The Spiritual Birth

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Born of the Spirit

There is a natural birth, and there is a spiritual birth. The natural birth is to die as pertaining to premortal life, to leave the heavenly realms where all spirits dwell in the Divine Presence, and to begin a new life, a mortal life, a life here on earth. The natural birth creates a natural man, and the natural man is an enemy to God. In his fallen state he is carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature. Appetites and passions govern his life and he is alive -- acutely so -- to all that is evil and wicked in the world.

The spiritual birth comes after the natural birth. It is to die as pertaining to worldliness and carnality and to become a new creature by the power of the Spirit. It is to begin a new life, a life in which we bridle our passions and control our appetites, a life of righteousness, a spiritual life. Whereas we were in a deep abyss of darkness, now we are alive in Christ and bask in the shining rays of his everlasting light. Such is the new birth the second birth, the birth into the household of Christ.

A wise and good man, one Nicodemus by name, sought counsel in secret from Jesus following the first Passover of our Lord’s ministry. Jesus said to him: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Born again! Except a man becomes alive to the things of the Spirit, how can he recognize the truth? Unless the light of heaven rests upon him, how can he ever see within the veil and gain even a glimpse of the celestial world?

Nicodemus was troubled. Being himself as yet dead to the things of the Spirit, he asked: “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” The questions were unworthy of one who was a master in Israel. He should have known, and all men should now know, the system that has prevailed among men from Adam to the present. Jesus said: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The reference is to immersion in water, which even then was being performed by the Baptist at Bethabara, and also to immersion in the Spirit, a baptism soon to be performed by the One whose shoe’s latchet the Baptist felt unworthy to loose.

There followed, however, a doctrinal explanation. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” Jesus said. These are the two births, the natural and the spiritual. “Marvel not that I said unto thee Ye must be born again,” Jesus continued. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:3-8.)

Birth from the waters of the Jordan was a visible sign for all to see; witnesses can testify of the occasion when men are born of water. But birth from a state of worldliness is as the spring breeze that blew through Jerusalem that night. None can tell its source or see its destiny. Only the newborn babe in Christ knows if he has been born of the Spirit; he alone can testify of the workings of the Holy Spirit in his heart. But both baptisms, both births, that of water and that of the Spirit, are essential to salvation.

Alma the son of Alma, baptized in his youth but as yet spiritually dead, went about with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church of God. Rebuked, smitten, condemned by an angelic ministrant, he lay in a trance for three days and three nights. When he gained consciousness again, he said: “I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.” The spiritual regeneration that follows baptism at long last was his. Whereas for long years he had stumbled along in spiritual darkness, now the light of heaven rested upon him, and the course he should now pursue was plainly lighted.

While he lay in a trance, the Lord said to him: “Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters. And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God.” (Mosiah 27:24-26.) Such is the doctrine relative to being born again. And for aught we know, the same Lord who spoke these words to Alma may have recited them over again to Nicodemus more than a century later in John’s home in Jerusalem. Truly, all men must be born again!
Sons and Daughters of Jesus Christ

Those who are born again not only live a new life, but they also have a new father. Their new life is one of righteousness, and their new father is God. They become the sons of God; or, more particularly, they become the sons and daughters of Jesus Christ. They bear, ever thereafter, the name of their new parent; that is, they take upon themselves the name of Christ and become Christians, not only in word but in very deed. They become by adoption the seed or offspring of Christ, the children in his family, the members of his household which is the perfect household of perfect faith. And further: Having become the sons of God (Christ), they also become joint-heirs with him of the fulness of the glory of the Father, thus becoming by adoption the sons of God the Father.

John tells us that the Lord Jesus, who came in time’s meridian unto his own, was rejected by them. “But as many as received him as their Messiah and Savior, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. (John 1:12.) Speaking of that same meridian day, the same Lord said in our day: “To as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons.” Be it noted that true believers are not automatically born to a newness of life by the mere fact of belief alone. That belief and that acceptance of the Savior gives them power to become the sons of God. And in our day the divine word continues: “Even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons.” And how are those who receive the Lord identified? By way of answer, he tells us: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me.” (D&C 39:4-5.) Those who have accepted the fulness of the everlasting gospel as it has come again in our day through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith have power to become the sons of God; those who reject this heaven-sent message of salvation reject that Lord whose message it is and remain outside the Lord’s family.

In addressing a congregation of contrite and penitent Nephites, King Benjamin, using that simplicity of speech and clarity of expression in which Book of Mormon prophets so excel, said to his fellow saints: “Because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters.” They thus gain a new father, and he gains new children. “For behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you.” Their new birth is not a natural but a spiritual birth. “For ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.”

