

PROLOGUE

This year the 34th annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, held at Brigham Young University, marks several significant anniversaries. One hundred eighty-five years ago, in the spring of 1830, the Prophet Joseph Smith experienced the First Vision when our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to him in Palmyra, New York, ushering in the dispensation of the fulness of all times (see Acts 3:19–21). The year 2005 also marks:

- The 200th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, born December 23, 1805.
- The 175th anniversary of the printing of the Book of Mormon, first published March 26, 1830.
- The 175th anniversary of the founding of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, organized on April 6, 1830.
- The 175th anniversary of the first missionaries called in these latter days, in April 1830.
- The 170th anniversary of the calling of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, ordained in February 1835.
- As early as March 1829, the Lord declared that the restoration of His word would come to our generation through the Prophet Joseph Smith (see D&C 5:10). At the time, Joseph Smith was only twenty-three years old. He would live only fifteen more years. But in those fifteen very short and compressed years, Joseph Smith ushered in the fulness of times that comprised a “welding together” of all dispensations wherein everything “from the days of Adam [to] the

present time” would be revealed in this, the final gospel dispensation (see D&C 128:18).

It is interesting that the Lord said the Restoration would come *through*, not *by* or *from*, the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Restoration is so grand in vision, so all-encompassing in thought and doctrine, and so beyond mortal power and authority that it could not possibly have come from the Prophet Joseph, or from any other individual, for that matter. Even if Joseph Smith had been the most gifted linguist, the most learned biblical scholar, the most studied anthropologist, the most spiritual intellect on the face of the earth (which, by the way, I believe he was), he still would not have been able to restore priesthood authority without help from the authorized servants of the Lord who held it anciently.

Through the centuries, many have recognized that elements once present in the original church were missing. For hundreds of years, reformers sought to bring back what was once present—including the offices and authority of the priesthood, the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Spirit that were exercised anciently as described in the Bible. No individual, committee, council, or creed was able to recover what was lost—until the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith to inaugurate the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21). From heavenly beings, the gospel was restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the promise was given by the Lord that it would never be taken from the earth again or given to another people (see D&C 27:13). The ministering of angels continued, and Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received the Aaronic Priesthood by the laying on of hands from John the Baptist (see D&C 13) and the Melchizedek Priesthood in the same manner from Peter, James, and John (see D&C 128:20).

Later, while translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith received a commandment from the Lord to “organize His Church once more here upon the earth.” Joseph was not only told the “precise day upon which, according to His will and commandment, we should proceed”¹ (April 6, 1830), but he was also informed by revelation how to conduct the organizing meeting.²

What have we received as a result of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s work and ministry? The world has received a knowledge of God the

Eternal Father, His marvelous plan for our salvation and happiness, and an understanding of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did for us through His atoning sacrifice, which is the centerpiece of God's plan for our redemption. To the Prophet Joseph Smith were revealed the eternal principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ that lead to eternal life in God's presence and more pages of holy scripture than have been given to any other prophet.

We accept and revere him as a prophet of God, and we declare to the world that he was called as such, but we do not worship him. In fact, many members of the Church are not even aware of Joseph Smith's final resting place.³ As President Gordon B. Hinckley observed, "We do not worship the Prophet. We worship God our Eternal Father, and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. But we acknowledge him . . . we reverence him as an instrument in the hands of the Almighty in restoring to the earth the ancient truths of the divine gospel, together with the priesthood through which the authority of God is exercised in the affairs of His church and for the blessing of His people."⁴

A MARVELOUS WORK AND A WONDER

This year's Sperry Symposium is devoted to exploring the impact that the doctrines and scriptures restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith have had on the world in the past 175 years. For example, "today there are more than twelve million members of the Church. More than 51,000 full-time missionaries along with members of the Church are sharing the gospel throughout the nations of the earth. More than 120 million copies of the Book of Mormon have been published and have been fully translated into 74 languages. The last general conference of the Church was broadcast throughout the world in 70 different languages. Temples are beginning to dot the earth. Millions of lives are being blessed around the world by the humanitarian and welfare efforts of the Church. More than 16,000 individuals [and more] have been helped by the Perpetual Education Fund. The seminary and institute programs of the Church are blessing the lives of more than 800,000 teenagers and young adults in 144 countries. Countless individual lives are being blessed in ways that cannot be measured."⁵

Those of us living today have inherited a great legacy. We are the

beneficiaries of what the scriptures describe as “a marvelous work and a wonder” (see 2 Nephi 25:17; 27:26). The worldwide Church, organized and established 175 years ago, is indeed the very kingdom of God on the earth. It is the restored Church of Jesus Christ. As envisioned by Daniel, it is the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, rolling forth across the earth in majesty and power (see Daniel 2:34–35, 44). As Isaiah foresaw, this Church has been raised up in the tops of the mountains like an “ensign,” or banner, and now waves to all the world, inviting people from every nation to come and partake of the blessings of the Restoration and the gathering of Israel (see Isaiah 5:26; 11:10, 12; 18:1–3). As prophesied, the Church will continue to rise out of obscurity and eventually become an object of political and religious interest to every person in the world (see D&C 1:30; Revelation 14:6).⁶ It will one day inundate “the earth as with a flood” to bear testimony of Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead (see Moses 7:62). In our modern world, which seems to be rapidly slouching into Sodom and Gomorrah–like conditions, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is becoming more and more a “defense, and . . . a refuge from the storm” for millions across the earth (see D&C 115:6). The gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored that its light may be “a standard for the nations” to look to (D&C 115:5).

