

## **Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple**

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### **Come to the Temple**

There are many reasons why one should want to come to the temple. Even its external appearance seems to hint of its deeply spiritual purposes. Much more is this evident within its walls. Over the door to the temple appears the tribute “Holiness to the Lord.” When you enter any dedicated temple, you are in the house of the Lord.

In the Church we build buildings of many kinds. In them we worship, we teach, we find recreation, we organize. We can organize stakes and wards and missions and quorums and Relief Societies in these buildings or even in rented halls. But, when we organize families according to the order that the Lord has revealed, we organize them in the temples. Temple marriage, that sealing ordinance, is a crowning blessing that you may claim in the holy temple.

In the temples members of the Church who make themselves eligible can participate in the most exalted of the redeeming ordinances that have been revealed to mankind. There, in a sacred ceremony, an individual may be washed and anointed and instructed and endowed and sealed. And when we have received these blessings for ourselves, we may officiate for those who have died without having had the same opportunity. In the temples the sacred ordinances are performed for the living and for the dead alike. Here is the baptismal font, where vicarious baptisms for the dead are performed, with worthy members acting as proxy for those who have gone beyond the veil.

“Come to the temple.” If not now, come soon. Pray fervently, set your lives in order, save whatever you can in hopes that that day may come. Start now that sometimes very difficult and discouraging journey of repentance. The temple transforms the individual and makes abundantly worthwhile any efforts made to get there. For some who live at great distances from a temple, the temples will come to you before you might come to them. Keep your faith and your hope and determine that you will come—that you will be worthy and that you will come to the temple.

### **These Things Are Sacred**

A careful reading of the scriptures reveals that the Lord did not tell all things to all people. There were some qualifications set that were prerequisite to receiving sacred information. Temple ceremonies fall within this category.

We do not discuss the temple ordinances outside the temples. It was never intended that knowledge of these temple ceremonies would be limited to a select few who would be obliged to ensure that others never learn of them. It is quite the opposite, in fact. With great effort we urge every soul to qualify and prepare for the temple experience. Those who have been to the temple have been taught an ideal: Someday every living soul and every soul who has ever lived shall

have the opportunity to hear the gospel and to accept or reject what the temple offers. If this opportunity is rejected, the rejection must be on the part of the individual.

The ordinances and ceremonies of the temple are simple. They are beautiful. They are sacred. They are kept confidential lest they be given to those who are unprepared. Curiosity is not a preparation. Deep interest itself is not a preparation. Preparation for the ordinances includes preliminary steps: faith, repentance, baptism, confirmation, worthiness, a maturity and dignity worthy of one who comes invited as a guest into the house of the Lord.

We must be prepared before we go to the temple. We must be worthy before we go to the temple. There are restrictions and conditions set. They were established by the Lord and not by man. And, the Lord has every right and authority to direct that matters relating to the temple be kept sacred and confidential.

All who are worthy and qualify in every way may enter the temple, there to be introduced to the sacred rites and ordinances.

### **Worthy to Enter**

Once you have some feeling for the value of temple blessings and for the sacredness of the ordinances performed in the temple, you would be hesitant to question the high standards set by the Lord for entrance into the holy temple.

You must possess a current recommend to be admitted to the temple. This recommend must be signed by the bishop of your ward and the president of your stake. In the mission field, of course, the branch president and the mission president have responsibility for issuing temple recommends. Only those who are worthy should go to the temple. The bishop has the responsibility of making inquiries into our personal worthiness. This interview is of great importance to you as a member of the Church, for it is an occasion to explore with an ordained servant of the Lord the pattern of your life. If anything is amiss in your life, the bishop will be able to help you resolve it. Through this procedure, as you counsel with the common judge in Israel, you can declare or can be helped to establish your worthiness to enter the temple with the Lord's approval.

President N. Eldon Tanner, who served as First Counselor in the First Presidency, spoke to the general priesthood meeting about interviews. His counsel has meaning both for the Church leaders who conduct the interview and for the members who are to be interviewed. Consider carefully this counsel:

You bishops and stake presidents might approach an interview for a temple recommend something like this:

“You have come to me for a recommend to enter the temple. I have the responsibility of representing the Lord in interviewing you. At the conclusion of the interview there is provision for me to sign your recommend; but mine is not the only important signature on your recommend. Before the recommend is valid, you must sign it yourself.

“When you sign your recommend, you make a commitment to the Lord that you are worthy of the privileges granted to those who hold such a recommend. There are several standard questions that I will ask. . . . You are to respond honestly to each one.” . . .

Now, after you have put those required questions to the applicant, you may wish to add something like this: “One who goes into the house of the Lord must be free from any *unclean, unholy, impure, or unnatural practice*.” . . .

Our interviews must be conducted in love, in modesty. Ofttimes things can be corrected if you ask: “Would there be a reason you may feel uncomfortable or perhaps even dishonest to the Lord if you were to sign your own temple recommend?”

“Would you like a little time to get some very personal things in order before you sign it? Remember, the Lord knows all things and will not be mocked. We are trying to help you. Never lie to try to obtain a call, a recommend, or a blessing from the Lord.”

