gave birth to Alvin in 1798 and Hyrum in 1800. Then in 1802 they moved to Randolph and opened a mercantile establishment. It was here that Lucy, now 27 years old, caught a cold that developed into tuberculosis after weeks of fever and coughing. Joseph was grief-stricken, for the doctors all said she would die. Lucy prayed with all the fervor of her soul and made a covenant with God that if he would let her live she would serve him. She heard a voice say: "Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Let your heart be comforted; ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Her mother leaned over the bed just as Lucy's speech returned, and in amazement she said, "Lucy, you are better!" Lucy replied, "Yes, mother, the Lord will let me live, if I am faithful to the promise which I made to him, to be a comfort to my mother, my husband, and my children."

Following this significant experience, Lucy hungered for more spiritual knowledge, but upon visiting several different churches, to hear the "word of life," she became disheartened. Her comments are prophetic:

"... but after hearing him [the minister] through I returned home, convinced that he neither understood nor appreciated the subject upon which he spoke, and I said in my heart, *that there was not then upon the earth the religion which I sought*. I, therefore, determined to examine my Bible and, taking Jesus and His disciples for my guide, to endeavor to obtain from God that which man could neither give nor take away . . . the Bible, I intended should be my guide to life and salvation."

Two other examples of Lucy's faith in the power of healing are noteworthy. Typhus fever raged through Lebanon, New Hampshire, in 1813, and all eight of her children caught it. Sophronia, who was ten, was critically ill for nearly three months and the doctors despaired for her life. When she stopped breathing altogether, Lucy grabbed her and paced the floor, praying fervently. Those present told Lucy, "It is all of no use; you are certainly crazy, your child is dead." But Sophronia gasped for breath and lived as her mother's prayers were answered.

Joseph, Jr., was eight when the typhus infection settled in his leg, and he had to undergo three excruciating operations. The surgeons desired to amputate but Lucy objected. Then cords were brought to bind him but he refused; he also rejected liquor as an anesthetic. She later wrote that Joseph implored:

"Mother, I want you to leave the room, for I know you cannot bear to see me suffer so; father can stand it, but you have carried me so much, and watched over me so long, you are almost worn out.' Then looking up into my face, his eyes swimming in tears, he continued: 'Now mother, promise me that you will not stay, will you? The Lord will help me, and I shall get through with it.' . . .

"When the third piece [of bone] was taken away, I burst into the room again--and oh, . . . what a spectacle for a mother's eye! The wound torn open, the blood still gushing from it, and the bed literally covered with blood. Joseph was pale as a corpse, and large drops of sweat were rolling down his face, whilst upon every feature was depicted the utmost agony!"

Joseph recovered quickly after the operation, but as a result he was lame for several years and walked with a slight limp for the rest of his life.

Lucy Mack Smith had faith in herself as a woman and as a homemaker. Her unique combination of traits seemed paradoxical; she was impulsive and determined, yet she relied upon the promptings of the Spirit to temper and give authority to what she did and said. When an unscrupulous teamster tried to steal her horses, wagon, and all their possessions as they were moving to Palmyra, she showed her spunk by confronting him in the inn in front of all the travelers present (for Joseph, Sr., had gone on to Palmyra several weeks previously):

"Gentlemen and ladies, please give your attention for a moment. Now, as sure as there is a God in heaven, that tem, as well as the goods, belong to my husband, and this man intends to take them from me, . . . leaving me with eight children, without the means of proceeding on my journey."

Then to the thieving driver she said:

"Sir, I now forbid you touching the team, or driving it one step further. You can go about your business; I have no use for you! . . ."

Lucy didn't tolerate injustice for long. They arrived at Palmyra safely but with "barely two cents in cash."

Despite their destitute circumstances, Lucy's faith in her own capabilities and those of her family produced amazing results that first year in Palmyra. With the spectre of crop failures and business reverses plaguing them since their marriage, Joseph and Lucy had moved eight times before arriving in New York. Now in Palmyra they industriously cleared thirty of the hundred acres they were buying and built a log house. Lucy earned enough money painting oilcloth coverings to provide food and furniture.

