

be offered by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone of the Seventy. We ask that he remember our colleague Brother Derek Cuthbert in that prayer.

The choir sang "Praise Ye the Lord."

Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Featherstone. We are pleased to mention that President Benson was here during the session this morning. He waved his greet-

ings to the congregation and is watching the proceedings in his apartment by television.

The choir will now sing "Consolation: I Am a Child of God." Upon the cue from Brother Ottley, we ask the congregation to join in singing the first verse of "I Am a Child of God."

Following the singing, Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will speak to us.

The choir sang "Consolation: I Am a Child of God," and the congregation joined in singing the first verse of "I Am a Child of God."

Elder David B. Haight

The dispensation of the fulness of times

Yesterday, April the 6th, as we have been reminded today, marked the 161st anniversary of the reestablishment of our Lord's church in these latter days. The history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also a history of the dispensation of the fulness of times.

A dispensation is the dispensing of blessings or afflictions by Deity, as appropriate. A dispensation is also defined as a period when God has revealed his mind and will to man. It "means the opening of the heavens to men; the . . . dispensing to them the word of God; the revealing to men . . . the principles and ordinances of the Gospel; the conferring of divine authority upon . . . chosen ones, by which they are empowered to act in the name . . . [and] authority of God. . . . The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times is the dispensation which includes all others," both in heaven and on earth. It is the dispensation which will fulfill

all of the decrees of a loving Heavenly Father for "the salvation of [all] men and the redemption of the earth itself" (*History of the Church*, 1:xxiii).

An inspired Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, "It is necessary . . . that a . . . welding together of dispensations . . . should take place . . . from the days of Adam even to the present time" (D&C 128:18).

The gospel, of course, is of great antiquity. In the heavenly kingdom it was formed before the foundation of the earth. From the very first, the plan of man's progression and salvation was known. (See *History of the Church*, 1:xxiii-xxiv.)

This period of time in which we live, the dispensation of the fulness of times, will see the culmination of all of God's work on the earth. For this reason, we are anxiously engaged in the Lord's work, which includes the performance of certain ordinances for all who have lived and will live upon the earth.

Granite Mountain Records Vault

Just a few minutes' drive to the southeast of where we are, in one of the many beautiful canyons that grace these Wasatch Mountains, stands a huge granite mountain. From the road deep in the canyon floor, most automobile passengers do not see the large, arched portals cut high in the side of the mountain. Few would realize that behind these portals are six large storage rooms cut deep into the solid granite and that in them lie the world's largest collection of genealogical records. These are not ordinary records, but records listing the births, marriages, and deaths of nearly two billion people who have lived on the earth. They are the product of over fifty years of tireless effort the world over by Church representatives, by microfilm camera operators, and by those who care for these records housed row upon row in microfilm cabinets deep in the mountain. The magnitude of this project to gather and preserve these records is awesome to behold.

Why we gather records

"Why do you do this?" some ask. "Why does the Church commit millions of dollars and tens of thousands of hours to this immense but unusual project? Why have such great concern for those who have died?"

Our answer is simple yet profound: "Because we love them. Because they are entitled to the same blessings that we enjoy. Because this is a major part of the heavenly plan for this, the dispensation of the fulness of times, for the blessing of all people."

We gather these records to identify our ancestors. We identify our ancestors so that we may perform for them the saving ordinances of the gospel in holy temples dedicated to that purpose. It is our responsibility, given

to us by the Lord, to help redeem all those of our Father's children who have lived and died without receiving the sacred ordinances of the gospel. Yet all have the opportunity to accept or reject the ordinances performed in their behalf.

Conversation with a British lawyer

Several years ago I was riding on a train from Edinburgh, Scotland, to Glasgow with a noted British lawyer. We had engaged him to present our claim of discrimination by the city council of Glasgow. We were seeking a building permit, which had been repeatedly denied by the city council at the instigation of an opposing ministerial group as not needed inasmuch as there was an abundance of vacant or unused church buildings. We had been granted a hearing before the secretary of state for Scotland, a member of the prime minister's cabinet.

As the early morning train sped toward Glasgow, I asked the distinguished counsel if he had any additional questions about our church. I was concerned about his limited understanding of our expansion, of why we were building modern church buildings and why we had hundreds of missionaries in Great Britain. He assured me that he was quite comfortable in representing us and presenting our case that to him appeared to have merit.

As we discussed other aspects of our growing presence in Great Britain, he said, "I hear, but it couldn't be true, that you baptize for dead people."

I said, "Yes, it is true—not only true that we do it today, but the eternal principle of vicarious service of baptism for the dead was taught during our Savior's earthly ministry."

I explained that all of God's worthy children of all ages can become heirs of salvation in His kingdom. I

briefly reminded the lawyer of Jesus teaching Nicodemus that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

"Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born [again] when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5).

I also made reference to the early Apostles' teachings regarding Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of all, including Paul's great statement: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:29).

The engaged lawyer seemed comfortable. He presented our case effectively. We won our building permit. The chapel now stands in Glasgow, Scotland.

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared:

"Let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation. . . . They without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect" (D&C 128:15).

FamilySearch™

"But how?" you might say. "Even with the millions of rolls of microfilm at my fingertips, even with the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and the hundreds of family history centers located in stake centers and ward meetinghouses scattered across the earth, how can I unlock the secrets hidden away in those microfilms and identify my ancestors?"