If you approach the matter as outlined above, the member has the responsibility to interview himself. The bishop or stake president has the right to the power of discernment. He will know whether or not there is something amiss that ought to be settled before a recommend is issued. (“The Blessing of Church Interviews,” *Ensign* [November 1978]: 42–43.)

The interview for a temple recommend is conducted privately between the bishop and the Church member concerned. Here the member is asked searching questions about his or her personal conduct, worthiness, and loyalty to the Church and its officers. The person must certify that he or she is morally clean and is keeping the Word of Wisdom, paying a full tithing, living in harmony with the teachings of the Church, and not maintaining any affiliation or sympathy with apostate groups. The bishop is instructed that confidentiality in handling these matters with each interviewee is of the utmost importance.

Acceptable answers to the bishop’s questions will ordinarily establish the worthiness of an individual to receive a temple recommend. If an applicant is not keeping the commandments or there is something unsettled about his or her life that needs putting in order, it will be necessary for that individual to demonstrate true repentance before a temple recommend is issued.

After the bishop has conducted such an interview, a member of the stake presidency likewise interviews each of us before we go to the temple. If we are going for the first time, ordinarily the stake president personally conducts the interview.

Surely, when you appear to be interviewed for a temple recommend you would accept the judgment of him who is designated as the judge in Israel, who is responsible to represent the Lord in determining whether or not it is proper for you to enter this sacred place.

### **First and Every Time**

If you are going to the temple for the first time it is quite normal for you to be a little unsettled. We are naturally anxious about the unknown. We often become nervous over new experiences.

Be at peace. You are going to the temple. You will have someone to assist you at every turn. You will be carefully guided—be at peace.

When we enter the temple we should be reverent. Any conversations that are necessary ought to be conducted in very subdued tones. During the periods of instruction, of course, we are completely reverent and quiet.

There are few places now that offer an opportunity to meditate in quiet reverence. Before entering some temples to begin the ordinance work, the companies frequently will assemble in the chapel of the building. Here the members wait until the full company is assembled. Generally in life we would become impatient with waiting. To be first in a room and then be compelled to wait for the last to enter before proceeding would in other circumstances cause irritation. In the temple it is just the opposite. That waiting is regarded as a choice opportunity. What a privilege it is to sit quietly without conversation and direct the mind to reverent and spiritual thoughts! It is a refreshment to the soul.

When you come to the temple, remember that you are a guest in the house of the Lord. It is a time of joy, but a time of quiet joy. Sometimes at a temple marriage it is necessary to remind the relatives and friends that their expressions of love and congratulations, and their greetings to family members whom they have not seen for a long period of time, should be given in a very quiet and subdued tone. Loud talking and loud laughter are not fitting in the house of the Lord.

Accept the direction of the workers in the temple. Someone will guide you as you proceed.

### **Taught from on High**

Before going to the temple for the first time, or even after many times, it may help you to realize that the teaching of the temples is done in symbolic fashion. The Lord, the Master Teacher, gave much of His instruction in this way.

The temple is a great school. It is a house of learning. In the temples the atmosphere is maintained so that it is ideal for instruction on matters that are deeply spiritual. The late Dr. John A. Widtsoe of the Quorum of the Twelve was a distinguished university president and a world-renowned scholar. He had great reverence for temple work and said on one occasion:

The temple ordinances encompass the whole plan of salvation, as taught from time to time by the leaders of the Church, and elucidate matters difficult of understanding. There is no warping or twisting in fitting the temple teachings into the great scheme of salvation. The philosophical completeness of the endowment is one of the great arguments for the veracity of the temple ordinances. Moreover, this completeness of survey and expounding of the Gospel plan, makes temple worship one of the most effective methods of refreshing the memory concerning the whole structure of the gospel.

Another fact has always appealed to me as a strong internal evidence for the truth of temple work. The endowment and the temple work as revealed by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith ... fall clearly into four distinct parts: The preparatory ordinances; the giving of instruction by

lectures and representations; covenants; and, finally, tests of knowledge. I doubt that the Prophet Joseph, unlearned and untrained in logic, could of himself have made the thing so logically complete. (John A. Widtsoe, "Temple Worship," *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 12 [April 1921]: 58.)

To quote again from Elder Widtsoe's article:

We live in a world of symbols. We know nothing, except by symbols. We make a few marks on a sheet of paper, and we say that they form a word, which stands for love, or hate, or charity, or God or eternity. The marks may not be very beautiful to the eye. No one finds fault with the symbols on the pages of a book because they are not as mighty in their own beauty as the things which they represent. We do not quarrel with the symbol G-o-d because it is not very beautiful, yet represents the majesty of God. We are glad to have symbols, if only the meaning of the symbols is brought home to us. I speak to you tonight; you have not quarreled very much with my manner of delivery, or my choice of words; in following the meaning of the thoughts I have tried to bring home to you, you have forgotten words and manner. ...

We live in a world of symbols. No man or woman can come out of the temple endowed as he should be, unless he has seen, beyond the symbol, the mighty realities for which the symbols stand. ("Temple Worship," page 62.)

