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The doctrine that underlies the work in the holy temple, more than any other thing, sets The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints apart from and transcendent above every other religious organization on the face of the earth.

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Around the turn of the twentieth century two missionaries were laboring in the mountain region of the southern part of the United States. One day as they were walking along a ridge in the hill country, they saw people gathering in a clearing near a cabin some distance down the hillside.

They discovered that there was to be a funeral. A little boy had drowned. His parents had sent for the minister to “say words” at the burial of the little fellow. The elders stayed in the background to watch the proceedings. The little fellow was to be buried in the grave already opened near the cabin. The minister stood before the grieving father and

mother and the others gathered and began his funeral sermon. If the parents expected to receive consolation from this man of the cloth, they would be disappointed.

He scolded them severely for not having had the little boy baptized. They had put it off because of one thing or another, and now it was too late. He told them very bluntly that their little boy had gone to hell. He told them that it was their fault, that they were to blame—they had caused their son endless torment.

After the sermon was over and the grave was covered, the friends, neighbors, and relatives left the scene. The elders approached the grieving parents. “We are servants of the Lord,” they told the sobbing mother, “and we have come with a message for you.”

FROM LEFT: DETAIL PHOTOGRAPH OF SALT LAKE TEMPLE BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN; PHOTOGRAPH OF JOHANNESBURG SOUTH AFRICA TEMPLE BY TREVOR SIMON; INTERIOR OF HELSINKI FINLAND TEMPLE BY JOHN LUKE © IRI, MAY NOT BE COPIED; PHOTOGRAPH AT SACRAMENTO CALIFORNIA TEMPLE BY JOHN LUKE, POSED BY MODELS; LINE ART OF PAPEETE TAHITI TEMPLE



Temple

As the grief-stricken parents listened, the two young elders unfolded to their view something of a vision of the eternities. They read from the revelations, and they bore to these humble, grief-stricken parents their testimony of the restoration of the keys for the redemption of both the living and the dead.

I do not berate the itinerant preacher. Indeed, I have some sympathy for him, for he was doing the best he knew how to do with such light and knowledge as he had received. But there is more than he had to give. There is the fulness of the gospel.

The path the missionaries pointed out to those humble folk was more than conversion and repentance and baptism; for, to those who will follow, in due time that path leads to the sacred rooms of the holy temple. There members of the Church who make themselves eligible can participate in the most exalted and sacred of the redeeming ordinances that have been revealed to mankind. There we

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.

It is my hope to enlarge your understanding as to why we build temples and why ordinances and ceremonies are performed there.

Privilege of Temple Attendance

It is a privilege to enter the holy temple. If you are eligible by the standards that are set, by all means you should come to receive your own blessings; and thereafter you should return again and again and again to make those same blessings available to others who have died without the opportunity to receive them in mortality.

You should *not* come to the temple until you are eligible, until you meet the requirements that the Lord has set. But you should come, if not now, as soon as you can qualify.

The doctrine that underlies the work in the holy temple, more than any other thing, sets The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints apart from and transcendent above every other religious organization on the face of the earth. We have something that no other religious denomination has. We can give something they cannot extend.

The anguish in the hearts of those grieving parents can be satisfied only in the doctrines of this Church. These doctrines center on the ordinances of the holy temple.

Order in All Things

To explain something of the significance of the ordinances, I begin with the third article of faith: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

The word *ordinance* means “a religious or ceremonial observance,” “an established rite.”¹ Now, what about the ordinances of the gospel? How important are they 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.

Each Latter-day Saint needs to ask himself or herself the questions: Is my life in order? Do I have all of the ordinances of the gospel that I should possess by this time in my life? Are they valid?

If you can answer these questions affirmatively, and if the ordinances come under the influence of the sealing power and authority, they will remain intact eternally. In that case your life, to this point, is in proper order. You then would do well to think of your family, living and dead, with the same questions in mind.

The Temple Ordinances

The ordinances we perform in the temples include washings, anointings, the endowment, and the sealing ordinance—both the sealing of children to parents, and the sealing of couples, spoken of generally as temple marriage.

Here is a brief summary of the information that is available in print with reference to the temple ordinances.

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. Concerning these ordinances the Lord has said, “I say unto you, how shall your washings be acceptable unto me, except ye perform them in a house which you have built to my name?” (D&C 124:37).

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.

To endow is to enrich, to give to another something long lasting and of much worth. In the temple endowment ordinances, “recipients are endowed with power from on high,” and “they receive an education relative to the Lord’s purposes and plans.”²

President Brigham Young (1801–77) said of the endowment: “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

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Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled 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.”³

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 sealing ordinance is that ordinance which binds families eternally. Temple marriage is a sealing ordinance. Children born to couples sealed in the temple are born in the covenant. When a couple has been married in a civil ceremony and then sealed in the temple a year or more later, children not born in the covenant are sealed to the couple in a brief and sacred ordinance.