After two years, Alvin drew plans for a new home that would be comfortable for his parents in "advanced life." Lucy was 45 at the time, with baby Lucy only two years old! She loved her new home and it was almost completed in November 1823, when Alvin got a stomach ailment and died after an incompetent physician treated him with calomel. On his deathbed Alvin counseled Hyrum to finish the house; Joseph to be faithful and obtain the plates; and all the children to be kind to their father and mother. The whole family and neighbors grieved at his death, for Alvin was only 25 and was loved by everyone. Lucy's enjoyment of her new home was short-lived, for unscrupulous men cheated the Smiths out of their developed farm and home.

Lucy was interested in religion from an early age and searched earnestly for the truth. After Joseph Smith, Sr., had become disenchanted with attending any church meetings because of the warring and discordant atmosphere, Lucy became depressed and prayed that he would find the true gospel and accept it. She received a beautiful dream that brought reassurance that Joseph would hear and

accept the pure and undefiled gospel of the Son of God at some future time. Joseph also had a number of interesting dreams and visions, which Lucy accepted and found very significant. She honored her husband as the head of her home long before he held the priesthood and became the first latter-day Patriarch to the Church.

The love of Lucy and Joseph, Sr., had been refined and ennobled in the fiery crucible of trial and persecution. As he closed his eyes in death on September 14, 1840, the future for Lucy seemed "lonesome and trackless" and she could not imagine a more dreadful calamity nor greater grief. And yet, during the next four years she would also suffer through the deaths of four sons, four grandchildren, and two daughters-in-law.

The brightest side in her prism of faith was as a mother. Lucy nurtured the budding faith of each of her children by teaching them to read and love the Bible, to pray and honor God. She raised nine of her eleven children to adulthood. When young Joseph, at 14, related to her the glorious appearance of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, Lucy believed with all her heart. Her soul rejoiced in the gradual day-to-day unfolding of the restoration of the true gospel she had so long awaited. She was justifiably proud of the mission and achievements of her son and family.

Lucy led the whole family in prayer each day for young Joseph to be instructed in his duty and protected from the snares of Satan. She was patient, encouraging, and perceptive while Joseph was suffering through those four long years of tested growth until Moroni finally entrusted the plates and that part of the work of the restoration to him.

Alvin suggested that everyone rise earlier so the farm work could be finished before sunset and that Mother Lucy have supper early so they could all gather around and listen to Joseph. The family rejoiced that God was about to light their lives with a more perfect knowledge of the plan of salvation.

Lucy longed to know more of the ancient peoples whose record Joseph was translating. And when finally she saw and read the Book of Mormon, she meditated upon all the frustrations and anxiety they had suffered for years, and she felt that the "heavens were moved in our behalf and that angels . . . were watching over us." She could truly say, "My soul did magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoiced in God my Savior."

She loved the Book of Mormon and bore a powerful testimony to its truths to all who would listen. Once a man called out from a crowd of several hundred: "Is the Book of Mormon true?" She replied for the whole world to hear:

"That book was brought forth by the power of God, and translated by the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, if I could make my voice sound as loud as the trumpet of Michael, the Archangel, I would declare the truth from land to land, and from sea to sea, and the echo should reach every isle, until every member of the family of Adam should be left without excuse. For I do testify that God has revealed himself to man again in these last days, and set his hand to gather his people upon a goodly land, and, if they obey his commandments, it shall be unto them for an inheritance"

A woman of great empathy and compassion, Lucy displayed prayerful concern over the Prophet and her family long before they were hunted and persecuted. She seemed intuitively to know when her children needed her prayers most.

Her prayers of faith were also extended to many others. After her baptism she became a great missionary, especially to her own family. She visited her relatives and wrote them letters explaining the gospel. Solomon, her brother, joined the Church as a result of her letters and interest.

Another of her prayers was answered when Joseph revealed the work of salvation for the dead and she was assured that Alvin could obtain the blessings of baptism and temple work vicariously. He had died just a few weeks following the appearance of the Angel Moroni in 1823.