If you will go to the temple and remember that the teaching is symbolic you will never go in the proper spirit without coming away with your vision extended, feeling a little more exalted, with your knowledge increased as to things that are spiritual. The teaching plan is superb. It is inspired. The Lord Himself, the Master Teacher, in His own teaching to His disciples taught constantly in parables, a verbal way to represent symbolically things that might otherwise be difficult to understand. He talked of the common experiences drawn from the lives of His disciples, and He told of hens and chickens, birds, flowers, foxes, trees, burglars, highwaymen, sunsets, the rich and the poor, the physician, patching clothes, pulling weeds, sweeping the house, feeding pigs, threshing grain, storing into barns, building houses, hiring help, and dozens of other things. He talked of the mustard seed, of the pearl. He wanted to teach His hearers, so He talked of simple things in a symbolic sense. None of these things is mysterious or obscure, and all of them are symbolic.

The temple itself becomes a symbol. If you have seen one of the temples at night, fully lighted, you know what an impressive sight that can be. The house of the Lord, bathed in light, standing out in the darkness, becomes symbolic of the power and the inspiration of the gospel of Jesus Christ standing as a beacon in a world that sinks ever further into spiritual darkness.

The temple ceremony will not be fully understood at first experience. It will be only partly understood. Return again and again and again. Return to learn. Things that have troubled you or things that have been puzzling or things that have been mysterious will become known to you. Many of them will be the quiet, personal things that you really cannot explain to anyone else. But to you they are things known.

What we gain from the temple will depend to a large degree on what we take to the temple in the way of humility and reverence and a desire to learn. If we are teachable we will be taught by the Spirit, in the temple.

When you have the opportunity to attend an endowment session in the temple or to witness a sealing, ponder the deeper meaning of what you see demonstrated before you. And in the days following your visit keep these things on your mind; quietly and prayerfully review them and you will find that your knowledge will increase.

One of the great values of the temple experience is that it presents the broad, sweeping panorama of God's purposes relating to this earth. Once we have been through the temple (and we can return and refresh our memories) the events of life fit into the scheme of things. We can see in perspective where we are, and we can quickly see when we are off course.

So look toward the temple. Point your children toward the temple. From the days of their infancy, direct their attention to it, and begin their preparation for the day when they may enter the holy temple.

In the meantime, be teachable yourself, be reverent. Drink deeply from the teachings—the symbolic, deeply spiritual teachings—available only in the temple.

It takes time to plan a temple marriage. It is worthy of careful planning. Not infrequently young couples who fall in love determine that they are going to be married and insist, against the pleadings of parents, that they want to be married right away, in just a week or two. The plea by parents for more time to prepare is sometimes interpreted by the young couple as being a disapproval of their marriage. They are afraid that if they wait something will interfere. Some young couples show themselves to be very immature and unkind when they press for immediate arrangements that can be met only with great difficulty and often result in an experience that is much less memorable than it might have been under other circumstances.

If things are too hurried or too pressured, something seems missing from the first visit to the temple, or from the wedding day in the temple. This first time through the temple or the sealing on a wedding day is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It is worth preparing for. It is so significant that we should not let the little details of preparation, the little housekeeping chores, detract from it. For that reason, everything should be done beforehand. It can be a great frustration for some essential thing to be left untended until that day.

If you go to a meeting early and sit in the chapel quietly and watch the people arrive, you see that they bring something with them. The spiritual temperature warms up and the room is changed as it is transformed from an empty room to a congregation, an audience of brothers and sisters who have come with a sense of expectancy.

Now, in our busy days we cannot always do this when going to a meeting. Whatever is brought to us by this approach to a meeting is doubly important when we go to the temple. This is especially true when we are going for the first time. We should get there early.

As you see, this early attendance is not just for protection, for making sure that the recommends and other things are in order and that we can adapt ourselves to the new experience. It is more than that. It is to get into the right place in time to get calmly into the right spirit—to get ourselves prepared for what is to take place.

We have been speaking in terms of the participants in the temple experience, but there are occasions when a temple wedding is being planned and some very close members of the family are not qualified for temple recommends. It may be that the groom or the bride is a convert and his or her parents are not yet in the Church; or, that they are too new in the Church to qualify for a temple recommend. Or it may be that the parents are members of the Church but one of them is not living the gospel standards sufficiently to receive a temple recommend. These limitations loom large at times of temple marriages. These are the times when families should be very close together, when they should be drawn together to share in these sacred moments of life. The withholding of a temple recommend to one who is not qualified, or the inability to invite a nonmember friend or relative to witness the sealing, can quickly present problems. This might cause unhappiness and contention at the very moment when there is a great need to have things serene, to have the greatest harmony.

What do we do in cases like that? What we would not do is apply pressure upon a bishop. The bishop, by the standard he is obliged to keep as a common judge in Israel, could not in good faith issue a recommend to one not qualified. To do so could be a great disservice to the individuals involved. And it would not be fair to the bishop himself.

When a temple marriage is scheduled and one of the parents or a very close relative is not able to enter the temple, careful planning may well make that an opportunity instead of a problem. Consider these suggestions. Invite the nonmember parent, or the member who is not eligible for a temple recommend, to come to the temple with the wedding party. There is a spirit and influence on the temple grounds that is not found in other places. Some of the temples have visitors' centers. The temple grounds in every case are beautifully kept. All in all it is a place of peace and serenity.

