

Elder Thomas S. Monson

We welcome to their new responsibilities and opportunities President Dwan J. Young and her counselors, Virginia B. Cannon and Michaelene P. Grassli. Certainly President Naomi Shumway and her counselors, Colleen B. Lemmon and Dorthea Lou C. Murdock, have established an enviable record of service on which to build.

Tribute to Primary leaders

Today I desire also to pay tribute to another Primary leader—a noble woman and personal friend. I speak of LaVern W. Parmley, former president of the Primary Association of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and former member of the National Advisory Council, Boy Scouts of America. Sister Parmley, as she was affectionately addressed by those who knew her, completed her mission here on earth on Sunday, 27 January 1980. Her funeral services followed a few days later, where in word and song eulogies were expressed and comfort extended to those in attendance.

LaVern Parmley and Naomi Shumway, together with their counselors, gave freely of their time and talents over a span of many years, teaching little children to walk in the light of the gospel of Christ. They taught each child to sing with personal conviction:

*I am a child of God, . . .
Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday*

("I Am a Child of God," *Sing with Me*, B-76).

Teaching boys

Part of their great love was teaching boys. Their inspired objective was to prepare them to receive the Aaronic Priesthood and to walk uprightly along the Scouting trail.

Under their direction, all eleven-year-old boys were asked to commit to memory the Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You remember them. May I mention just two:

"We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost" (A of F 1:1).

"We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things" (A of F 1:13).

Can you think of a more firm foundation, a more basic philosophy to guide a boy, than the Articles of Faith? What a gift these noble women imparted when they expected each boy to know and indeed live by such a standard. They personally accepted the divine injunction, "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs" (see John 21:15-16).

John the Baptist

Some may inquire: What is the significance of the Aaronic Priesthood for which such preparation takes place? Is it all that important in the life of a boy? The Priesthood of Aaron "is an appendage to the . . . Melchizedek Priesthood, and has power in administering outward ordinances" (D&C 107:14). John the

Baptist was a descendant of Aaron and held the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood. Perhaps we could review the life and mission of John, so that the importance of the Aaronic Priesthood might be more fully appreciated.

Long years ago and distant miles away, in the conquered country of Palestine, a marvelous miracle occurred. The setting was bleak, the time one of tumult. In these, the days of Herod, king of Judea, there lived a priest named Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth. "They were . . . righteous before God (Luke 1:6). However, long years of yearning had returned no reward—Zacharias and Elisabeth remained childless.

Then came that day of days ever to be remembered. There appeared to Zacharias the angel Gabriel, who proclaimed: "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

"He shall be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:13-15).

Elisabeth did conceive. In due time a son was born, and according to the angel's instruction he was named John.

As with the Master, Jesus Christ, so with the servant, John—precious little is recorded of their years of youth. A single sentence contains all that we know of John's history for a space of thirty years—the entire period which elapsed between his birth and his walk into the wilderness to commence his public ministry: "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (Luke 1:80).

His dress was that of the old prophets—a garment woven of camel's hair. His food was such as the desert afforded—locusts and wild honey. His message was brief. He

preached faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and the bestowal of the Holy Ghost by an authority greater than that possessed by himself.

"I am not the Christ" (John 1:20); he told his band of faithful disciples. "But I am sent before him." "I indeed baptize you with water . . . but one mightier than I cometh. . . : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire (see Matt. 3:11).

Baptism of Christ

Then there transpired the climactic scene of John's mission—the baptism of Christ. Jesus came down from Galilee expressly "to be baptized" by John. Humbled of heart and contrite in spirit, John pleaded, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" The Master's reply: "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." (See Matt. 3:13-15.)

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

John's testimony that Jesus was the redeemer of the world was declared boldly. Without fear, and with courage, John taught: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Of John, the Savior later testified, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11).

John's public ministry moved toward its close. He had, at the beginning of it, condemned the hypocrisy and worldliness of the Pharisees and Sadducees; and he now had occasion to denounce the lust of a king.

The result is well known. A king's weakness and a woman's fury combined to bring about the death of John.

Restoration of Aaronic Priesthood

The tomb in which his body was placed could not contain that body. Nor could the act of murder still that voice. To the world we declare that at Harmony, Pennsylvania, on 15 May 1829, an angel, "who announced himself as John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament" (D&C 13, section heading), came as a resurrected personage to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. "The angelic visitant averred that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John, the ancient Apostles, who held the keys of the higher Priesthood, which was called the Priesthood of Melchizedek" (D&C 13, section heading). The Aaronic Priesthood was restored to the earth.