Hyrum married Jerusha Barden in 1826, and Joseph married Emma Hale on January 18, 1827. Lucy loved her daughters-in-law and was an exemplary mother-in-law. After the martyrdom left both women bereft, Lucy spent her last years living with Emma, who faithfully cared for her until her death in 1856. Lucy loved her grandchildren, and when Joseph and Emma lost four children in childbirth, it grieved Lucy as if they had been her own.

All who loved God were made welcome in Lucy's home. Many nights she and her husband offered every bed in their home to visiting brethren, while they slept on the floor.

Oliver Cowdery called Lucy "Mother" and she treated him like a son, giving him her faith and encouragement in the work of translation. Her faith and love were also extended to Martin Harris, in spite of the trouble and heartache his breach of trust brought upon the Prophet and his family.

Although Lucy was a loving and amiable woman, she could chastise with fire when the occasion demanded. Her great devotion to the cause of the Lord and her fine sense of justice made her an authoritative figure.

Her leadership qualities were put to the test in the early spring of 1831. The Saints had been commanded to move to Kirtland from the Palmyra area. Most of Lucy's family had gone on ahead in

January, and Lucy was chosen to lead a company of eighty Saints from the Waterloo Branch with only her two young sons, William and Don Carlos, to assist her.

The trip down the Erie Canal by flatboat had taken five days and was a nightmare, for most of the Saints had not provided adequate food for themselves, and the exposure to the harsh weather was hard on the women and children. When they arrived in Buffalo, some members of the Colesville Branch were also there, seeking boat passage to Kirtland. The harbor was ice-locked and the Saints were stranded.

When the Colesville brethren informed Lucy's group that they must not tell anyone that they were Latter-day Saints, for then they wouldn't find a boat or lodging, Lucy spoke up boldly: "I shall tell people precisely who I am, and if you are ashamed of Christ, you must not expect to be prospered; and I shall wonder if we do not get to Kirtland before you!"

This was a prophetic statement, for through Lucy's faith and prayers, she found passage for her group. As her beloved Saints waited upon the deck of their ship arguing and complaining loudly, William rushed up to his mother and said: "Mother, do see the confusion yonder; won't you go and put a stop to it!"

Lucy was not tall, but she straightened up regally and with fire in her icy blue eyes walked right into the noise and confusion. Her voice rang out with authority:

"Brethren, and sisters, we call ourselves Saints, and profess to have come out from the world for the purpose of serving God at the expense of all earthly things; and will you, at the very onset, subject the cause of Christ to ridicule by your own unwise and improper conduct? You profess to put your trust in God, then how can you feel to murmur and complain as you do! You are even more unreasonable than the children of Israel were; for here are my sisters pining for their rocking chairs, and brethren for whom I expected firmness and energy, declare that they positively believe they shall starve to death before they get to the end of their journey. And why is it so? Have any of you lacked? Have not I set food before you every day, and made you, who had not provided for yourselves, as welcome as my own children? Where is your faith? Where is your confidence in God? . . . Now brethren and sisters, if you will all of you raise your desires to heaven, that the ice may be broken up, and we be set at liberty, as sure as the Lord lives, it will be done."

Only moments later, Lucy's faith was rewarded as the ice parted and they sailed into Lake Erie. The boat was so loaded that the bystanders were certain it would sink. In fact, they went to the newspaper office and published the news that the Mormon boat had sunk with all on board. When Lucy and the Saints arrived in Fairport, they were amused to read in the papers the news of their own deaths.

President Young then pledged himself and the congregation to do Mother Smith's bidding. But Lucy was too infirm to make the hard trek west. She died in May 1856, in the Mansion House in Nauvoo, at the age of 81.

Lucy Mack Smith's example has relevance and inspiration for the members of the Church today: faith to honor our ancestors through genealogy and temple work; faith to teach our children to love and honor God; faith to honor our husbands and the priesthood; faith to hold "never-to-be-forgotten" family home evenings; faith in ourselves as parents and homemakers; faith to endure trials and tribulations with steadfastness to the gospel of truth; faith to give all that we have to help build our eternal family; faith to bear our solemn witness of God's truths to our families and fellowmen everywhere; and faith to lead those souls of infinite worth, by example and precept, back to their eternal Father and family.

By Jaynann Payne
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