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LEARNING FROM THE LORD THROUGH SYMBOLS

"I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts"
(2 Nephi 28:30).

OBJECTIVE

To help class members understand and appreciate the use of symbols in the temple.

PREPARATION

1. Bring a flag of your country or a picture of your country's flag.
2. Ask a class member to summarize the story of how one of the Brethren answered a question about temple garments. The story is found on pages 20–21 and 23 of *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*.

Note to teacher: Temple ordinances and covenants are sacred, and discussion about them is primarily limited to within the temple. Therefore, class discussion should be limited to the explanations given in this manual.

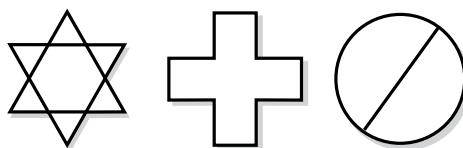
LESSON PRESENTATION

Invite someone to give an opening prayer.

Ask class members if they have any questions. Take the time required to answer questions to the best of your ability and as guided by the Lord's Spirit. Remember that some aspects of temple work must not be discussed outside the temple.

SYMBOLS ARE IMPORTANT IN OUR DAILY LIVES

Explain that symbols are used constantly in our everyday lives. Draw the following or other appropriate symbols on the chalkboard. Ask the class members to describe what each symbol means.



Show the class your country's flag or a picture of the flag and ask them to describe what the flag means to them.

- What are some other objects or some actions that show patriotism? (A song, a uniform, a piece of clothing, a holiday, or a celebration.)

Point out that these are symbols that stand for or represent patriotism.

- What are some symbols for love and respect? (A gift or a ring, a kiss or an embrace, a heart shape.)
- Do symbols convey the same message to all people? Why or why not?
- Why do we use symbols?

Let the class members discuss. They may suggest ideas such as the following:

1. Symbols can help us remember important things.
2. Symbols can teach us abstract truths that might be hard to learn in other ways.
3. Symbols can represent feelings.
4. Symbols can teach different principles according to our personal readiness to learn.

Explain that when the symbols are repeated, we learn to understand them better.

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS PROPHETS USED SYMBOLS

Explain that the Savior repeatedly used symbols when He taught.

- What are some instances in which the Lord taught by using symbols?

The class members may mention such things as lost sheep (see Matthew 18:12–14); a mustard seed (see Matthew 13:31–32); or a pearl of great price (see Matthew 13:45–46).

- Why do you think the Savior used symbols when He taught?

Let the class members discuss. Then review the following statement:

"The Lord Himself, the Master Teacher, in His own teaching to His disciples taught constantly in parables, a verbal way to represent symbolically things that might otherwise be difficult to understand. He talked of the common experiences drawn from the lives of His disciples, and He told of hens and chickens, birds, flowers, foxes, trees, burglars, highwaymen, sunsets, the rich and the poor. . . . He talked of the mustard seed, of the pearl. He wanted to teach His hearers, so He talked of simple things in a symbolic sense. None of these things is mysterious or obscure, and all of them are symbolic" (*Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, 8).

Explain that the prophets and apostles often used symbols to teach of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the basis of the gospel and of all the blessings we receive. It makes

salvation possible. Therefore, most of the symbols in the scriptures teach us about the Savior and His sacrifice.

Ask the class members to read Moses 6:63.

- What things in the earth bear record of the Savior?

Ask the class members to read Alma 13:16.

- In what ways do priesthood ordinances bear record of the Savior?

Point out that before the Savior carried out the Atonement, His covenant people sacrificed animals as a symbol of His atoning sacrifice (see Moses 5:4–8). That practice ended with the Savior’s death and Resurrection. Now the Lord commands us to “offer for a sacrifice unto [Him] a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20). And priesthood ordinances continue to help us remember the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. Elder Russell M. Nelson taught:

“Essential ordinances of the gospel symbolize the Atonement. Baptism by immersion is symbolic of the death, burial, and Resurrection of the Redeemer. Partaking of the sacrament renews baptismal covenants and also renews our memory of the Savior’s broken flesh and of the blood He shed for us. Ordinances of the temple symbolize our reconciliation with the Lord and seal families together forever” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 47; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 35).

