

Following my remarks, this session will conclude with the choir singing “How Firm a Foundation.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Wolfgang

H. Paul of the Seventy, and the concluding session of the conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Now, my brothers and sisters, we live with an interesting phenomenon. A soloist sings the same song again and again. An orchestra repeats the same music. But a speaker is expected to come up with something new every time he speaks. I am going to break that tradition this morning and repeat in a measure what I have said on another occasion.

Marvelous growth of the Church

The Church has become one large family scattered across the earth. There are now more than 13 million of us in 176 nations and territories. A marvelous and wonderful thing is coming to pass. The Lord is fulfilling His promise that His gospel shall be as the stone cut out of the mountain without hands which would roll forth and fill the whole earth, as Daniel saw in vision (see Daniel 2:31–45; D&C 65:2). A great miracle is taking place right before our eyes.

I take you back 184 years to the year 1823. The month was September—the night of September 21–22, to be exact.

The boy Joseph Smith had prayed that night before going to sleep. He asked the Lord for forgiveness of his light-mindedness. A miraculous thing then happened. He says:

“While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noon-day, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside. . . .

“He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from

the presence of God . . . and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:30, 33).

The boy must have been stunned by what he heard. In the eyes of those who knew him, he was simply a poor, unlearned farm boy. He had no wealth. His neighbors were in the same condition. His parents were struggling farmers. The area where they lived was rural and largely unknown. They were simply ordinary people trying to survive through hard work.

And yet an angel of God said that Joseph’s “name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues.” How could it be? That description fits the entire world.

Now, as we look back 177 years to the organization of the Church, we marvel at what has already happened. When the Church was organized in 1830 there were but six members, only a handful of believers, all residing in a largely unknown village. Today we have become the fourth or fifth largest church in North America, with congregations in every city of any consequence. Stakes of Zion today flourish in every state of the United States, in every province of Canada, in every state of Mexico, in every nation of Central America, and throughout South America.

Congregations are found throughout the British Isles and Europe, where thousands have joined the Church through

the years. This work has reached out to the Baltic nations and on down through Bulgaria and Albania and other areas of that part of the world. It reaches across the vast area of Russia. It reaches up into Mongolia and all down through the nations of Asia into the islands of the Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand, and into India and Indonesia. It is flourishing in many of the nations of Africa.

Our general conferences are carried by satellite and other means in 92 different languages.

And this is only the beginning. This work will continue to grow and prosper and move across the earth. It must do so if Moroni's promise to Joseph is to be fulfilled.

This work is unique and wonderful. It is fundamentally different from every other body of religious doctrine of which I know.

The glorious First Vision

When Jesus walked the earth, He said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Joseph, when he was 14 years of age, had an experience in that glorious First Vision that was different from any other recorded experience of any man. At no other time of which we have any record have God, our Eternal Father, and His Beloved Son, the risen Lord, appeared on earth together.

At the time of the baptism of Jesus by John in the river Jordan, the voice of God was heard, but He was not seen. At the Mount of Transfiguration, again the voice of God was heard, but there is no record of His appearance. Stephen saw the Lord on the right hand of the Father, but They did not address or instruct him.

Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Nephites in the Western Hemisphere. The voice of the Almighty was heard three times, introducing the

risen Christ, but there was no appearance of the Father.

How truly remarkable was that vision in the year 1820 when Joseph prayed in the woods and there appeared before him both the Father and the Son. One of these spoke to him, calling him by name and, pointing to the other, said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

Nothing like it had ever happened before. One is led to wonder why it was so important that both the Father and the Son appear. I think it was because They were ushering in the dispensation of the fulness of times, the last and final dispensation of the gospel, when there would be gathered together in one the elements of all previous dispensations. This was to be the final chapter in the long chronicle of God's dealing with men and women upon the earth.

The nature of Deity

Following the Savior's death, the Church He had established drifted into apostasy. Fulfilled were the words of Isaiah, who said, "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant" (Isaiah 24:5).

Realizing the importance of knowing the true nature of God, men had struggled to find a way to define Him. Learned clerics argued with one another. When Constantine became a Christian in the fourth century, he called together a great convocation of learned men with the hope that they could reach a conclusion of understanding concerning the true nature of Deity. All they reached was a compromise of various points of view. The result was the Nicene Creed of A.D. 325. This and subsequent creeds have become the declaration of doctrine concerning the nature of Deity for most of Christianity ever since.