Arrange to have someone wait with that family member. Surely you would not leave the person alone. There are instances in which family members who were quite eligible to enter the temple to witness the marriage were content instead to spend the time on the temple grounds with those who could not. Here in the surroundings of the temple they have been able to explain the desire of the young couple to be sealed in the house of the Lord.

There can be great influence exerted at this time that may not have been possible otherwise. For instance, at some of the larger temples tours are conducted. Planning ahead may provide some special attention tailored to fit the need of a close family member who for one reason or another is not able to enter the temple. The disappointment and even resentment, sometimes bitterness, on the part of the nonmember parents or ineligible-member parents can be greatly softened in these ways.

In some temples a special room is provided where parents who are not eligible to enter the temple itself may meet with a qualified individual who can answer their questions.

The young couple must understand that their parents may have looked forward to the wedding day during the entire lives of the bride and groom. Their desire to attend the wedding, and their resentment when they cannot, is a sign of parental attachment. It is not to be resented by the young couple. It is to be understood and planned for carefully as a part of the wedding.

There are some cases of course in which the ineligible parent is offended and will not be placated. In those cases the young couple will just have to make the best of it. The question may come up: Well, then, should we be married civilly so that they can witness the marriage, then we would wait for the necessary year before entering the temple? But that would not be the ideal solution. Prayerful and careful planning in most cases can make the problem transform itself into an opportunity that ultimately will bring the family closer together than it previously had been.

Large groups of friends, ward members, and so on should not be invited to witness a marriage. Wedding groups should be small, comprising only the members of the two families and some few who are very close to the couple. On occasions a wedding has been announced in the ward with the invitation that all should try to attend to give support and encouragement to the couple being married. That is what a reception is for. A wedding reception is to provide a time for greeting the friends and the well-wishers. The temple marriage itself should be sacred and should be shared only by those who have a very special place in the lives of those being married.

We do not quote the words of the sealing ordinance outside of the temple, but we may describe the sealing room as being beautiful in its appointment, quiet and serene in spirit, and hallowed by the sacred work that is performed there.

Before the couple comes to the altar for the sealing ordinance it is the privilege of the officiator to extend, and of the young couple to receive, some counsel. These are among the thoughts that a young couple might hear on this occasion.

“Today is your wedding day. You are caught up in the emotion of your marriage. Temples were built as a sanctuary for such ordinances as this. We are not in the world. The things of the world do not apply here and should have no influence upon what we do here. We have come out of the world into the temple of the Lord. This becomes the most important day of your lives.

“You were born, invited here by parents who prepared a mortal tabernacle for your spirit to inhabit. Each of you has been baptized. Baptism, a sacred ordinance, is symbolic of a cleansing, symbolic of death and resurrection, symbolic of coming forward in a newness of life. It contemplates repentance and a remission of sins. The sacrament is a renewal of the covenant of baptism, and we can, if we live for it, retain a remission of our sins.

“You, the groom, were ordained to the priesthood. You had first conferred upon you the Aaronic Priesthood and probably have progressed through all the offices thereof—deacon, teacher, and priest. Then the day came when you were found worthy to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. That priesthood, the higher priesthood, is defined as the priesthood after the holiest order of God, or the Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God. (See Alma 13:18 and Helaman 8:18.) You were given an office in the priesthood. You are now an elder.



“Each of you has received your endowment. In that endowment you received an investment of eternal potential. But all of these things, in one sense, were preliminary and preparatory to your coming to the altar to be sealed as husband and wife for time and for all eternity. You now become a family, free to act in the creation of life, to have the opportunity through devotion and sacrifice to bring children into the world and to raise them and foster them safely through their mortal existence; to see them come one day, as you have come, to participate in these sacred temple ordinances.

“You come willingly and have been judged to be worthy. This union can be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.”

Wherefore, I now send upon you another Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise; which other Comforter is the same that I promised unto my disciples, as is recorded in the testimony of John.

This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom. (D&C 88:3–4.)

“To accept one another in the marriage covenant is a great responsibility, one that carries with it blessings without measure.”

A bride and groom will quite likely be so emotionally involved with the wedding that they may not listen carefully—they may not really hear the words of the sealing ordinance. While we may not repeat those words outside of the temple, we may return on occasions to witness a wedding. It is a generous Lord who has authorized us to do this. On these occasions, when we are not so personally involved, we may listen carefully to the words of the ordinance. Similarly, of course, by returning frequently to officiate for those who have passed on, we may refresh the mind and the spirit on the endowment experience.

If you were previously married in a civil ceremony, you may wish to now be sealed for eternity, and, if you have children, have them sealed to you in an eternal family relationship. If you qualify for this it may be your great privilege to receive this blessing.

### **Dressed in White**

When we do ordinance work in the temple we wear white clothing. This clothing is symbolic of purity and worthiness and cleanliness.

Upon entering the temple you exchange your street clothing for the white clothing of the temple. This change of clothing takes place in the locker room, where each individual is provided with a locker and a dressing space and is completely private. In the temple the ideal of modesty is carefully maintained. As you put your clothing in the locker you leave your cares and concerns and distractions there with them. You step out of this private little dressing area dressed in white and you feel a oneness and a sense of equality, for all around you are similarly dressed.

