

Find out about the figures that stand atop the temple.



Looking Up to

The gold figure of a heavenly messenger in flowing robes atop the Salt Lake Temple has become one of the Church's most recognizable symbols. But the first angel to adorn a temple was a horizontal weathervane on the Nauvoo Temple as shown in this drawing (right).

By applying layers of clay, sculptor Karl Quilter (far right) created muscle tone on his version of the figure of the angel Moroni. Molds of Brother Quilter's figure are now used to create the figures of Moroni used on all temples built today.



The First Heavenly Messenger Decoration

Decorative weathervanes were placed atop many public buildings when the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples were constructed. So in accordance with that practice, both were adorned with weathervanes. The Nauvoo Temple's weathervane, however, was unique—an angel, in a horizontal position as if in flight, holding an open book with one hand and a horn pressed to its lips with the other. This was the first angel to appear atop an LDS temple. Simple weathervanes still top the St. George Utah, Logan Utah, and Manti Utah Temples.

Why Moroni?

Non-LDS sculptor Cyrus Dallin was asked to create an ornament for the central spire of the Salt Lake Temple. While he was searching LDS scriptures for inspiration, the concept of the figure of the angel Moroni was born. To Dallin, Moroni symbolized the restoration of the gospel, and since his placement atop the Salt Lake Temple, the golden figure of an angel in flowing robes with a long horn pressed to his lips has become one of the Church's most recognized symbols.

Crafting Moroni

When President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) first conceived of building smaller temples, Utah sculptor Karl Quilter was asked to design a smaller version of the angel Moroni that could be adapted for placement on temples of different sizes. The process of creating the new figure began with the construction of a metal armature, or support structure. Foam was then sprayed into this structure and sculpted into a basic human body shape. Clay was then applied

MORONI

TEMPLES WITHOUT THE ANGEL MORONI

Not all temples have a figure of the angel Moroni. Some, such as the Laie Hawaii, Mesa Arizona, and Cardston Alberta Temples, were not designed with towers or spires, so they have no angel Moroni. And even though the St. George, Logan, and Manti temples all have towers, they are topped with simple weathervanes rather than the angel Moroni. Some temples have had to delay the placement of the angel Moroni because of building code restrictions. This happened in Boston, Massachusetts, and Sydney, Australia, where figures were added after construction was completed. The only other temples that do not have figures of the angel Moroni are the Hamilton New Zealand and Oakland California Temples.





Brother Quilter's version of Moroni (shown above in the casting workshop before the molds are made) depicts the heavenly messenger with wavy hair and robes draped over his muscular body while holding a trumpet to his lips with his right hand.

to the foam and sculpted into more detail. More clay was applied in order to sculpt the clothing. It took about eight months before Brother Quilter's 7-foot-tall model was ready for the First Presidency's review. Once it was approved, Brother Quilter scaled up his model to produce larger versions, and molds were made from the clay models. From these molds the figures were cast in fiberglass under the direction of craftsman LaVar Wallgren. Brother Quilter's Moroni design is now used exclusively in the Church, and the Church owns the molds. About 10 figures can be cast from each mold. Today it takes less than a week to fabricate a figure.

Moroni's Left Arm

In the first version of the figure, Moroni's left arm is hanging at his side, slightly outstretched with his fist clenched. A few renditions later, the figure was slightly modified to incorporate the gold plates. In his version of Moroni for the Hill Cumorah Monument, Torlief Knaphus placed gold plates in Moroni's left arm. For his version for the Los Angeles Temple, sculptor Millard Malin followed Knaphus' design and kept the plates in Moroni's left arm; so did Avard Fairbanks, who sculpted the version for the Washington D.C. Temple. (Replicas of Fairbanks's plate-holding Moroni stand atop the Seattle Washington, Jordan River Utah, and Mexico City Mexico Temples.) When Karl Quilter designed his version of the figure, he eliminated the plates and then spent a great deal of time making sure the left arm hung in the proper position—not too rigid, not too limp, but showing slight forward movement.

