

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 178th Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 4, 2008. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir, directed by Mack Wilberg and Ed Thompson, with Clay Christiansen and Andrew Unsworth as the organists. To begin this session, the choir sang “High on the Mountain Top.” President Monson then made the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

My brothers and sisters, as we begin this first general session of the 178th Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we extend a special welcome to members and friends throughout the world as you participate with us in the proceedings of this conference.

We acknowledge with appreciation the General Authorities and the general auxiliary presidencies who are in attendance at this conference.

We are grateful to the many television and radio stations and satellite and cable systems for offering their facilities

as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Mack Wilberg and Ed Thompson, with Clay Christiansen and Andrew Unsworth at the organ. The choir opened this session by singing “High on the Mountain Top” and will now favor us with “Redeemer of Israel.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Shayne M. Bowen of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Redeemer of Israel.” Elder Shayne M. Bowen offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you. It will now be my pleasure to address you. Following my remarks, the choir will sing “Oh, May My Soul Commune with Thee.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us, after which we shall hear from Sister Silvia H. Allred, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency. Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Presidency of the Seventy will then speak to us.

President Thomas S. Monson

Temple dedications and cultural events

My dear brothers and sisters, the past six months since last we met seem to have flown by. Much has transpired as the work of the Lord has moved forward uninterrupted.

It has been my privilege, accompanied by my counselors and by other General Authorities, to dedicate three new

temples: in Curitiba, Brazil; in Panama City, Panama; and in Twin Falls, Idaho—bringing to 128 the number of temples in operation throughout the world.

The evening before each of the temple dedications took place, magnificent cultural events were held. In Curitiba, Brazil, 4,330 members from the temple district, supported by a choir of 1,700

voices, presented a most inspirational program through song, dance, and video. The enormous soccer stadium where the event took place was filled with spectators. The wind had been blowing, and rain threatened. I offered a silent prayer asking Heavenly Father to look with mercy upon those who had prepared so diligently for our entertainment and whose costumes and presentations would be damaged if a heavy rain or wind enveloped them. He honored that prayer, and it wasn't until the end of the show and later on that evening that rain fell in abundance.

A history of the Church in Brazil was portrayed in song and dance. A particularly moving scene was the portrayal of Elders James E. Faust and William Grant Bangerter, who served as missionaries in Curitiba in 1940. As their photos were displayed on large screens, a tremendous cheer went up from the audience. All in all, it was a glorious event.

In Panama City, Panama, the evening before the dedication of the temple there, we watched some 900 of our youth who were gathered from across Panama. They were dressed in colorful folkloric costumes as they danced and presented messages of family, fellowship, and faith. We learned that they had been practicing for a year. They came from points as distant as the San Blas Islands and the Changuinola region in northeast Panama. The trip to the capital city for the San Blas youth exacted three days of travel over land and sea. The event was magnificent and inspiring.

In preparation for our most recent temple dedication, in Twin Falls, Idaho, local Church members constructed a huge stage at the Filer, Idaho, fairgrounds and filled the dirt arena with sod and other decorations, including a large waterfall to represent Shoshone Falls, a popular landmark located two miles from the new temple. The evening of the performance, 3,200 young men and young women entered the arena waving blue and white ribbons, turning the arena into a representation of a

great river of flowing water. Titled "Living Water," from John 4:10, 14, the celebration brought together youth from 14 stakes in the new temple district. They depicted through song and dance both their dependence for their spiritual lives on the living water from the Savior and their dependence for their physical lives on the mountain streams and rivers in their area. Those of us privileged to witness this event were uplifted and edified.

I am an advocate for such events. They enable our youth to participate in something they truly find unforgettable. The friendships they form and the memories they make will be theirs forever.

Next month the Mexico City Mexico Temple will be rededicated following extensive renovations. In the coming months, the construction of other temples will be completed, and open houses and dedications will take place.

Announcement of new temples

This morning I am pleased to announce five new temples for which sites have been acquired and which, in coming months and years, will be built in the following locations: Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Córdoba, Argentina; the greater Kansas City area; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Rome, Italy.

Expanding missionary work

Brothers and sisters, our missionary force, serving throughout the world, continues to seek out those who are searching for the truths which are found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church is steadily growing; it has since its organization over 178 years ago.

It has been my privilege during the past six months to meet with leaders of countries and with representatives of governments. Those with whom I've met feel kindly toward the Church and our members, and they have been cooperative and

accommodating. There remain, however, areas of the world where our influence is limited and where we are not allowed to share the gospel freely. As did President Spencer W. Kimball over 32 years ago, I urge you to pray for the opening of those areas, that we might share with them the joy of the gospel. As we prayed then in response to President Kimball's pleadings, we saw miracles unfold as country after country, formerly closed to the Church, was opened. Such will transpire again as we pray with faith.

Conference messages will inspire

Now, my brothers and sisters, we have come here to be instructed and inspired. Some of you are new in the Church. We welcome you. Some of you are struggling

with problems, with challenges, with disappointments, with losses. We love you and pray for you. Many messages will be shared during the next two days. I can assure you that those men and women who will speak to you have prayed about what they should say. They have been inspired and impressed as they have sought heaven's help and direction.

Our Heavenly Father is mindful of each one of us and our needs. May we be filled with His Spirit as we partake of the proceedings of this, the 178th Semiannual General Conference of the Church. This is my sincere prayer, and I offer it in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Oh, May My Soul Commune with Thee."

Elder L. Tom Perry

Faith that the best is yet to come

Those of us who have been around a while—and Elder Wirthlin and I have been around for a long time—have recognized certain patterns in life's test. There are cycles of good and bad times, ups and downs, periods of joy and sadness, and times of plenty as well as scarcity. When our lives turn in an unanticipated and undesirable direction, sometimes we experience stress and anxiety. One of the challenges of this mortal experience is to not allow the stresses and strains of life to get the better of us—to endure the varied seasons of life while remaining positive, even optimistic. Perhaps when difficulties and challenges strike, we should have these hopeful words of Robert Browning etched in our minds: "The best is yet to be" ("Rabbi Ben Ezra," in Charles W. Eliot, ed., *The Harvard Classics*, 50 vols. [1909–10], 42:1103). We can't predict all the struggles and storms in life, not even the ones just around the next corner, but

as persons of faith and hope, we know beyond the shadow of any doubt that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true and the best is yet to come.

Simplifying overly complex lives

I remember a particular period of my life when I was under unusual stress. There were troubles with my employment, and at the same time my wife was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. This was one of those times when it felt like the adversary had mounted a frontal assault against me and my family. On days when the stresses and anxieties of our tumultuous life were about to get the best of us, my wife and I found a way to relieve them.

We drove to a place just a few miles from our home to get away for a few moments of relief from our troubles, talk, and give emotional comfort to each other. Our place was Walden Pond. It was a beautiful little pond surrounded by forests of trees.