

LDS Temple Worship

From the
Encyclopedia of Mormonism



Rexburg Temple

Latter-Day Saint Temple Worship and Activity

Immo Luschin

Performing ordinances and seeking the will of the Lord in the temple are a sacred and meaningful form of worship in Latter-day Saint religious life. In the temple, holy truths are taught and solemn covenants are made in the name of Jesus Christ, both by the individual members on their own behalf and as proxies on behalf of others who have died (the latter have the choice in the spirit world to accept or reject such vicarious service). Obedience to temple covenants and reverence in doing temple ordinances give peace in this world and the promise of eternal life in the world to come.

There are special areas inside each temple for the various ordinances. A large baptismal font supported on the backs of twelve sculpted oxen (cf. 1 Kgs. 7:25) is used for baptism for the dead. In other areas are cubicles in which individuals are ritually washed and anointed before endowments can be performed. In the older temples, larger rooms are decorated to represent the Creation, the Garden

of Eden, this world, and the Terrestrial Kingdom, and in such Endowment rooms, participants watch and hear figurative presentations in which scenes are acted out, depicting by whom and why the earth was created and how one may come to dwell again in God's presence. The participants make covenants and receive promises and blessings. This is known as receiving one's Endowment. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that this Endowment was necessary to empower one "to overcome all things" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [1976], p. 91). A veil symbolically divides the terrestrial room from the celestial room, which suggests through furnishings and decor the peace, beauty, and glory of the highest degree of heaven. Also in the temple are smaller sealing rooms, where temple marriages and sealings are solemnized for the living and vicariously for the dead. A temple may also have an upper room where solemn assemblies can be convened. (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow [1992])

Meanings and Functions of Temples

Hugh W. Nibley

The temple is the primal central holy place dedicated to the worship of God and the perfecting of his covenant people. In the temple his faithful may enter into covenants with the Lord and call upon his holy name after the manner

that he has ordained and in the pure and pristine manner restored and set apart from the world. The temple is built so as to represent the organizing principles of the universe. It is the school where mortals learn about these things. The temple is a model, a presentation in figurative terms, of the

pattern and journey of life on earth. It is a stable model, which makes its comparison with other forms and traditions, including the more ancient ones, valid and instructive.

THE COSMIC PLAN. From earliest times, temples have been built as scale models of the universe. The first known mention of the Latin word *templum* is by Varro (116-27 B.C.), for whom it designated a building specially designed for interpreting signs in the heavens—a sort of observatory where one gets one's bearings on the universe. . . . According to Varro, there are three temples: one in heaven, one on earth, and one beneath the earth. In the universal temple concept, these three are identical, one being built exactly over the other, with the earth temple in the middle of everything, representing "the Pole of the heavens, around which all heavenly motions revolve, the knot that ties earth and heaven together, the seat of universal dominion." Here the four cardinal directions meet, and here the three worlds make contact. ...

THE PLACE OF CONTACT. As the ritual center of the universe, the temple was anciently viewed as the one point

on earth at which men and women could establish contact with higher spheres. The earliest temples were not, as once supposed, permanent dwelling places of divinity but were places at which humans at specific times attempted to make contact with the powers above. ...

At the same time, the temple is the place of meeting with the lower world and the one point at which passage between the two is possible. ...

THE RITUAL DRAMA. The pristine and original temple rites are dramatic repetitions of the events that marked the beginning of the world. This creation drama was not a simple one, for an indispensable part of the story is the ritual death and resurrection of the king, who represents the founder and first parent of the race ... The temple drama is essentially a problem play, featuring a central combat . . . The hero is temporarily beaten by the powers of darkness and overcome by death, but calling from the depths upon God, "he rises again and puts the false king, the false Messiah, to death." (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow [1992])

Temple Ordinances

Allen Claire Rozsa

The ordinances performed only in the temple are baptisms for the dead, washings and anointings, endowments, and marriages or sealings for eternity. The privilege of entering the House of the Lord, the temple, and participating in its ordinances is a spiritual apex of LDS religious life. Through temple ordinances, one receives a ceremonial overview of and commitment to the Christlike life. Temple ordinances are instruments of spiritual rebirth. In the words of President David O. McKay, they are the "step-by-step ascent into the eternal presence." Through them, and only through them, the powers of godliness are granted to men in the flesh (D&C 84:20-22). Temple ordinances confirm mature discipleship; they are the essence of fervent worship and an enabling and ennobling expression of one's love for God.