I have always been impressed that the ordinances of the temple are reverently and carefully administered. They are not complicated or extravagant but are typical of the simplicity of the principles of the gospel.

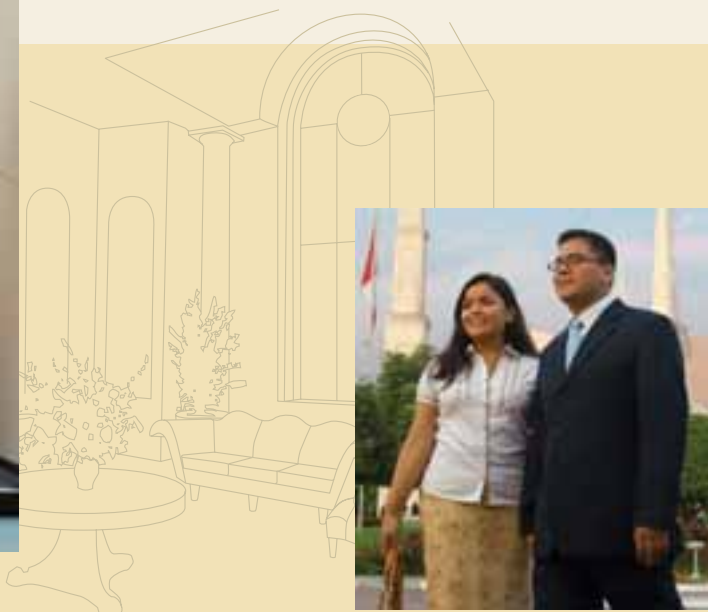
In the Church we hold sufficient authority to perform

all of the ordinances necessary to redeem and to exalt the whole human family. And because we have the keys to the sealing power, what we bind in proper order here will be bound in heaven. Those keys—the keys to seal and bind on earth and have it bound in heaven—represent the consummate gift from our God. With that authority we can baptize and bless, we can endow and seal, and the Lord will honor our commitments.

Ordinances Must Be Offered to the Dead

The itinerant preacher spoken of earlier had no answer to the question of what happens to those who died without baptism. What about them? If there is none other name given under heaven whereby man must be saved (and that is true), and they have lived and died without even hearing that name, and if baptism is essential (and it is), and they died without even the invitation to accept it, where are they now?

That question is hard to fathom, but it describes most of the human family. In other words, ask what power would establish one Lord and one baptism and then allow it to happen that most of the human family never comes within the influence of its doctrines? With that question unanswered, the vast majority of the human family must



What happens to those who died without baptism? If a church has no answer to this dilemma, how can it lay claim to be the Lord's Church?



This work came as a great reaffirmation of something very basic—that there is life after death. Mortal death is no more an ending than birth was the beginning. The great work of redemption goes on beyond the veil as well as here in mortality.

We have been authorized to perform baptisms and other temple ordinances vicariously for the dead so that when they hear the gospel preached and desire to accept it, those essential ordinances will have been performed.

be admitted to be lost, including the little boy who drowned—and against any reasonable application of the law of justice or of mercy, either.

If a church has no answer to this dilemma, how can it lay claim to be the Lord's Church? Surely He is not willing to write off the majority of the human family because they were never baptized while on earth.

In all reason those who admit in puzzled frustration that they have no answer to this question cannot lay claim to authority to administer the affairs of the Lord on the earth or to oversee the work by which all mankind must be saved.

One of the characteristics that sets us apart from the rest of the world and identifies us as the Lord's Church is that we provide baptism and other ordinances for our deceased ancestors.

Whenever I address myself to the question of those who died without baptism, I do so with the deepest reverence, for it touches on a sacred work. Little known to the world, this work is marvelous in its prospects, transcendent above what man might have dreamed of, supernal, inspired, and true. It is the answer.

With proper authority a mortal person could be baptized for and in behalf of someone who had not had that opportunity before passing on. That individual would then accept or reject the baptism in the spirit world, according to his own desire.

Come to the Temple

Every Latter-day Saint is responsible for this work. Probably no point of doctrine sets this Church apart from the other claimants as this one does. We have the revelations. We have those sacred ordinances.

To all of you I say, "Come to the temple." It may be that you look forward to the once-in-a-lifetime privilege of going there to receive your own endowment, to receive your own blessings, and to enter into your own covenants with the Lord. It may be that you have been there once or twice already. It may be that you go frequently. It may even be that you are an officiator. Whatever the circumstances may be, come to the temple.

If needed, set your lives in order; pray fervently. Start now that very difficult and sometimes very discouraging journey of repentance. Firmly resolve that you will do everything you can to aid temple work and the family history work that supports it and to assist every living soul and every soul beyond the veil in every way you can with every resource at your disposal.

Come to the temple! ■

Adapted from The Holy Temple (1980).

NOTES

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), "ordinance," 2006.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 227.
3. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1941), 416.