I have read them all a number of times. I cannot understand them. I think others cannot understand them. I am sure that the Lord also knew that many would not understand them. And so in 1820, in that incomparable vision, the Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph. They spoke to him with words that were audible, and he spoke to Them. They could see. They could speak. They could hear. They were personal. They were of substance. They were not imaginary beings. They were beings tabernacled in flesh. And out of that experience has come our unique and true understanding of the nature of Deity.

No wonder that when Joseph in 1842 wrote the Articles of Faith, he stated as number one, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:1).

Great influence of the Book of Mormon

As all of you well know, there followed through the years a veritable “cloud of witnesses,” as Paul described prophetically (see Hebrews 12:1).

First came Moroni with the plates from which was translated the Book of Mormon. What a singular and remarkable thing this was. Joseph’s story of the gold plates was fantastic. It was hard to believe and easy to challenge. Could he have written it of his own capacity? It is here, my brothers and sisters, for everyone to see, to handle, to read. Every attempt to explain its origin, other than that which he gave, has fallen of its own weight. He was largely unschooled, and yet in a very brief time he brought forth the translation which in published form comes to more than 500 pages.

Paul declares that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).

The Bible had stood for centuries. It is a precious and wonderful book. Now

there was a second witness declaring the divinity of Christ. The Book of Mormon is the only book ever published, of which I know, that carries in it a promise that one who reads it prayerfully and asks concerning it in prayer will have revealed to him by the power of the Holy Ghost a knowledge that it is true (see Moroni 10:4).

Since its first publication in a rural print shop in Palmyra, New York, there have been more than 133 million copies produced. It has been translated into 105 languages. Not long ago it was named one of the 20 most influential books ever published in North America. Recently a first edition sold for \$105,000. But the cheapest paperback edition is as valuable to the reader who loves its language and message.

Through all of these years, critics have tried to explain it. They have spoken against it. They have ridiculed it. But it has outlived them all, and its influence today is greater than at any time in its history.

Priesthood and Church restored

In this series of events came next the restoration of the priesthood, bestowed by resurrected beings who held it when the Savior walked the earth. This occurred in 1829, when Joseph was only 23.

Following receipt of the priesthood, the Church was organized on the 6th of April, 1830, when Joseph was a young man not yet 25. Again, the organization is unique and different from that of traditional Christianity. It is largely operated by a lay ministry. Voluntary service is its genius. As it has grown and spread abroad, thousands upon thousands of faithful and able men have directed its efforts.

Witness of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Today I stand in wonder at the marvelous things which God revealed to His

appointed prophet while he was yet young and largely unknown. The very language of these revelations is beyond the capacity of even a man of great learning.

Scholars not of our faith, who will not accept our singular doctrines, are puzzled by the great unrolling of this work, which is touching the hearts of people across the earth. We owe it all to Joseph the Prophet, the seer and the revelator, the Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was foreordained to come forth in this generation as an instrument in the hands of the Almighty in restoring to the earth that which the Savior taught when He walked the roads of Palestine.

To you this day, I affirm my witness of the calling of the Prophet Joseph, of his works, of the sealing of his testimony with his blood as a martyr to the eternal truth. Each of you can bear witness of the same thing. You and I are faced with the stark question of accepting the truth of the First

Vision and that which followed it. On the question of its reality lies the very validity of this Church. If it is the truth—and I testify that it is—then the work in which we are engaged is the most important work on the earth.

I leave with you my testimony of the truth of these things, and I invoke the blessings of heaven upon you. May the windows of heaven be opened and blessings showered upon you as the Lord has promised. Never forget that this was His promise and that He has the power and the capacity to see that it is fulfilled. I so pray as I leave my blessing and love with you in the sacred name of our Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “How Firm a Foundation.”

Elder Wolfgang H. Paul offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 177th Semiannual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 7, 2007. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir. Andrew Unsworth and Richard Elliott were the organists.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 177th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinck-

ley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, the Internet, and satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Andrew Unsworth and Richard Elliott at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “Beautiful Zion, Built Above.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Robert S. Wood of the Seventy.

Following the invocation, the choir will sing “Our Prayer to Thee,” with soloist Scott Miller. Elders Robert D. Hales