

Symbolism AND TEMPLE *Preparation*

EVERYTHING
IN THE TEMPLE
POINTS US TO
CHRIST WHEN WE
ARE PREPARED TO
LEARN THROUGH
SYMBOLISM.

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After I received my mission call, my parents and I traveled to the Mesa Arizona Temple so I could receive my endowment. As we prepared to climb a set of stairs that led to the temple's ordinance rooms, I saw on a wall above a doorway the Savior's words: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). The Spirit immediately bore witness to me that I was in a sacred place doing a sacred work.

I didn't understand all the symbolism in what I saw and heard that day. But I felt the Spirit as I made covenants and received further light and knowledge essential for my eternal progress.



MESA ARIZONA TEMPLE

Symbolism and the Gospel

The temple is “a house of learning,” said Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “There we are taught in the Master’s way. His way differs from modes of others. His way is ancient and rich with symbolism.”¹

This symbolism (using one thing to stand for or remind us of another thing or idea) has been central to the ordinances of the gospel since Adam and Eve sacrificed the firstlings of their flocks (see Moses 5:5–7). During His life, the Savior also taught in parables, which, according to President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, are “a verbal way to represent symbolically things that might otherwise be difficult to understand.”²

Just as symbols were used anciently to teach profound truths, Elder Nelson said, symbols likewise are used to teach in the temple today. “It is necessary, therefore,” he added, “that we ponder the symbols presented in the temple and see the mighty realities for which each symbol stands.”³

The Importance of Preparation

In order to appreciate and clearly understand these symbols, we must prepare ourselves. President Packer called the ordinances and ceremonies of the temple simple, beautiful, and sacred, and he said, “Preparation for [temple] ordinances includes

preliminary steps: faith, repentance, baptism, confirmation, worthiness, a maturity and dignity worthy of one who comes invited as a guest into the house of the Lord.”⁴

For Church members who will be going to the temple for the first time, Elder Nelson has recommended that they study the following sections in the Bible Dictionary: “Anoint,” “Covenant,” “Sacrifices,” and “Temple.” He also suggested a study of Exodus 26–29, Leviticus 8, and the books of Moses and Abraham.⁵ As we become familiar with these materials, we will be better able to understand the symbols and teachings in the temple.

“If you will go to the temple and remember that the teaching is symbolic,” said President Packer, “you will never go in the proper spirit without coming away with your vision extended, feeling a little more exalted, with your knowledge increased as to things that are spiritual.”⁶

Symbolism and the Savior

Just as coming unto Christ is central to the gospel, so temples are also central to helping us come unto Christ. Elder David E. Sorensen of the

Seventy (served from 1992 to 2005) taught that temples “symbolically and literally remind us and teach us about Christ and His Father. . . . Our temple worship today includes many symbolic references to Christ, from the spires on the outside that point our minds heavenward, to the white clothing we wear inside the temple.”⁷

The temple ordinances themselves also inspire us to come unto Christ, because those essential ordinances of



SYMBOLIC TEACHING

“Before going to the temple for the first time, or even after many times, it may help you to realize that the teaching in the temples is done in symbolic fashion.”

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Holy Temple,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2010, 31.

exaltation point us to the Atonement.⁸ “All temple ordinances are centered in Jesus Christ and His divine mission. . . . Each ordinance is calculated to reveal to us something about Christ and our relationship to God.”⁹

Returning Often

Trying to understand temple symbolism has been called “the starting place for meaningful temple worship.”¹⁰ That worship includes establishing “the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of [our] membership.”¹¹ We do that as we keep the sacred covenants we make there and as we “hasten to the temple as frequently as time and means and personal circumstances allow.”¹²

During the years following my mission, I attended the temple often in the area where I attended college. But I did not get to return to the Mesa temple until I went with the young woman I married for time and all eternity. As we knelt at the altar, I was reminded of my visit several years earlier—grateful for symbols and sealings found only in the house of the Lord. **NE**

SYMBOLS THAT YOU SEE



Oxen: If you’ve performed baptisms for the dead, then temple symbolism isn’t new to you. No doubt you’ve noticed that temple baptismal fonts rest on the back of 12 oxen. The 12 oxen symbolize two things: the tribes of Israel and the strength and power on which God’s work rests.¹³ Understanding what the oxen—and other temple symbols—represent makes our vicarious work more meaningful.



White Clothing: You’ve also noticed that everyone in the temple wears white, which is another symbol. White clothing symbolizes purity, worthiness, and cleanliness and that we are all equal before Heavenly Father.¹⁴



“Mirrors of Eternity”: When you attend a celestial marriage or a family sealing in the temple, you’ll notice mirrors on each side of the sealing room. These mirrors reflect images back and forth that seem to go on forever. This enduring reflection symbolizes our divine nature and destiny, reminding us that temple ordinances and covenants unite us eternally in God’s presence.¹⁵

The full meaning of some temple symbols, such as those you’ll see during the temple endowment ceremony, may not be so easily interpreted. But through frequent

attendance and with help from the Spirit, you will increase your ability to learn through temple symbolism, and your appreciation for the temple and its symbolic teachings will grow.

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 33.
2. Boyd K. Packer, “The Holy Temple,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2010, 32.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Prepare for the Blessings of the Temple,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2010, 47.
4. Boyd K. Packer, “The Holy Temple,” 30.
5. See Russell M. Nelson, “Prepare for the Blessings of the Temple,” 47.
6. Boyd K. Packer, “The Holy Temple,” 32.
7. David E. Sorensen, “Small Temples—Large Blessings,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 65.
8. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Atonement,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 35.
9. David E. Sorensen, “Small Temples—Large Blessings,” 65.
10. “Preparing for Your Temple Endowment,” *Tambuli*, Aug. 1988, 16.
11. Jay M. Todd, “President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church,” *Ensign*, July 1994, 5.
12. Jay M. Todd, “President Howard W. Hunter,” 5.
13. See Edward J. Brandt, “Why Are Oxen Used in the Design of Our Temples’ Baptismal Fonts?” *Ensign*, Mar. 1993, 55.
14. See *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple* (booklet, 2002), 16–18.
15. See Gerrit W. Gong, “Temple Mirrors of Eternity: A Testimony of Family,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 37.