SYMBOLS TEACH US TRUTH IF WE ARE SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE

Explain that when the Savior lived on earth, His disciples asked Him why He taught with parables. Parables are stories that teach important truths, often using symbolic language. Have the class members read Matthew 13:10–12 to learn what the Savior said.

- What do you think the Savior meant when He said this?

Explain that the Lord reveals truth to those who are spiritually ready to understand it. Those who receive truth with faith and obedience continue to receive more truth. Those who are not spiritually prepared and who fail to receive truth or receive it with a doubtful heart will gradually lose the truth they have.

Stories with symbols present truth in such a way that those who are spiritually prepared understand the meaning of the symbols. Those who are not prepared do not understand the meaning.

Some people in the Savior’s time understood the messages of His parables, but many did not. The same is true today. There are many levels of spiritual understanding among righteous members of the Church.

Have the class members read 2 Nephi 28:30 and Doctrine and Covenants 42:49–50.

- What do these scriptures teach about how we learn truth from God?

Explain that it is possible for all of us to develop spiritually to a level where we can understand the meaning of symbols used in the gospel, in the scriptures, and especially in the temple.

THE MOST SACRED SYMBOLIC TEACHINGS ARE RECEIVED IN THE TEMPLE

Explain that the most sacred symbolic teachings on earth are received in the temple. In a symbolic way, the teachings and rituals of the temple take us on an upward journey toward eternal life, ending with a symbolic entrance into the presence of God. The characters depicted, the physical setting, the clothing worn, the signs given, and all the events covered in the temple are symbolic. When they are understood, they will help each person recognize truth and grow spiritually.

"All things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual" (Moses 6:63).

Some of the symbols are straightforward, and the meaning is readily apparent. The temple itself is a symbol:

"If you have seen one of the temples at night, fully lighted, you know what an impressive sight that can be. The house of the Lord, bathed in light, standing out in the darkness, becomes symbolic of the power and the inspiration of the gospel of Jesus Christ standing as a beacon in a world that sinks ever further into spiritual darkness" (*Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, 10).

The temple clothing is also symbolic. When we enter the temple, we change from street clothes into white temple clothing, which is a symbol of purity. President James E. Faust said:

"Fundamental to temple worship is the principle that 'God is no respecter of persons.' [Acts 10:34.] Within the hallowed walls of the temples, there is no preference of position, wealth, status, race, or education. All dress in white. All receive the same instruction. All make the same covenants and promises. All receive the same transcendent, eternal blessings if they live worthy to claim them. All are equal before their Creator" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 23; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 20).

Explain that members who receive temple ordinances and make covenants with God wear special garments (underclothing) throughout the rest of their lives. Read the following statement:

"The garment represents sacred covenants. It fosters modesty and becomes a shield and protection to the wearer. . . . The garment, covering the body, is a visual and tactile reminder of [covenants made in the temple]. For many Church members the garment has

formed a barrier of protection when the wearer has been faced with temptation. Among other things it symbolizes our deep respect for the laws of God—among them the moral standard” (*Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, 20, 23).

Ask the assigned class member to summarize how one of the Brethren described the purpose of the temple garment (see *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, 20–21, 23).

Explain that almost every aspect of the temple ceremony is symbolic. This means that each person should prepare to be as spiritually sensitive as possible to the symbolic nature of the temple endowment.

- What could keep a person from being spiritually sensitive in the temple?

Class members might mention such things as the following:

1. A person may not be worthy. A person who has failed to sincerely repent and has not prepared humbly and prayerfully for the temple will find that the symbols will be lifeless and their meanings will be hidden.
 2. A person may lack faith. A person who does not have faith in Jesus Christ and the temple ceremony may not receive the inspiration from the Holy Ghost necessary for understanding the temple endowment.
 3. A person may focus so much on the outward motions of the ceremonies that he or she may miss the powerful teachings represented by the symbols.
- How can we prepare to be spiritually sensitive in the temple?

CONCLUSION

Point out that those going to the temple for the first time can expect to learn many new things and feel the power of the Lord’s Spirit. Encourage class members to prepare themselves spiritually for their temple experience. Remind them that all of what is presented cannot be understood in a single visit. They should return to the temple as often as possible so they can continue to learn and to renew their spiritual feelings.

Invite someone to give a closing prayer.