



By Elder
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*What I learned
about the temple
as a young
missionary has
blessed me ever
since.*

The Kirtland Temple

A Place of Holiness

Many missionaries open their mission call surrounded by family and friends. I opened mine all alone in a potato field. I was a student at Ricks College (which later became Brigham Young University–Idaho). We didn’t have social media or the internet back then, and I was away from my family. So I went into the field, offered a prayer, and opened the letter.

“You are called to labor in the Ohio Cleveland Mission,” it said. I thought it was especially sweet that Kirtland, Ohio, was part of the mission, though I didn’t understand its significance at that time.

Welcome to Ohio

My first assignment was the Ashtabula Ward, part of the Kirtland stake. On our way to my first area, my companion, Elder Shawn Patrick Murphy, and I stopped at the Newel K. Whitney store in Kirtland. Today there is a large visitors’ center there, but at the time it was a small place. I remember walking up the stairs to the room above the store where Joseph Smith held the School of the Prophets. I knew little of the history of the place, but I still felt something distinct as we entered that plain room with its simple wooden benches.

The director of the center was a former mission president, President Brewer. As he spoke about this place where the Brethren studied and learned together, I felt the Spirit deeply. I began to see the role Kirtland played as a hinge point in the history of the Church.

A Place of Preparation

In the early 1830s, Independence, Missouri, was identified as the site of the New Jerusalem. The Saints had begun to settle there. But they were then forced out because of differences with other Missouri residents and opposition to the Saints’ beliefs. In 1834, Joseph organized a group of about 230 men, women, and children, later known as Zion’s Camp. They were to travel 900 miles (1,450 km) from Ohio to Missouri to help the Saints regain land they had

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legally purchased. The journey was not successful in getting the land back, but it created a setting that helped prepare many future leaders of the Church, including Church Presidents Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff.

It wasn't just the preparation of leaders that was important. The sanctifying effect of Zion's Camp prepared a people who were willing to sacrifice to build a temple.

In Kirtland, the Prophet received revelation after revelation about the organization of the Church, all in preparation for what would be the crowning achievement—the building of the temple.¹ And sacrifice literally brought forth the blessings of heaven.² The Saints were so poor they could hardly afford the necessities of life. Yet they consecrated their time, talents, and possessions—the very covenant we make in the temple today—to build the house of the Lord.

The Spirit of the Temple

Today the Kirtland Temple is owned and maintained by another church—the Community of Christ. When a guide from that church took us through the building, I felt the Spirit as he quoted from journals of those who witnessed marvelous events at the temple's dedication. These events included seeing angels and the temple seeming to be ablaze with light.³ The Spirit confirmed to me that this had indeed been a house of God.

I served in the Ashtabula Ward for seven months. Almost every preparation day, we took those we were teaching to visit the Newel K. Whitney store and talk about the Kirtland Temple. Many times we recited the inspiring account of Christ's appearance at the temple:

“His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying:

“I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:3–4).

In addition to the Savior, others also visited the temple—Moses, Elias, and Elijah. They committed to Joseph keys for the gathering of Israel, the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, and temple and family history work. (See Doctrine and Covenants 110:10–16.)

Sacrifice and Blessings

Because these visitations are so significant, I think we sometimes overlook the significance of other things that also occurred. In the dedicatory prayer, Joseph Smith addressed the Lord God of Israel, “who keepest covenant and showest mercy,” and pleaded with the Lord to “accept the dedication of this house unto thee, the work of our hands, which we have built unto thy name” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:1, 78).

By appearing in answer to that prayer, Jesus Christ, as the mouthpiece of God the



Father, showed that He accepted His house, the ordinances that would be performed there, and the covenants that would be made there. That acceptance has been granted to every temple that has been dedicated since then, as well as to the covenants made and ordinances performed in those temples.

In the dedicatory prayer, Joseph also specifically asked the Lord to bless those who served in presidencies, as well as their families. Today, those blessings are extended to Relief Society presidents, quorum presidents, Young Women presidents, stake presidents, mission presidents, and so on. (See Doctrine and Covenants 109:71.) Then Joseph asked the Lord to “remember all thy church, O Lord, with all their families . . . that thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:72–73).

Joseph sought specific blessings for presidencies and their families, for members and their families, and for the Church as a whole. We regularly witness the fulfillment of those blessings as the Church shines forth as a light in the darkness.

Three Basic Truths

The dedication of the Kirtland Temple exemplifies for me three basic truths:

1. **We are blessed when we prepare for the temple.** The Saints had to prepare for the Kirtland Temple to be built. They had to sacrifice, purify themselves, and develop willing hearts. We need to do the same to become more ready to receive blessings the Lord has for us.

2. **We can receive revelation in the house of the Lord.** The visions given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple provided guidance, direction, and understanding. On a personal level, we can also find inspiration when we go to the temple seeking answers.
3. **We can find refuge in the temple.** In a time of persecution and poverty, the Saints in Kirtland found that the house of the Lord was a sanctuary from the worries surrounding them. The same is true for us today.

Temple Blessings

Over the years, I have found that the things I learned about the temple as a young missionary in Ohio have blessed my family and me. For example, in the temple a year after we were married, my wife, Amy, and I received an impression that it was time to have a child. We were students, and because of tight finances I was tempted to cast the prompting aside. But the Lord was preparing us.

We had three miscarriages over the next two years, and I wondered, “Why the prompting to have children if we’re not able to have them?” Then we moved to California, worked with a fertility specialist, and finally had our first child, Mackenzie.

By following the inspiration we received in the temple, we began a process that took three years. If we had not followed the prompting when we did, it would probably have been at least another three years before we had our first child. We count that experience as a blessing of preparation and revelation.

We had a second child, Emma, but then we had another miscarriage and the loss of our son, Stewart. In subsequent months and years, as we sought peace, we learned that most of the symbols in the temple point us to the Savior and the healing balm only His Atonement can give.

I am grateful for the blessings of the temple. I testify to you that it is a place of preparation, revelation, and peace. ■

NOTES

1. Forty-six revelations published in the Doctrine and Covenants were received by Joseph Smith in or near Kirtland.
2. See “Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27.
3. See *History of the Church*, 2:428.