

PURE RELIGION

A Stranger in Nauvoo

There were eight of them. And although they had been born free, everywhere they went, they were accused and harassed as if they were fugitive slaves.

Jane Manning James, who was a 20-years-old black woman, had joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a year earlier. It was her idea that they leave their home in Buffalo, New York, and begin the long journey west toward the one place they knew they would be safe—Nauvoo, the Beautiful. For in that city in Illinois lived the Prophet Joseph Smith. And Jane had seen him in a vision and wanted to go to him.

So, they came on foot, not daring to use well-traveled roads because of the fear they might be apprehended. First, they wore out their shoes, then their stockings. Ultimately, they walked on bare feet, step after step, moving ever closer to their goal.

“We lay in bushes, and in barns and outdoors,” Jane later recalled, “and traveled until there was a frost just like a snow, and we had to walk on that frost.”

After a hard journey of more than 800 miles, at long last they arrived in Nauvoo. Emma Smith, the Prophet Joseph’s wife, invited them into her home. Joseph came down to the sitting room and spoke with them. “Now,” he said to them, “I want you to tell me about some of your hard trials.”

They told him, and Joseph slapped his hands and said to a friend, “What do you think of that?”

“I think if I had had it to do I should not have come; would not have had faith enough,” replied the friend.

The Prophet told the weary travelers that they would stay with him until they had each found a place to stay. A week later, they all had found new lodgings. All except Jane.

One morning, the Prophet found her crying.

“Why, where are all the folks?” Joseph asked.

“They have all got themselves places,” Jane replied, “but I haven’t got any place.” And she burst out crying. To make matters worse, she had only recently learned that the trunk of possessions she had sent by water from Buffalo, New York, had been stolen in St. Louis, Missouri. Now she had nothing and nowhere to go.

“We won’t have tears here,” Joseph said.

“But, I have got no home.”

Then the Prophet found his wife, Emma, and said, “Here’s a girl who says she’s got no home. Don’t you think she’s got a home here?”

Emma replied, “If she wants to stay here.”

And from that moment on, Jane lived as a member of the family in the home of the Prophet. “He was the finest man I ever saw on earth,” Jane later said.

After Joseph and his brother Hyrum were martyred, Jane Manning James crossed the plains with other members of the Church. She arrived in Salt Lake and lived out her days there. Years later, she said that sometimes she would still “wake up in the middle of the night, and I just think about Brother Joseph and Sister Emma and how good they were to me.”