Genealogy has long been associated with tedium, painstaking research, and musty books. But no more! Now we have available a modern miracle called FamilySearch. FamilySearch is a powerful, innovative computer system. In response to your typing in a name of one of your ancestors at a keyboard, FamilySearch, in just moments, races through millions of names and finds any that match what you typed. It knows how to match names that are spelled differently but sound the same. It can guide you from one small fragment of sketchy information to full screens of information—dates and places of birth, marriage, and death; and names of parents, children, and spouses.

To store all of this information, FamilySearch uses little compact discs—the same electronic marvels that you see in the record stores. Each disc can store as many as five million names.

FamilySearch includes many different kinds of records: publicly available government records from the military and other agencies as well as the Family History Library's own catalog, an index to completed temple ordinances, and family pedigrees contributed from people the world over. Each of these files is a valuable contribution to our efforts in fulfilling our mandate.

Ancestral File™

One of the most promising and helpful features of FamilySearch is Ancestral File. It has made the world much smaller because it has put total strangers with common ancestry in touch with each other. Suddenly, Church members and nonmembers alike are finding new cousins and thousands of deceased ancestors at the press of a computer key.

By using Ancestral File at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City or at one of the local libraries scattered across the country, you are able to view on a computer screen the pedigrees and family group records of more than seven million people, and the file is continually growing as you and your friends contribute your own data to the file. Many of those listed are your relatives and mine. You can also see on the computer screen the names and addresses of each person who has submitted the information, thereby enabling you to make contact and exchange information and verify the facts.

Some of you may be intimidated or have a fear of using computers. This need not be.

Ellie is twelve. She was planning to go to the Family History Library with her Beehive class. She was a little apprehensive, not having been before. But her father told her not to worry. All she needed to do to get started was to use the computer.

But Ellie smiled. She was sure that her father was joking, and she replied, "Oh, I could never do that. I couldn't even work the computer."

The day arrived for her visit to the library. Ellie and her friend Cami decided to give the computer a try. They quickly learned that if they would read and follow the instructions on the screen, they would do just fine.

It was an excited Ellie who returned home that evening. "So you found some names you recognized?" her father asked. "Oh, yes! At first I looked for Grandpa's name, and I found it. Then I looked for Uncle Steve, and he was there. And then I looked for me, and I was there. I found me! I was right there on the screen! And all of the other family names filled up the whole screen. When can we go again?" she said.

A nonmember in Wisconsin, with other family members, has been stymied by lack of information on her great-grandfather. She decided to try Ancestral File and, after some searching, discovered her great-grandfather, the very one she had been looking for for many years. Shortly she had transferred to her disk several thousand additional names and over 1,300 marriages on this previously "dead-end" line. She too is entering thousands of additional names on other lines to contribute to Ancestral File.

One member from Georgia was able to extend his pedigree back to 1486 using Ancestral File and now has submitted hundreds of names for temple work.

Contributing to Ancestral File

Ancestral File will continue to increase in value as members and nonmembers contribute their family history research in a cooperative effort to identify and link the family of man. It catalogs extended family relationships—a sort of electronic book of remembrance full of pedigree charts and family group records—not only for your family but also the families of tens of thousands of others, indicating where your family line links with countless others.

Simple instructions on how you can contribute your family's accumulated information to Ancestral File are now available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and at the other centers in various stake centers and ward meetinghouses in the United States and Canada and, shortly, worldwide. Ask your ward family history consultant where the nearest center is to you, find out how to contribute your genealogical data into the computer, and then make that information available to the world.

Unlock the secrets of your ancestry

We know that God our Father is our greatest teacher, and nothing that we might read or hear should quicken our attention like His instructions and counsel. These marvelous new technological developments have been revealed in this dispensation in greater fulness and greater plainness than ever before in the history of the world as far as we know so that His purposes might be speedily brought to pass. The Church, in establishing family history centers, is now bringing these marvelous developments directly to you.

From Buckeye, Arizona, to Birmingham, Alabama; and from Sandpoint, Idaho, to Albany, New York; and from Calgary, Canada, to Montreal, Canada; and soon from Sydney, Australia, to London, England, the Saints will be able to go to a Church meetinghouse near their homes and unlock the secrets of their ancestry.

One of the most thrilling results of being involved in family research and genealogical research is becoming intimately acquainted with our ancestors—their challenges and achievements—and then showing our gratitude by performing for them the ordinances that will allow them to obtain the greatest of all gifts: the gift of eternal life.

Lord of the living and dead

James E. Talmage wrote: “Compliance with the ordinance [of baptism] has been shown to be essential to salvation, and this condition applies to all mankind. Nowhere in scripture is a distinction made in this regard between the living and the dead. . . . All are children of the same Father, all to be judged and rewarded or punished by the same unerring justice, with the same . . . mercy . . . for all inhabitants of earth . . . past, present, and future. . . . He is Lord alike of [all—the] living and dead” (*Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924], p. 145).

“Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand. . . . Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy temple . . . a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all [acceptance]” (D&C 128:24).

This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder David B. Haight of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard, also a member of the Council of the Twelve, and he will be followed by Elder Loren C. Dunn of the Seventy.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Christmas lighting celebration

During this past Christmas season, I had the privilege of participating in the Washington, D.C., Visitors' Center Christmas lighting celebration. When I turned on the 200,000 lights, they

seemed to dance and sparkle in the trees, with the majestic temple glowing in the background. That night, outside of their Soviet community for the first time, thirty-five children from the Soviet Embassy School performed.