If you are going to the temple for the first time, counsel with your bishop. When he issues you a recommend he will explain something of the nature of the clothing that will be required in the temple. Obtaining this clothing need not be a worry to you. You can either buy it through Church Distribution Services or, in some cases, rent it at the temple. In the latter case a very modest fee is required which covers only the cost of laundering the clothing. Rental clothing is not available at the smaller temples.

As with the ceremonies and ordinances of the temple, outside of the temple we say very little about the clothing worn inside. We can say that it, like the ceremonies, has great symbolic meaning.

It is a mark of reverence and respect when the Church member visits the temple dressed and groomed in such a way that he or she would not be uncomfortable in the presence of the Lord. Suppose for a moment that you are invited to be the guest in the home of a prominent and highly respected leader. You are given to understand that you will mingle with distinguished guests who have received similar invitations. The invitation is an indication that the host holds you in very high regard. You realize that many others would highly prize such an invitation, but for one reason or another they have not likewise been invited and therefore are not able to attend. Under those circumstances it is doubtful that you would arrive in old work clothes or dressed as you do for recreation. It is doubtful that a man would go unshaven, or a woman with her hair unkempt.

People of dignity and refinement, upon receiving an invitation to an important gathering, frequently make inquiry as to what dress would be in order. Would you not prepare carefully for such a special occasion? You might even purchase new clothing in the hope that your appearance would not detract from the dignified nature of the setting.

Care would also be shown for the pressing and cleaning of your clothes. You would feel uncomfortable if you were not properly attired.

The opportunity to visit the temple might be compared to such an invitation.

There is one occasion only when members of the Church are invited into the temple proper in "street" clothing, and that is when they witness a temple marriage. In that case only the shoes are removed, and these may be replaced with white footwear. Years ago the Brethren authorized this to be so for the convenience of those family members and friends who would not be going through an endowment session immediately prior to the marriage.

Brides and grooms enter the temple to be married for time and all eternity. There brides wear white dresses that are long-sleeved, modest in design and fabric, and free of elaborate ornamentation. Grooms also dress in white. Brethren who come to witness temple marriages do not wear tuxedos.

We have been puzzled and a little saddened at times, when attending the temple, to find that some have come to witness marriages or to attend a session in the temple dressed as though they were going to a picnic or an athletic event.

The privilege to enter the temple deserves more from us than that. It is pleasing to the Lord when we bathe our bodies and put on clean clothing, however inexpensive the clothing may be. We should dress in such a way that we might comfortably attend a sacrament meeting or a gathering that is proper and dignified.

On occasions there has been one to witness a wedding who obviously has paid little attention to the counsel that the Brethren have given about dress and grooming, about taking care not to emulate the world in the extremes of style in clothing, in hair length and arrangement, etc. We wonder why it is that a person who is mature enough to be admitted to the temple would not at once be sensible enough to know that the Lord could not be pleased with those who show obvious preference to follow after the ways of the world.

How could a recommended member attend the temple in clothing that is immodest or worldly? How could one wear a style of hair that is not in keeping with refinement and dignity?

When you have the opportunity to go to the temple to participate in the temple ceremonies or to witness a sealing, remember where you are. You are a guest in the house of the Lord. You should groom yourself and clothe yourself in such a way that you would feel comfortable should your Host appear.

Those who hold and share in the blessings of the priesthood should have their bodies covered as was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith when the endowment ceremony was given to him.

Members who have received their temple ordinances thereafter wear the special garment or underclothing. Garments are provided by an agency of the Church—and are generally available to members throughout the world through a distribution program operated by the Church.

The garment represents sacred covenants. It fosters modesty and becomes a shield and protection to the wearer.

The wearing of such a garment does not prevent members from dressing in the fashionable clothing generally worn in the nations of the world. Only clothing that is immodest or extreme in style would be incompatible with wearing the garment. Any member of the Church, whether he or she has been to the temple or not, would in proper spirit want to avoid extreme or revealing fashions.

There may be occasions when endowed members of the Church face questions on the garment.

On one occasion one of the brethren was invited to speak to the faculty and staff of the Navy Chaplains Training School in Newport, Rhode Island. The audience included a number of high-ranking naval chaplains from the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths.

In the question-and-answer period one of the chaplains asked, “Can you tell us something about the special underwear that some Mormon servicemen wear?” The implication was, “Why do you do that? Isn’t it strange? Doesn’t that present a problem?”

To the chaplain who made the inquiry he responded with a question: “Which church do you represent?” In response he named one of the Protestant churches.

He said, “In civilian life and also when conducting the meetings in the military service you wear clerical clothing, do you not?” The chaplain said that he did.

He continued: “I would suppose that that has some importance to you, that in a sense it sets you apart from the rest of your congregation. It is your uniform, as it were, of the ministry. Also, I suppose it may have a much more important place. It reminds you of who you are and what your obligations and covenants are. It is a continual reminder that you are a member of the clergy, that you regard yourself as a servant of the Lord, and that you are responsible to live in such a way as to be worthy of your ordination.”

