

Looking toward the Temple



John A. Widtsoe was born on Frøya Island, Norway, in 1872 to John A. and Anna K. Gaarden Widtsoe. He married Leah E. Dunford in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1, 1898. Before being ordained an Apostle on March 17, 1921, he enjoyed prominence as a scientist, educator, author, and academic, serving as president of

Utah Agricultural College and the University of Utah. Elder Widtsoe, a prolific author of books on Church history and doctrine, died in Salt Lake City, Utah, at age 80. This article originally appeared in the October 1962 Improvement Era; capitalization, paragraphing, and punctuation have been standardized; emphasis is in the original.

By Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872–1952)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The temple is a house or home of the Lord. Should the Lord visit the earth, He would come to His temple. We are of the Lord's family. We are His children begotten in our preexistent [premortal] life. Hence, as the earthly father and mother and their family gather in the family home, so the worthy members of the Lord's family

may gather as we do in the house of the Lord.

The temple is a place of instruction. Here the principles of the gospel are reviewed, and profound truths of the kingdom of God are unfolded. If we enter the temple in the right spirit and are attentive, we go out enriched in gospel knowledge and wisdom.

The temple is a place of peace.

Here we may lay aside the cares and worries of the outside, turbulent world. Here our minds should be centered upon spiritual realities, since here we are concerned only with things of the spirit.

The temple is a place of covenants, which will help us live righteously. Here we declare that we will obey the laws of God and promise to use the precious knowledge of the gospel for our own blessing and the good of man. The simple ceremonies help us to go out from the temple with the high resolve to lead lives worthy of the gifts of the gospel.

The temple is a place of blessing. Promises are made to us, conditioned only upon our faithfulness, which extend from time to eternity. They will help us to understand the nearness of our heavenly parents. The power of the priesthood is thus given us in new and large measures.

The temple is a place where ceremonies pertaining to godliness are presented. The great mysteries of life, with man's unanswered questions, are here made clear: (1) Where did I come from? (2) Why am I here? (3) Where do I go when life is over? Here the needs of the spirit from which all other things of life issue are held of paramount importance.



enjoy its privileges. It is a sacred place in which holy ordinances are given to all who have proved themselves worthy to partake of its blessings.

Whatever the gospel offers may be done in a temple. Baptisms [for the dead], ordinations to the priesthood [for the dead], marriages, and sealings for time and eternity for the living and the dead, the endowment for the living and the dead, . . . gospel instruction, councils for the work of the ministry, and all else belonging to the gospel are here performed. Indeed, in the temple the whole gospel is epitomized. . . .

It is not to be expected that the temple ceremonies can be comprehended in full detail the first time a person “goes through” the temple. Therefore, the Lord has provided means of repetition. Temple work must be done first by each person for himself or herself; then it may be done for one’s dead ancestors or friends as frequently as circumstances will allow. This service will open the doors of salvation for the dead and will also help fix upon the mind of the living the nature, meaning, and obligations of the endowment. By keeping the endowment fresh in mind, we shall be better able to perform our duties in life under the influence of eternal blessings.

The temple is a place of revelation. The Lord may here give revelation, and every person may receive revelation to assist him in life. All knowledge, all help come from the Lord, directly or indirectly. Though

It is good to be in the temple, the house of the Lord, a place of priesthood instruction, of peace, of covenants, of blessings, and of revelation. Gratitude for this privilege and an eager desire to possess the spirit of the occasion should overflow in our hearts.

The temple, with its gifts and blessings, is open to all who conform to the requirements of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each person who is worthy may apply to his or her bishop for a recommend to enter the temple.

The ordinances performed there are sacred; they are not mysterious. All who accept and live the gospel and keep themselves clean may partake of them. Indeed, all faithful members of the Church are invited and urged to make use of the temple and to

The temple, with its gifts and blessings, is open to all who conform to the requirements of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He may not be there in person, He is there by His Holy Spirit and by earthly men holding the priesthood. By that Spirit they direct the Lord’s work here on earth. Every person who enters this sacred place in faith and prayer will find help in the solution of life’s problems.

The ceremonies of the temples are comprehensively outlined in the revelation known as section 124, verses 39–41, of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive

In the temple all are dressed alike in white. White is the symbol of purity. No unclean person has the right to enter God’s house.

conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name.

“And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people;

“For I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the

foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times.”

In the temple all are dressed alike in white. White is the symbol of purity. No unclean person has the right to enter God’s house. Besides, the uniform dress symbolizes that before God our Father in heaven, all men are equal. The beggar and the banker, the learned and the unlearned, the prince and the pauper sit side by side in the temple and are of equal importance if they live righteously before the Lord God, the Father of their spirits. It is spiritual fitness and understanding that one receives in the temple. All



such have an equal place before the Lord. . . .

From beginning to end, going through the temple is a glorious experience. It is uplifting, informative. It gives courage. The candidate is sent forth with increased understanding and power for his work.

The laws of the temple and the covenants of the endowment are beautiful, helpful, simple, and easily understood. To observe them is equally simple. It is marvelous, however, that the Prophet Joseph Smith, untaught in the ways of the world, could so place them in proper sequence in laying the foundation for human spiritual progress. This alone justifies our faith that Joseph Smith was guided by powers beyond those of mortal men.

For those who enter into the temple service in faith, in full surrender to the will of the Lord, the day will be a glorious experience. Light and power will come to them. . . .

Wherever one turns in the revealed gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly in the temple, the conviction grows that the work of God is reestablished for His specific purposes in the latter days. Temple service is to aid and to help us in qualifying for this mighty work: “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). ■