

To all who have loved and lost on either side of this tragic conflict, your grief can be assuaged. There is balm in Gilead. There awaits the promise of a new day. There echoes from a land not far from where your loved ones fell even a promise of peace, spoken by our Lord, the Prince of Peace:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there ye may be also" (14:2-3).

His love, His promise, His presence is as a yellow ribbon, tied with care and marked with compassion. To your loved ones He has beckoned, "Welcome home." To you He speaks the heavenly and divine assurance: "I am with you; you are never alone."

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

To these words I add my witness: God lives, and His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. Tonight my wife and I shall join millions of you as we kneel in solemn prayer and supplication. We shall acknowledge His holy hand in our lives. And from our hearts will come our expression of gratitude, "Thanks be to God." In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "Precious Savior, Dear Redeemer" without announcement.

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### President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Precious Savior, Dear Redeemer."

President Howard W. Hunter, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now speak to us.

## President Howard W. Hunter

### The organizing of the Church

On the sixth of April, 1830, 161 years ago yesterday, a group of men and women, acting in obedience to a commandment of God, assembled in the house of Mr. Peter Whitmer to organize The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This church, in whose annual worldwide conference we are gathered today and that had been prophesied to be a latter-day marvelous work and a wonder, has come forth from the most humble of beginnings.

Six men comprised the total membership of the Church that day. None

of them laid any claim to special learning or significant leadership. They were honorable people and respectable citizens but were virtually unknown outside of their own immediate neighborhood.

We can get a good picture of the moral and economic atmosphere of the circle of six from the description in the *History of the Church* of one of the local citizens, Mr. Joseph Knight. The history states that he "owned a farm, a grist mill and carding machine. He was not rich, yet he possessed enough of this world's goods to secure to himself and family, not only the necessaries, but also the comforts of life. . . . [He]

was a sober, honest man, generally respected and beloved by his neighbors and acquaintances. He did not belong to any religious sect, but was a believer" (*History of the Church*, 1:47). Of such ordinary, honest people was the group composed that assembled in Peter Whitmer's house in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, more than a century and a half ago.

### A humble beginning

Most of life's momentous hours are recorded, but what these men did on that humble occasion would not have given the world much reason to take note. What they did, however, ranks among the most important events ever to have transpired since the death of Jesus and his Apostles in the meridian of time.

These humble, ordinary men gathered because one of them, Joseph Smith, Jr., a very young man, had set forth a most remarkable claim. He declared to them and all others who would listen that he had received profound and repeated heavenly communications, including an open vision of God the Father and his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. As a result of these revelatory experiences, Joseph Smith had already published the Book of Mormon, a record of Christ's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of America. Furthermore, the Lord had commanded this young man, by now only twenty-four years of age, to reinstitute the Church that had existed in New Testament times and that in its restored purity should again be designated by the name of its chief cornerstone and eternal head, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Thus, humbly but most significantly was opened the first scene in the great Church drama that eventually would affect not only that generation of men but the entire human family, including everyone within the sound of

my voice today. A humble beginning, yes, but the claim that God had spoken, that Christ's church was again organized and its doctrines reaffirmed by divine revelation, was the most outstanding declaration made to the world since the days of the Savior himself when he walked the paths of Judea and the hills of Galilee.

### Comparison of Joseph Smith and Paul

When men heard that young Joseph Smith was claiming God had manifested Himself to the boy, they mocked him and turned away from him, just as in the Christian era wise and able men in Athens turned away from a singular man ministering in their midst. Yet the fact remains that Paul, in that earlier experience, was the only man in that great city of learning who knew that a person may pass through the portals of death and live. He was the only man in Athens who could clearly delineate the difference between the formality of idolatry and the heartfelt worship of the only true and living God. The Epicureans and Stoics, with whom he had conversed and argued, called Paul a babbler, a setter forth of strange gods. The record states:

"And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?"

"For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. . . ."

"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:19-20, 22-23).

Surely from an intellectual standpoint and in terms of formal education, Joseph Smith was as unlearned and wholly untrained in the ministry as Paul was—probably even less learned and trained. Yet something made him very bold in his declarations against the false doctrines pertaining to infant baptism, self-appointed priesthood, predestination, and other erroneous teachings of the day.