All participants must be baptized and confirmed members of the Church, and must receive a temple recommend. However, children under eight years of age may participate in their own family sealings before being baptized. Members who are twelve years of age or older may serve as proxies in baptisms for the dead. Worthy adults may participate in the temple Endowment ceremonies. All men must have been ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood. Temple ordinances are performed in sequence.

Washings and Anointings

Washings and anointings are preparatory or initiatory ordinances in the temple. They signify the cleansing and sanctifying power of Jesus Christ applied to the attributes

of the person and to the hallowing of all life. They have biblical precedents. Women are set apart to administer the ordinances to women, and men are set apart to administer the ordinances to men. Latter-day Saints look forward to receiving these inspired and inspiring promises with the same fervent anticipation they bring to baptism. They come in the spirit of a scriptural command: "Cleanse your hands and your feet before me" (D&C 88:74; cf. 1 John 2:27). A commemorative garment is given with these ordinances and is worn thereafter by the participant.

Temple Endowment

The temple Endowment is spoken of in scripture as an "Endowment," or outpouring, of "power from on high" (D&C 84:20-21; 105:11; 109:22, 26; cf. Luke 24:49). Participants in white temple clothing assemble in ordinance rooms to receive this instruction and participate in the unfolding drama of the Plan of Salvation. They are taught of premortal life; the spiritual and temporal creation; the advent of Adam and Eve, and their transgression and expulsion into the harsh contrasts of the mortal probation; the laws and ordinances required for reconciliation through the Atonement of Christ; and a return to the presence of God. The Endowment is a series of symbols of these vast spiritual realities, to be received only by the committed and spiritual-minded (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [1976], p. 237). "All the ordinances," wrote Heber C. Kimball, "are signs of things in the heavens. Everything we see here is typical of what will be hereafter" ("Address to My Children,"

unpublished). The Endowment increases one's spiritual power, based in part "on enlarged knowledge and intelligence—a power from on high, of a quality with God's own power" (Widtsoe, 1921, p. 55; Widtsoe, 1939, p. 335).

During the Endowment, solemn covenants are made pertaining to truthfulness, purity, righteous service, and devotion. In this way, the temple is the locus of consecration to the teaching of the law and the prophets and to the ways of God and his Son. One does not assume such covenants lightly. Modern commandments relating to temple building have been addressed to those "who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command" (D&C 97:8-9). As with Abraham of old, latter-day revelation says that to obtain "the keys of the kingdom of an endless life" one must be willing to sacrifice all earthly things (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [1976], p. 322).

Before taking these solemn vows, new converts prepare for at least a year after baptism. Missionaries typically receive the temple blessings prior to their service. Couples receive them on, shortly before, or sometimes well in advance of the day of their temple marriage. This order of instruction and covenant making culminates in the celestial room, which represents the highest degree of heaven, a return to the presence of God, a place of exquisite beauty and serenity, where one may feel and meditate "in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2). Communal sensitivity in the presence of like-dedicated and like-experienced loved ones enhances deep fellowship. The temple is "a house of glory" and "a place of thanksgiving for all saints" (D&C 88:119; 97:13).

Sealing of Families

Only after patrons make these unconditional covenants with and through Jesus Christ may they receive "the most

glorious ordinances of the temple," the covenants of marriage and family sealing (Widtsoe, 1937, p. 128). Marriage and sealing covenants are performed in temple sealing rooms convenient to the celestial room. Officiators and close family and friends often attend the couple. Kneeling opposite each other at the altar, the bride and groom are placed under mutual covenants to each other, and are married through the sealing power of Jesus Christ; their children will thus be born in the covenant, and the family kingdom will become a nucleus of heaven. If the couple has been previously married under secular authority and now has children, the husband and wife are sealed in the temple under the new and everlasting covenant and their children are then brought to the altar and are sealed to them. All subsequent children born to this family are born in the covenant. By apostolic authority, the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are explicitly invoked upon all marriages and sealings. It is envisioned that eventually further sealings will link all the couple's progenitors and all of their descendants in an unbroken chain (see Sealing: Temple Sealings). Thus, divine parenthood is imaged on earth. The saintly life is not in renunciation but in glorification of the family. The quest for happiness and completeness within the marital state is transformed from the banal and temporary toward the divine and eternal.

