

John the Baptist Conferring the Aaronic Priesthood

Doctrine and Covenants 13; Joseph Smith—History 1:68–73

Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. Doctrine and Covenants 13

Joseph Smith translated the golden plates into English, and Oliver Cowdery wrote the translation down. While translating, they learned about baptism for the remission of sins. On May 15, 1829, they went into the woods to pray, to ask Heavenly Father about baptism. (See Joseph Smith—History 1:68, 72.)

As they prayed, an angel from heaven appeared in a cloud of light. He laid his hands on Joseph and Oliver and ordained them, saying, “Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness” (Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69; see also D&C 13).

The angel said the Aaronic Priesthood had the power to baptize but not to give the gift of the

Holy Ghost. The angel commanded Joseph and Oliver to be baptized. He told Joseph to baptize Oliver and then Oliver to baptize Joseph. (See Joseph Smith—History 1:70.)

They baptized each other in the Susquehanna River near Harmony, Pennsylvania. Then, following the angel’s instructions, Joseph laid his hands upon Oliver’s head and ordained Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood. Oliver then ordained Joseph in the same way. (See Joseph Smith—History 1:71; D&C 13, section heading.)

The angel said his name was John the Baptist. He told them he was acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Joseph and Oliver, he said, would receive the Melchizedek Priesthood in due time. (See Joseph Smith—History 1:72.)

After Joseph and Oliver were baptized, they “experienced great and glorious blessings from . . . Heavenly Father” (Joseph Smith—History 1:73).

Summary

While translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery learned about baptism. They went into the nearby woods to ask the Lord more about this important ordinance. As they prayed, John the Baptist appeared. He laid his hands upon Joseph and Oliver and gave them the Aaronic Priesthood, which gave them

the power to baptize. John the Baptist instructed Joseph to baptize Oliver and Oliver to baptize Joseph, which they did in the Susquehanna River. Afterward Joseph and Oliver ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood, as instructed by John the Baptist.

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