



Joseph Smith

Loving Friend of Children



BY PATRICIA R. JONES

(Based on historical sources from the life of Margarette McIntire Burgess)

Children are an heritage of the Lord (Psalm 127:3).

Poor little Margarette has a very bad sore throat,” Margarette’s mother told a visitor. Hearing her mother talking about her, Margarette hurried to the bedroom door to see the Prophet Joseph Smith standing there.

He called Margarette to him and examined her throat. Concluding that it was very bad, he took her on his lap and gave her a blessing.

Immediately, Margarette felt healed. She was very grateful that the Prophet would give her such a blessing—after all, she was only a child. Why should he worry about her? She wondered about it for several days.

“Why did the Prophet bother with me?” she finally asked Mother. “I’m just a little girl. I’m nobody special.”

Mother set aside the bread dough she was kneading and wiped her hands on her apron. “My sweet child, the Prophet Joseph is a loving friend of all children. He believes as the Lord said in the gospel of Matthew: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’*”

“What does that mean?” Margarette asked.

“It means that when we serve others, it is the same as serving the Lord,” Mother explained. “I won’t be surprised if you find that the Prophet helps you

again,” she added with a wink.

A few days later, Margarette and her older brother, Wallace, set out for school. It had been raining, and the ground was slippery and muddy, especially along the street by the Prophet Joseph’s Red Brick Store. As the two children hurried along their way, they got stuck in the mud. Although they tried to get out by wrapping their arms beneath their legs to lift their feet, it was no use.

“Oh, what shall we do?” cried Margarette. She remembered seeing wagons stuck in the mud, and sometimes they were left until the ground became drier. Margarette feared that she and her brother would have to stay where they were until the ground dried up and they could walk out on their own.

Wallace let out a loud wail. Seeing her brother’s fear, Margarette joined him with cries of her own. But looking up, she saw the loving friend of children, the Prophet Joseph, walking toward them. He lifted them out of the mud, wiped off their dirty shoes, and used his clean handkerchief to wipe the tears from their faces. He smiled and spoke with such cheery words that they were soon happily on their way to school.

“He is every child’s best friend,” Margarette told Wallace. He smiled in agreement.

But it saddened Margarette that the Prophet and his wife, Emma, had lost so many children of their own. Their young child had died shortly after Margarette’s



“Joseph had a ‘native cheery temperament’ (Joseph Smith—History 1:28). He delighted in the society of his friends. . . . He loved little children and often frolicked with them. . . . These warm, human qualities . . . endeared him to many who knew him.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Joseph, the Man and the Prophet,” Ensign, May 1996, 72.

mother had given birth to twin baby girls not long ago. The Prophet and his wife were so kind to children, Margarette was sure they missed their own sweet baby.

One day, Margarette heard the Prophet talking to her mother in the kitchen. He asked if she would let him borrow one of the twin girls to help comfort Emma.

“You may take one home with you, as long as you bring her back each night,” Margarette’s mother said. She handed him little Mary. Margarette watched as he gently wrapped a quilt around the baby and, cooing to her, opened the door and left.

True to his word, the Prophet returned little Mary every night, except for one. Margarette’s mother was nervous when he didn’t come at his usual time. She decided to go check on the babe, and hurried away to the Prophet’s home, the Mansion House. Soon afterward, Mother and the Prophet returned with little Mary. Margarette heard him explaining again that Mary had been cranky. He had been trying to calm her down before he returned her.

The next morning, the Prophet arrived as usual. Margarette’s mother handed him Sarah instead of Mary, thinking he would not know which baby he was holding. Sarah and Mary were identical—even some family members couldn’t tell them apart. After gently cuddling the child, the Prophet looked down at her face and then slowly shook his head. “This is not my little Mary,” he said.

Margarette’s mother nodded and took Sarah back to the cradle.

After the Prophet left with Mary, Margarette said, “He must really study Mary’s face in order to tell the difference between her and little Sarah.” As Margarette left the kitchen, she noticed her mother blotting her eyes with the hem of her apron.

Soon afterwards, the Prophet stopped taking Mary to his home, but he often came to visit her. Sadly, a short time later, Mary was called to return home to her

Heavenly Father. Just after Mary died, Margarette was

sitting at the kitchen table when the Prophet arrived. Little Mary’s body lay quiet and still in her cradle. The Prophet rushed to pick her cold form up in his arms. He cried as if he had lost one of his own little children. Again and again he whispered, “Mary, oh my dear little Mary!”

Margarette went to where her mother stood sobbing and softly said, “See how much he loved her, Mother—just as he loves all children. It is right that he is often called ‘the loving friend of children.’ ” ●

* Matthew 25:40.

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