Thus it is that the saints are born of Christ because they have been born of the Spirit; they are alive in Christ because they enjoy the companionship of the Spirit, and they are members of his family because they are clean as he is clean. “And under this head ye are made free” -- being in Christ, they are free from the bondage of sin -- “and there is no other head [other than Christ our Head] whereby ye can be made free.” Only those who accept Christ and receive the Spirit can free themselves from the sins of the world. “There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.” (Mosiah 5:7-8.)

Those who receive the Lord Jesus and believe in their hearts that he is the Son of God by whom salvation comes; those who then covenant in the waters of baptism to serve him and keep his commandments; those who believe the gospel and are members of the earthly kingdom -- these are the ones who have power to become his sons and daughters. Thus they are the ones who take upon themselves his name.

In our day the divine word from the Lord Jesus commands: “Take upon you the name of Christ, and speak the truth in soberness. Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved; wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day; wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father.” (D&C 18:21-25.)

It was ever thus. Isaiah prophesied of the “seed” of Christ. (Isaiah 53:10.) Abinadi says “his seed” consists of the prophets and saints who hearken to his word, who believe he will “redeem his people,” who gain “a remission of their sins,” and who are thus “heirs of the kingdom of God.” (Mosiah 15:11.)

Our theologically gifted friend Paul teaches the doctrine of spiritual rebirth and of becoming sons and daughters of both the Father and the Son, explaining that true believers, converted souls, righteous saints, those who are born again, “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” To walk after the manner of the flesh is to live after the manner of the world; to walk after the manner of the Spirit is to overcome the world and live by the standards of the gospel. “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh” -- they live carnal and evil lives -- but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Theirs is a godly course of conduct. “For to be
carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." The Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Those who live after the manner of the flesh are damned; those who bridle their passions and overcome the world are saved.

As to the saints of God, Paul says: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." In the full and eternal sense even in the true church, only those saints who enjoy the companionship of the Spirit belong to the Lord; they are the only ones who are the Lord’s people in the sense of gaining salvation. “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you -- if you have the companionship of the Holy Ghost -- he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Ye shall be born again; ye shall become new creatures of the Holy Ghost; your bodies shall be quickened, shall be made new shall become fit tabernacles in which the Spirit may dwell. “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” The saints must not live in sin. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Those who live after the manner of the world are spiritually dead; those who control the appetites of the flesh and pursue a godly course are alive spiritually. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” Ye are made free from the bondage of sin through Christ. “But ye have received the Spirit of adoption [of sonship], whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Abba is an Aramaic word that means father; the meaning here is that we sense and feel our newly found relationship with God the Father and hence feel free to address him in a friendly and familiar way.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” That is, because we have been adopted into the family of Christ, because we have taken his name upon us, and because he has accepted us in full, we are also accepted by his Father. We become joint-heirs with the Son. We are adopted into a state of sonship by the Father. Christ is his natural heir, and as adopted sons, we become joint-heirs, receiving, inheriting, and possessing as does the Natural Heir. Because we conform “to the image of his Son,” we are also “glorified” with him. (Romans 8:4-30.) And thus in like manner, the inhabitants of all worlds “are begotten sons and daughters unto God” the Father through the atonement of Christ the Son. (D&C 76:24.)

**Born of Water, Blood, and Spirit**

Three elements are involved in every valid baptism. Unless they are present, unless they are inseparably connected, unless they act in perfect harmony, there is no legal and lawful baptism. These three are the water, the blood, and the Spirit.

Baptism itself is dual in nature; it consists of two parts, an immersion in water and an immersion in the Spirit. But baptism operates and has efficacy, virtue, and force because of blood, the blood of Christ. Baptism is a birth, a new birth, a birth in water and of the Spirit; but these two births would be mere formalities, useless performances, needless man-made rites without saving power, if it were not for the atoning blood of the Lamb. That is to say: If there had been no atonement of Christ, no agony of blood and Sorrow in Gethsemane, no suffering with blood and pain on Calvary, baptism would be a worthless waste of time and effort. The blessings that flow from baptism come because of the shedding of the blood of Christ. Baptism and all else by which salvation comes have power and efficacy because of the atonement.

Two births are essential to salvation. Man Cannot be saved without birth into mortality, nor can he return to his heavenly home without a birth into the realm of the Spirit. By obedience and conformity in pre-existence, we earned the right to a mortal birth, and by a like Course while here, we become fit candidates for the promised Spirit-birth. The elements present in a mortal birth and in a spiritual birth are the same. They are water, blood, and spirit. Thus every mortal birth is a heaven-given reminder to prepare for the second birth.

The Lord commanded Adam to teach his children: “By reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death.” That is, death and procreation entered the world with the fall. Both of them appertain to mortality, and Adam lived in a deathless state of immortality before the fall. “And inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul,” the Lord continued, “even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten.”