He then told them: “You should be able to understand at least one of our reasons why Latter-day Saints have a deep spiritual commitment concerning the garment. A major difference between your churches and ours is that we do not have a professional clergy, as you do. The congregations are all presided over by local leaders. They are men called from all walks of life. Yet they are ordained to the priesthood. They hold offices in the priesthood. They are set apart to presiding positions as presidents, counselors, and leaders in various categories. The women, too, share in that responsibility and in those obligations. The man who heads our congregation on Sunday as the bishop may go to work on Monday as a postal clerk, as an office worker, a farmer, a doctor; or he may be an air force pilot or a naval officer. By our standard he is as much an ordained minister as you are by your standard. He is recognized as such by most governments. We draw something of the same benefits from this special clothing as you would draw from your clerical vestments. The difference is that we wear ours under our clothing instead of outside, for we are employed in various occupations in addition to our service in the Church. These sacred things we do not wish to parade before the world.”

He then explained that there are some deeper spiritual meanings as well, connecting the practice of wearing this garment with covenants that are made in the temple. We wouldn't find it necessary to discuss these—not that they are secret, he repeated, but because they are sacred.

The garment, covering the body, is a visual and tactile reminder of these covenants. For many Church members the garment has formed a barrier of protection when the wearer has been faced with temptation. Among other things it symbolizes our deep respect for the laws of God—among them the moral standard.

### **The Power to Seal**

If we would understand both the history and the doctrine of temple work we must understand what the sealing power is. We must envision, at least to a degree, why the keys of authority to employ the sealing power are crucial.

Nearly nine hundred years before Christ, the prophet Elijah appeared in the court of the king of Israel. He carried with him a sacred authority: the power to seal.

Elijah worked out his ministry, ordained and anointed Elisha to succeed him, and then—and this is important—he did not die. Like Moses before him, he was translated.

After that, his name appears only once in the Old Testament, in the next to the last verse of the last chapter of the Old Testament. It is here that Malachi prophesies that Elijah would return and that he would “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,” lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse. (See Malachi 4:5–6.)

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:13–19.)

When Peter, James, and John went with the Lord to the Mount of Transfiguration, there appeared with the transfigured Lord two personages. They recognized them to be Moses and Elijah, who had come to convey to that presidency the sealing power. (See Matthew 17:1–8; note that *Elias* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name *Elijah* and is often used in the New Testament to designate Elijah, the prophet of the Old Testament.)

Peter was to hold the keys. Peter was to hold the sealing power, that authority which carries the power to bind or seal on earth or to loose on earth and it would be so in the heavens.

In A.D. 34, after His crucifixion, the Lord ministered to the Nephites. He dictated to them—and this is remarkable in scriptural history—the last two chapters of Malachi (which contained the prophecy that Elijah would return), caused them to write them, and then expounded them.

When the Angel Moroni appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith to tell him of the plates, he quoted Malachi’s prophecy that Elijah would return. This quotation is now section two of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Thirteen years after Moroni appeared, a temple had been built adequate for the purpose, and the Lord again appeared and Elijah came with Him and bestowed the keys of the sealing power.

Those keys belong to the President of the Church—to the prophet, seer, and revelator. That sacred sealing power is with the Church now. Nothing is regarded with more sacred contemplation by those who know the significance of this authority. Nothing is more closely held. There are relatively few men who hold this sealing power upon the earth at any given time—in each temple are brethren who have been given the sealing power. No one can get it except from the prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or from those he has delegated to give it to others.

### **“We Saw the Lord. ...”**

The day of the return of Elijah was a Sunday afternoon, April 3, 1836. A sacrament meeting had been held in the Kirtland Temple. The Prophet described that afternoon in these simple terms:

In the afternoon, I assisted the other Presidents in distributing the Lord’s Supper to the Church, receiving it from the Twelve, whose privilege it was to officiate at the sacred desk this day. After having performed this service to my brethren, I retired to the pulpit, the veils being dropped, and bowed myself, with Oliver Cowdery, in solemn and silent prayer. After rising from prayer, the following vision was opened to both of us. (D&C 110, introduction.)

The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened.

We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber.

His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying:

I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.

Behold, your sins are forgiven you; you are clean before me; therefore, lift up your heads and rejoice.

Let the hearts of your brethren rejoice, and let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name.

For behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house.

Yea, I will appear unto my servants, and speak unto them with mine own voice, if my people will keep my commandments, and do not pollute this holy house.

Yea the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands shall greatly rejoice in consequence of the blessings which shall be poured out, and the endowment with which my servants have been endowed in this house.

And the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people. Even so. Amen.

After this vision closed, the heavens were again opened unto us; and Moses appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north.

After this, Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed.

After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors. (D&C 110:1–16.)

It had happened! This signal event went unheeded by the world, but it would influence the destiny of every soul who has ever lived or will live. Things began quietly to happen. The Church became a temple-building church.

In the world there emerged here and there, in a way thought to be spontaneous, people and organizations and societies interested in tracing genealogies. This has all taken place since the appearance of Elijah in the Kirtland Temple.