### **“I will be hung in your stead”**

As with Paul, many scorned Joseph Smith and scoffed at his teachings when he declared that he had received revelations from the Lord. Others loved him and felt as Willard Richards did when he said: “Brother Joseph you did not ask me to cross the river with you—you did not ask me to come to Carthage—you did not ask me to come to jail with you—and do you think I would forsake you now? But I will tell you what I will do; if you are condemned to be hung for treason, I will be hung in your stead, and you shall go free” (*History of the Church*, 6:616).

How reminiscent of those who loved the Lord when he walked as a man on the shores of Galilee. Even as Jesus was persecuted, stoned, condemned, and finally crucified, some of his disciples felt as Thomas did when he said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

### **Revelations to Joseph Smith**

Joseph Smith was not only a great man, but he was an inspired servant of the Lord, a prophet of God. His greatness consists in one thing: the truthfulness of his declaration that he saw the Father and the Son and that he responded to the reality of that divine revelation. Part of the divine revelation was instruction to reestablish the true

and living church, restored in these modern times as it existed in the day of the Savior’s own mortal ministry. The Prophet Joseph Smith said the Church of Jesus Christ was “organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by Him to ourselves in these last days, as well as according to the order of the Church as recorded in the New Testament” (*History of the Church*, 1:79).

### **Faith in God is the foundation**

For the first time in eighteen hundred years, God had revealed himself as a personal being. Furthermore, the Father and the Son demonstrated the undeniable truth that they are separate and distinct personages. Indeed, the relationship of the Father and the Son was reaffirmed by the divine introduction to the boy prophet, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17). Those who were baptized into the Church on the sixth of April, 1830, believed in the existence of a personal God; they believed that his reality and the reality of his Son, Jesus Christ, constitute the eternal foundation upon which this church is built.

Once we accept Christ as divine, it is easy to visualize his Father as being just as personal as he. Christ said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Faith in the existence of a divine and real and living personal God was the first element that contributed to the perpetuity of the Church of Jesus Christ in ancient times, and it is the everlasting foundation upon which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is built today.

### **A worldwide church**

On April 6, 1830, the Church was officially organized with its six mem-

bers. That action was largely unknown to the world at that time and would come to be known only to the extent that it contained and radiated eternal principles that harmonize with all other truth coming from God, the author of all truth. Only thus, through its truthfulness, could it and would it ever become a marvelous work and a wonder.

Today, from those humble beginnings those many years ago, there are units and members of that church almost literally around the face of the earth. The marvelous progress in transportation and communication has made possible the promulgation of these truths of the restored gospel to the children of men nearly everywhere in the world. Millions in America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the islands of the sea have been able not only to hear but, in millions of cases, to accept and commit to these saving principles of the gospel of truth.

We represent and speak today for a worldwide Church, the organized and established kingdom of God on earth. I bear you my testimony that the church organized in obscurity 161 years ago yesterday is indeed the Church of Jesus Christ. I declare that God lives, that he is a personal God who hears and answers our prayers, that he is the Father he has always declared himself in scripture to be. He is undoubtedly more than we can fully understand him to be, but he is certainly not less than we understand.

I testify that Jesus Christ is his Only Begotten Son, the Savior of the

world, and that the Father and the Son did appear to the Prophet Joseph Smith to initiate this great rolling forth of the latter-day work in our time.

I testify that the boy prophet, who in so many ways remains the central miracle in the 161 years of this church's experience, is living proof that, within God's hands and under the direction of the Savior of the world, weak and simple things should come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones. In this anniversary season of the organization of the Church, I bear testimony of its truthfulness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "See What Love" without announcement.

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#### **President Hinckley**

We have just heard from President Howard W. Hunter, President of the Council of Twelve Apostles. The choir then sang "See What Love."

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," following which we shall hear from Bishop Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric.

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The choir and congregation sang "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

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## **Bishop Henry B. Eyring**

### **We must believe in God**

You talk with people every day who say that God does not exist or is far, far away. A woman sat next to me on a plane. I spoke to her. She strained

to understand me. When she spoke, her accent almost overpowered her English. In answer to my question, she told me that she was returning to the place of her birth. She said that the occasion which drew her was a reli-