In every mortal birth the child is immersed in water in
the mother’s womb. At the appointed time the spirit enters the body, and blood always flows in the veins of the new person. Otherwise, without each of these, there is no life, no birth, no mortality.

In every birth into the kingdom of heaven, the newborn babe in Christ is immersed in water, he receives the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and the blood of Christ cleanses him from all sin. Otherwise, without each of these there is no Spirit-birth, no newness of life, no hope of eternal life.

Why must we be born of the Spirit? The Divine Voice continues: “That ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory; for by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified.” (Moses 6:59-60.)

Those who are born of the Spirit thereby -- that is, by virtue of their spiritual rebirth -- overcome the world. They die as to carnality and evil; they live as to spirituality and godliness. And it all comes to pass because they have faith in Christ. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,” John says. Those who are born anew love the Lord and keep his commandments. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. ... For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” There is no way to overcome the world except by turning to Christ and his gospel. It is by living the gospel that men forsake the world and are born again. “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Having so taught, John says of our Lord: “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood.” That is to say: Christ our prototype was born as we are. He came into the world as a mortal by water and blood and spirit. In his birth, as in the birth of each of us, the requisite elements were present. But in his life, these elements were again present in his death. He sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane as he took upon himself the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. This same agony and suffering recurred on the cross. It was then that he permitted his spirit to leave his body, and it was then that blood and water gushed from his riven side.

Thus it was that his mortal life ended; thus it was that his atoning death fulfilled the Father’s plan; and thus it was that the elements of water, blood, and spirit came not only to signify the spiritual rebirth into the kingdom of God, but also were made symbols of the atonement itself. And, be it remembered, it is because of the atonement that an entrance into the kingdom of heaven is possible. “It is the Spirit that beareth witness” of all these things, “because the Spirit is truth.”

Then John says: “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” The three members of the one Godhead bear everlasting witness of eternal truth. “And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” Every birth of water, blood, and spirit is a witness that the infant mortal must in due course be born of water, blood, and Spirit into the kingdom of heaven. And every baptism -- in water, of the Spirit, and binding because of Christ’s shed blood -- is a witness that our Lord’s atonement, wherein also the water and blood and spirit were present, is the rock foundation upon which all blessings rest. “This is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.” This the true saints understand. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” (1 John 5:1-10.)

**Baptism of the Spirit**

Questions: When do we receive the actual remission of our sins? When are we changed from our carnal and fallen state to a state of righteousness? When do we become clean and pure and spotless so as to be able to dwell with Gods and angels? What is the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost?

Answers: Sins are remitted not in the waters of baptism, as we say in speaking figuratively, but when we receive the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Spirit of God that erases carnality and brings us into a state of righteousness. We become clean when we actually receive the fellowship and companionship of the Holy Ghost. It is then that sin and dross and evil are burned out of our souls as though by fire. The baptism of the Holy Ghost is the baptism of fire. There have been miraculous occasions when visible flames enveloped penitent persons, but ordinarily the cleansing power of the Spirit simply dwells, unseen and unheralded, in the hearts of those who have made the Lord their friend. And the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle.

John, who baptized the Lord Jesus, preached the baptism of repentance. He called upon all men to repent and be baptized in water for the remission of their sins, meaning that if they submitted to his Aaronic authority, they would be blessed in due course with the manifestation of Melchizedek authority of Another who would give them a second baptism. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance,” he said, “but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy
to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11.)

After his resurrection, Jesus told the apostles: “John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:5.) The blessed fulfillment came on the day of Pentecost, when “suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:1-4.)

To his Nephite apostles Jesus said: “Blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.” (3 Nephi 12:2.) Thus has it been in all ages, and thus is it in our day. After baptism in water, legal administrators lay their hands upon a repentant person and say: “Receive the Holy Ghost.” This gives him the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead based on faithfulness. Either then or later, depending upon the individual’s personal worthiness, the Holy Ghost comes. The baptized person becomes a new creature. He is baptized with fire, sin and evil are burned out of his soul, and he is born again.

Truly baptism is a death, burial, and resurrection! “We are buried” with Christ “by baptism into death.” We die as to sin. Then, “like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. We live as to righteousness. “Our old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

Truly baptism prepares us for a glorious resurrection! “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his [Christ’s] death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” (Romans 6:3-6.) As he came forth in the resurrection with a celestial body, a body free from sin, a body prepared to dwell everlastingly in a celestial kingdom, so shall it be with us.

All those who have been baptized in water for the remission of their sins; all those who have received the gift of the Holy Ghost; all those who are saints in very deed and who seek salvation -- all these desire, above all else, to gain the companionship of the Spirit, the baptism of the Spirit, so they can stand spotless before the Holy One in the day of judgment.