Moroni's Clothing

All figures except one show Moroni wearing long, flowing robes, belted at the waist. The Moroni figure atop the Los Angeles California Temple, however, is dressed in a Mayan-style robe and headband, wearing sandals on his feet and bearing distinctive Native American facial features.

Moroni's Physique

Over the years, figures of the angel Moroni have become more robust as sculptors have added muscle tone and bulk to the figure. While sculpting his version of Moroni, Karl Quilter used human models to help him accurately shape muscles and correctly depict a body standing atop a ball.

Gilding Moroni

All Moroni figures are gilded, or covered with gold. The process involves rubbing thin sheets of gold onto the figure's surface. Today that process usually only takes a couple of days, but once the figure is gilded, it must be handled with gloved hands to avoid marring the delicate surface.

Embedded Lightning Rod

Since gold leaf is a perfect conductor of electricity, and because the figures are often placed high above the ground atop a temple's tallest spire, they are frequently hit by lightning. Today's figures have a copper rod running through them vertically, which extends several inches above the figure's head at the top, and attaches to a grounding cable at the bottom. This serves both as a lightning rod and as the mechanism for mounting the figure on the building's tower.

Modern Material

Early figures of the angel Moroni were made of bronze, copper, or aluminum, and were very heavy. (The bronze figure on the Washington D.C. Temple weighs approximately 2 tons, or 4,000 pounds.) Today's figures are made from lightweight fiberglass, and weigh only about 300 pounds.



FOUR TALLEST MORONI FIGURES

The four tallest figures of the angel Moroni are:

1. Jordan River Temple: 20 feet
2. Washington D.C. Temple: 18 feet
3. Los Angeles Temple: 15 feet, 5 inches
4. Salt Lake Temple: 12 feet, 5 inches

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

Adverse environmental conditions such as humidity, pollution, and extreme temperature variations take their toll on the figures, so they have to be periodically re-gilded and repaired. Sometimes, the figure is removed from the temple for maintenance work. At other times, scaffolding and tenting is set up so that the work can be done in place. Temple maintenance crews also must periodically clean bird droppings off the figures.



(Above) The angel Moroni at the top of the Hill Cumorah in Palmyra, New York, was sculpted by Torlief Knaphus and shows Moroni raising his right arm and carrying in his left arm the gold plates.

(Right) A crane prepares to place the Moroni figure atop the Rexburg Idaho Temple. Each of these figures is placed on the high point spire and, where possible, oriented eastward.

Moroni's Horn

In the scriptures, trumpets are used to sound warnings, proclaim news, and herald visitors. Moroni holds a horn to his lips with his right hand, symbolizing both the spreading of the gospel throughout the world and the long-anticipated Second Coming of the Savior, which will be announced by trumpet-blowing angels (see Matthew 24:31). The only version of the angel Moroni figure that doesn't hold a horn is the one sculpted by Torlief Knaphus for the Hill Cumorah Monument. Knaphus's Moroni is raising his right arm in a gesture of priesthood authority.

Shipping the Figure

Completed figures are laid horizontally and boxed in wooden crates for shipping. The trumpet, which is cast separately from the body, is packaged separately and then bolted to the figure's hand after being shipped to the temple.

Placement and Orientation of Figure

According to scripture, at the Second Coming the Savior will come from the east (see Matthew 24:27). The Church's guideline concerning placement of the angel Moroni figures is that where possible, they should face eastward. Sometimes, however, the angel Moroni figure may face another direction in order to align it with the orientation of the temple. Originally, the figure on the Los Angeles Temple was placed facing southwest, the same direction the temple faced, but the figure's orientation was adjusted to face due east upon instructions from President David O. McKay. The angel Moroni figure is placed on the high point spire, not necessarily the central spire. On several temples the figure of Moroni is placed atop a tower that is actually detached from the temple.