“Mormonism,” Elder Orson F. Whitney observed, “is not a mere sect among sects, one more broken off fragment of a degenerate and crumbling Christianity. It is the pure, primitive Christianity restored—the original faith, the root of all religion; and it was not accident, but [divine] design, that [has given] it the strength of its position.”⁷

OUR DAY IN CHURCH HISTORY

In describing the early, foundational events of the Restoration, Joseph Smith testified:

The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; it is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this

our day; but they died without the sight; *we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory; it is left for us to see, participate in and help to roll forward the Latter-day glory*, “the dispensation of the fulness of times, when God will gather together all things that are in heaven, and all things that are upon the earth, ‘even in one.’”⁸

Saints living today have not only inherited a great spiritual legacy but also the responsibility to carry this work forward. As President Hinckley further reminded us, these are our days in the history of the Church and kingdom of God on the earth, and we have work to do: “The Lord expects so much of [Latter-day Saints] now because we are not persecuted, we are not driven, we are not on the march, we are not being burned and destroyed and troubled on all sides. We have peace, and we have the good opinion of many, many people in many, many places. How thankful we ought to be and how ambitious we ought to be to move forward this, the work of the Lord.”⁹

It is our privilege to stand for the one cause that will emerge victorious! President Hinckley testified: “This Church is true. It will weather every storm that beats against it. It will outlast every critic who rises to mock it. It was established by God our Eternal Father for the blessing of His sons and daughters of all generations. It carries the name of Him who stands as its head, even the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. It is governed and moves by the power of the priesthood. It sends forth to the world another witness of the divinity of the Lord.”¹⁰

Thus, not only will the Church continue to stand, but we have an obligation to stand with it. As Oliver Cowdery was told, “Therefore be diligent; stand by my servant Joseph, faithfully” (D&C 6:18). The Prophet Joseph Smith laid the foundations for this work, and it is now up to us to “stand faithfully” until the capstone of Zion has been set in place.

A LIGHT THAT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

Seventeenth-century artists employed a technique called *chiaroscuro* in which the artist created an extreme contrast between light and darkness to achieve dramatic effect and create depth. Before beginning a painting, Rembrandt would first paint his canvas black,

causing the lighter colors that came later to shimmer and stand out more. Similarly, the light of the restored gospel is all the more brilliant when painted across the bleak landscape of the world. Thus, the Restoration is both a *declaration* of light and a *refutation* of darkness. In a revelation given in 1831, the Lord declared that His everlasting covenant has been sent into the world to be a *standard*, a *light* for people to seek after, and a *messenger* to prepare the way for His Second Coming (see D&C 45:9).

Our congregations sing a hymn in honor of the Restoration that contains the verse, “Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah! Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer.”¹¹ The focus of this symposium is to praise the Father and the Son for communing with living prophets—such great men as the Prophet Joseph Smith. When Joseph Smith walked out of the grove near his home in Palmyra, New York (as the cover of this book illustrates), a new day had dawned in the history of the world. The Restoration is real, and now, 175 years later, it is moving forward at a quickened pace to fulfill its ultimate and prophesied destiny. It is our privilege to be living in a day when the Lord is making “bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” and at a time when “all the ends of the earth shall [one day] see the salvation of God” (3 Nephi 16:20).

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CHAIR, 2005 SIDNEY B. SPERRY SYMPOSIUM COMMITTEE

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:64.
2. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:60–61.
3. Joseph Smith is buried in Nauvoo, Illinois.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Be Thou an Example* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 119.
5. *Church News*, January 1, 2005, 7.
6. President Ezra Taft Benson said: “We may expect to see the righteousness of the Saints and the progress of the kingdom of God continue unabated, but it will not be without opposition. The Council of the Twelve proclaimed in 1845: ‘As this work progresses in its onward course, and becomes more and more an object of political and religious interest, . . . no king, ruler, or subject, no

community or individual, will stand neutral. All will . . . be influenced by one spirit or the other; and will take sides either for or against the kingdom of God'" (in Conference Report, April 1978, 46; or *Ensign*, May 1978, 32).

7. Orson F. Whitney, *The Strength of the Mormon Position*, cited in Abinadi Pratt, ed., *Pamphlets: Latter-day Tracts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1880), 23–24.
8. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:609–10; emphasis added.
9. President Gordon B. Hinckley, member meeting, Richmond, Virginia, November 14, 1989; as cited in *Church News*, April 2, 2005, 5.
10. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Keep the Faith," *Ensign*, September 1985, 6.
11. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 27.