"Ministering of angels"

Thanks to that memorable event, I was given the privilege to bear the Aaronic Priesthood, as have millions of young men in these latter days. Its true significance was taught me by my former stake president, the late Paul C. Child.

When I was approaching my eighteenth birthday and preparing to enter military service in World War II, I was recommended to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. Mine was the task of telephoning President Child for an appointment and interview. He was one who loved and understood the holy scriptures. It was his intent that all others should similarly love and understand them. Knowing from others of his rather detailed and searching interviews, our telephone conversation went something like this:

"Hello, President Child. This is Brother Monson. I have been asked by the bishop to seek an interview with you."

"Fine, Brother Monson. When can you visit me?"

Knowing that his sacrament meeting time was six o'clock, and desiring minimum exposure of my scriptural knowledge to his review, I suggested, "How would five o'clock be?"

His response: "Oh, Brother Monson, that would not provide us sufficient time to peruse the scriptures. Could you please come at two o'clock, and bring with you your personally marked and referenced set of scriptures."

Sunday finally arrived, and I visited President Child's home on Indiana Avenue. I was greeted warmly, and then the interview began. He said: "Brother Monson, you hold the Aaronic Priesthood. Have you ever had angels minister to you?"

My reply was: "No, President Child."

"Do you know," said he, "that you are entitled to such?"

Again came my response: "No."

Then he instructed, "Brother Monson, repeat from memory the thirteenth section of the Doctrine and Covenants."

I began, "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels . . ." (D&C 13:1).

"Stop," President Child directed. Then in a calm, kindly tone he counseled: "Brother Monson, never forget that as a holder of the Aaronic Priesthood you are entitled to the ministering of angels." It was almost as though an angel were in the room that day. I have never forgotten the interview. I yet feel the spirit of that solemn occasion. I revere the priesthood of Almighty God. I have wit-

nessed its power. I have seen its strength. I have marveled at the miracles it has wrought.

Authority of Aaronic Priesthood

Almost thirty years ago I knew a boy, even a priest, who held the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood. As the bishop, I was his quorum president. This boy, Robert, stuttered and stammered, void of control. Self-conscious, shy, fearful of himself and all others, he had an impediment of speech which was devastating to him. Never did he fulfill an assignment; never would he look another in the eye; always would he gaze downward. Then one day, through a set of unusual circumstances, he accepted an assignment to perform the priestly responsibility to baptize another.

I sat next to him in the baptistry of this sacred tabernacle. He was dressed in immaculate white, prepared for the ordinance he was to perform. I asked Robert how he felt. He gazed at the floor and stuttered almost incoherently that he felt terrible.

We both prayed fervently that he would be made equal to his task. Then the clerk read the words: "Nancy Ann McArthur will now be baptized by Robert Williams, a priest." Robert left my side, stepped into the font, took little Nancy by the hand, and helped her into that water which cleanses human lives and provides a spiritual rebirth. He then gazed as though toward heaven and, with his right arm to the square, repeated the words "Nancy Ann McArthur, having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (see D&C 20:73). Not once did he stammer. Not once did he stutter. Not once did he falter. A modern miracle had been witnessed.

In the dressing room, as I congratulated Robert, I expected to hear this same uninterrupted flow of speech. I was wrong. He gazed downward and stammered his reply of gratitude.

To each of you this day, I testify that when Robert acted in the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood, he spoke with power, with conviction, and with heavenly help.

Such is the legacy of one called John, even John the Baptist. We hear his voice today. It teaches humility; it prompts courage; it inspires faith.

May we be motivated by his message. May we be inspired by his mission. May we be lifted by his life to a full appreciation of the Aaronic Priesthood and its divine power. I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Following Elder Monson's remarks, the Choir sang "Praise Ye the Lord" without announcement.

President N. Eldon Tanner

Elder Thomas S. Monson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us. He was followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Praise Ye the Lord."

Elder David B. Haight, also a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will be our next speaker.

Elder David B. Haight

I pray for divine direction and an interest in your faith and prayers as I

express the convictions of my soul this morning.