From that very day, April 3, 1836, the hearts of the children began to turn to their fathers. Thereafter ordinances were not tentative, but permanent. The sealing power was with us. No authorization transcends it in value. That power gives substance and eternal permanence to all ordinances performed with proper authority for both the living and the dead.

### **All Done in Order**

Following the dramatic events at the Kirtland Temple, difficulties and persecutions required that the Saints move. Wherever they located, the Lord revealed plans to build temples. This was true in both Independence and Far West, Missouri. In this period persecution fell upon the Saints with unprecedented rage and eventually they fled to Nauvoo, Illinois. Here the revelation came again and the commandment to build a house of the Lord.

The Lord explained that the purpose of the building of the house was to reveal the ordinances. “And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people; for I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times.” (D&C 124:40–41.)

He had mentioned that the temple would be a place for them to conduct “your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipals, ... by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name.” (D&C 124:39.)

Among the ordinances we perform in the Church are these: baptism, sacrament, naming and blessing of infants, administering to the sick, setting apart to callings in the Church, ordaining to offices. In addition there are higher ordinances, performed in the temples. These include washings, anointings, the endowment, and the sealing ordinance, spoken of generally as temple marriage.

How important are the ordinances to us as members of the Church?

Can you be happy, can you be redeemed, can you be exalted without them? Answer: They are more than advisable or desirable, or even than necessary. More even than essential or vital. They are *crucial* to each of us.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said he was frequently asked the question:

“Can we not be saved without going through with all those ordinances, etc.?” I would answer, No, not the fullness of salvation. Jesus said, “There are many mansions in my Father’s house, and I will go and prepare a place for you.” *House* here named should have been translated kingdom; and any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too. (*History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949], 6:184.)

President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

I do not care what office you hold in this Church, you may be an apostle, you may be a patriarch, a high priest, or anything else, and you cannot receive the fulness of the priesthood unless you go into the temple of the Lord and receive these ordinances of which the prophet speaks. No man can get the fulness of the priesthood outside of the temple of the Lord. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Elijah the Prophet and His Mission* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957], page 46.)

We spoke earlier of the higher ordinances performed in the temple. These include the endowment. To endow is to enrich, to give to another something long lasting and of much worth. The temple endowment ordinances enrich in three ways: (a) The one receiving the ordinance is



given power from God. “Recipients are endowed with power from on high.” (b) A recipient is also endowed with information and knowledge. “They receive an education relative to the Lord’s purposes and plans.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], page 227.) (c) When sealed at the altar a person is the recipient of glorious blessings, powers, and honors as part of his or her endowment.

There are two published definitions or descriptions of the endowment, the first by President Brigham Young:

Let me give you a definition in brief. Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being able to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971], page 416.)

Elder James E. Talmage described the endowment thus:

*The Temple Endowment*, as administered in modern temples, comprises instruction relating to the significance and sequence of past dispensations, and the importance of the present as the greatest and grandest era in human history. This course of instruction includes a recital of the most prominent events of the creative period, the condition of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, their disobedience and consequent expulsion from that blissful abode, their condition in the lone and dreary world when doomed to live by labor and sweat, the plan of redemption by which the great transgression may be atoned, the period of the great apostasy, the restoration of the Gospel with all its ancient powers and privileges, the absolute and indispensable condition of personal purity and devotion to the right in present life, and a strict compliance with Gospel requirements. (James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962], pages 99–100; hereafter cited as *The House of the Lord*.)

This statement from Elder Talmage makes it clear that when you receive your endowments you will receive instruction relative to the purpose and plans of the Lord in creating and peopling the earth. You will be taught what must be done for you to gain exaltation.

The blessing of the endowment is required for full exaltation. Every Latter-day Saint should seek to be worthy of this blessing and to obtain it.

The ordinances of washing and anointing are referred to often in the temple as initiatory ordinances. It will be sufficient for our purposes to say only the following: Associated with the endowment are washings and anointings—mostly symbolic in nature, but promising definite, immediate blessings as well as future blessings.

In connection with these ordinances, in the temple you will be officially clothed in the garment and promised marvelous blessings in connection with it. It is important that you listen carefully as these ordinances are administered and that you try to remember the blessings promised and the conditions upon which they will be realized.

The sealing ordinance is that ordinance which binds families eternally. Temple marriage is a sealing ordinance. When a couple is sealed in the temple following a civil marriage the children born to them previous to that time, and therefore not born in the covenant, are sealed to them in a brief and sacred ordinance.

Please be certain that your life is in complete order. This only comes from receiving your temple blessings, your ordinances, for “in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.” (D&C 84:20.)

## **Sacred Covenants**

The Lord in the revelation now known as section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants announces:

For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.

For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. (D&C 132:4–5.)

President Joseph Fielding Smith defines the new and everlasting covenant in these words:

What is the new and everlasting covenant? I regret to say that there are some members of the Church who are misled and misinformed in regard to what the new and everlasting covenant really is. *The new and everlasting covenant is the sum total of all gospel covenants and obligations.* (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 1:156; hereafter cited as *Doctrines of Salvation*.)