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- (From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4. vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow [New York: Macmillan, 1992])

Endowment

Alma P. Burton

An Endowment generally is a gift, but in a specialized sense it is a course of instruction, ordinances, and covenants given only in dedicated temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The words "to endow" (from the Greek *enduein*), as used in the New Testament, mean to dress, clothe, put on garments, put on attributes, or receive virtue. Christ instructed his apostles to tarry at Jerusalem "until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), a promise fulfilled, at least in part, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). In modern times, a similar revelation was given: "I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house, in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power on high; for this is the promise of the Father unto you; therefore I command you to tarry, even as mine apostles at Jerusalem" (D&C

95:8-9).

Though there had been preliminary and preparatory spiritual outpourings upon Latter-day Saints in Ohio and Missouri, the Endowment in its full sense was not received until the Nauvoo Temple era. As he introduced temple ordinances in 1842 at Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that these were "of things spiritual, and to be received only by the spiritual minded" (Smith, 1976, p. 237). The Endowment was necessary, he said, to organize the Church fully, that the Saints might be organized according to the laws of God, and, as the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple petitioned, that they would "be prepared to obtain every needful thing" (D&C 109:15). The Endowment was designed to give "a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God" (Smith, 1976, p. 324), "to prepare the disciples for their missions in the world" (p.

274), to prevent being "overcome by evils" (p. 259), to enable them to "secure the fulness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the Firstborn" (p. 237).

The Endowment of "power from on high" in modern temples has **four main aspects**. **First** is the preparatory ordinance, a ceremonial washing and anointing, after which the temple patron dons the sacred clothing of the temple.

Second is a course of instruction by lectures and representations. These include a recital of the most prominent events of the Creation, a figurative depiction of the advent of Adam and Eve and of every man and every woman, the entry of Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden, the consequent expulsion from the garden, their condition in the world, and their receiving of the Plan of Salvation leading to the return to the presence of God (Talmage, pp. 83-84). The Endowment instructions utilize every human faculty so that the meaning of the gospel may be clarified through art, drama, and symbols. All participants wear white temple robes symbolizing purity and the equality of all persons before God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. The temple becomes a house of revelation whereby one is instructed more perfectly "in theory, in principle, and in doctrine" (D&C 97:14). "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 entire structure of the gospel" (Widtsoe, 1986, p. 5).

Third is making covenants. The temple Endowment is seen as the unfolding or culmination of the covenants made at baptism. Temple covenants give "tests by which one's willingness and fitness for righteousness may be known" (Widtsoe, p. 335). They include the "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 [human] 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 Jesus Christ" (Talmage, p. 84). One also promises to keep these covenants sacred and to "trifle not with sacred things" (D&C 6:12).

Fourth is a sense of divine presence. In the dedicatory prayer of the temple at Kirtland, Ohio, the Prophet Joseph Smith pleaded "that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord's house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that thou hast sanctified it, and that it is thy house, a place of thy holiness" (D&C 109:13). Of temples built by sacrifice to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, dedicated by his authority, and revered in his Spirit, the promise is given, "My name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this holy house" (D&C 110:8). In the temples there is an "aura of deity" manifest to the worthy (Kimball, pp. 534-35). Through the temple Endowment, one may seek "a fulness of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 109:15). Temple ordinances are seen as a means for receiving inspiration and instruction through the Holy Spirit, and for preparing to return to the presence of God.

In Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph taught for the first time that it is the privilege of Latter-day Saints to act as agents in behalf of their kindred dead. After receiving their own temple Endowment, Latter-day Saints return to the temple frequently to participate in the Endowment ceremony as proxies for, and in behalf of, deceased persons. Consistent with the law of agency, it is believed that those so served have complete freedom in the spirit world to accept or reject the spiritual blessing thus proffered them (*History of the Church*, 5:350).

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