This covenant includes all ordinances of the gospel—the highest of which are performed in the temple. To quote President Smith again:

Now there is a clear-cut definition in detail of the new and everlasting covenant. *It is everything—the fulness of the gospel.* So marriage properly performed, baptism, ordination to the priesthood, everything else—*every contract, every obligation, every performance that pertains to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise* according to his law here given, *is a part of the new and everlasting covenant.* (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:158.)

In the verse quoted previously (Doctrine and Covenants 132:4) the Lord spoke with unmistakable plainness: “... for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.”

Those who go to the temple have the privilege of taking upon themselves specific covenants and obligations relative to their exaltation and that of others. Elder James E. Talmage wrote:

The ordinances of the endowment embody certain obligations on the part of the individual, such as covenant and promise to observe the law of strict virtue and chastity, to be charitable, benevolent, tolerant and pure; to devote both talent and material means to the spread of truth and the uplifting of the race; to maintain devotion to the cause of truth; and to seek in every way to contribute to the great preparation that the earth may be made ready to receive her King,—the Lord Jesus Christ. With the taking of each covenant and the assuming of each obligation a promised blessing is pronounced, contingent upon the faithful observance of the conditions. (*The House of the Lord*, page 100.)

We covenant with the Lord to devote our time, talents, and means to His kingdom.

We are a covenant people. We covenant to give of our resources in time and money and talent—all we are and all we possess—to the interest of the kingdom of God upon the earth. In simple terms, we covenant to do good. We are a covenant people, and the temple is the center of our covenants. It is the source of the covenant.

Come to the temple. You ought to come to the temple. Here, acting as proxy for someone who has gone beyond the veil, you will have reviewed before you the covenants that you have made. You will have reinforced in your mind the great spiritual blessings that are associated with the house of the Lord.

Be faithful to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel. Qualify for those sacred ordinances step by step as you move through life. Honor the covenants connected with them. Do this and you will be happy.

Your lives will then be in order—all things lined up in proper sequence, in proper ranks, in proper rows. Your family will be linked in an order that can never be broken.

In the covenants and ordinances center the blessings that you may claim in the holy temple. Surely the Lord is pleased when we are worthy of the title: A keeper of the covenants.

### **Not without Opposition**

Temples are the very center of the spiritual strength of the Church. We should expect that the adversary will try to interfere with us as a Church and with us individually as we seek to participate in this sacred and inspired work. The interference can vary from the terrible persecutions of the earlier days to apathy toward the work. The latter is perhaps the most dangerous and debilitating form of resistance to temple work.

Temple work brings so much resistance because it is the source of so much spiritual power to the Latter-day Saints, and to the entire Church.

At the Logan Temple cornerstone dedication, President George Q. Cannon made this statement:

Every foundation stone that is laid for a Temple, and every Temple completed according to the order the Lord has revealed for his holy Priesthood, lessens the power of Satan on the earth, and

increases the power of God and Godliness, moves the heavens in mighty power in our behalf, invokes and calls down upon us the blessings of the Eternal Gods, and those who reside in their presence. (In “The Logan Temple,” *Millennial Star*, 12 Nov. 1877, page 743.)

When members of the Church are troubled or when crucial decisions weigh heavily upon their minds, it is a common thing for them to go to the temple. It is a good place to take our cares. In the temple we can receive spiritual perspective. There, during the time of the temple service, we are “out of the world.”

A large part of the value of these occasions is the fact that we are doing something for someone that they cannot do for themselves. As we perform the endowment for someone who is dead, somehow we feel a little less hesitant to pray fervently to the Lord to assist us. When young married couples have decisions to make, if they are near a temple there is great value in attending a session. There is something cleansing and clarifying about the spiritual atmosphere of the temple.

Sometimes our minds are so beset with problems, and there are so many things clamoring for attention at once, that we just cannot think clearly and see clearly. At the temple the dust of distraction seems to settle out, the fog and the haze seem to lift, and we can “see” things that we were not able to see before and find a way through our troubles that we had not previously known.

The Lord will bless us as we attend to the sacred ordinance work of the temples. Blessings there will not be limited to our temple service. We will be blessed in all of our affairs. We will be eligible to have the Lord take an interest in our affairs both spiritual and temporal.

### **Toward the Veil**

We must gain some feeling for why we build temples, and why the ordinances are required of us. Thereafter we are continually instructed and enlightened on matters of spiritual importance. It comes line upon line, precept upon precept, until we gain a fullness of light and knowledge. This becomes a great protection to us—to each of us personally. It is a protection also for the Church.

No work is more of a protection to this Church than temple work and the genealogical research which supports it. No work is more spiritually refining. No work we do gives us more power. No work requires a higher standard of righteousness.

Our labors in the temple cover us with a shield and a protection, both individually and as a people.

It is in the ordinances of the temple that we are placed under covenant to Him—it is there we become the covenant people.

If we will accept the revelation concerning temple ordinance work, if we will enter into our covenants without reservation or apology, the Lord will protect us. We will receive inspiration sufficient for the challenges of life.

The work relating to the temples is true. It was revealed from beyond the veil and revelation continues.

Revelation may come to each member of the Church individually concerning temple work.

So come to the temple—come and claim your blessings. It is a sacred work.