

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 172nd Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 7, 2002. This session was conducted by President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe 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 172nd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, 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, cable, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

How firm our foundation

About two decades ago when a temple was to be built in Mexico City, architects faced a great challenge. Because Mexico City is situated on a basin over water, some of its buildings settle and become tilted with the passage of time. Construction of a temple there required a special foundation. Two hundred twenty-one large, reinforced concrete piles¹ were driven more than 100 feet deep into the ground. Onto those pilings, steel straps were anchored

The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing "Redeemer of Israel." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Monte J. Brough of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Redeemer of Israel."
Elder Monte J. Brough offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will sing "Joseph Smith's First Prayer." At the conclusion of the singing, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us. We shall then hear from Elders John M. Madsen, Carlos H. Amado, and Gene R. Cook of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Joseph Smith's First Prayer."

Elder Russell M. Nelson

and fastened to a unit that can be adjusted if need be to keep the building level.² With this unseen but sure foundation, that temple today stands steady and straight.

A firm foundation is necessary for any building, institution, or individual to endure. With that in mind, let us consider the foundation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Then let us see how the solid foundation of the Church supports our foundation of faith as individual members of the Church.

I. Foundation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

This Church stands on a unique foundation, anchored to a bedrock of timeless truth. Brothers and sisters, the holy cause in which we are engaged did not begin in 1820 in the state of New York. It did not begin in Bethlehem. It did not begin in the Garden of Eden. The underpinnings of the everlasting gospel were in place even before the world was.

This reality is affirmed repeatedly in holy writ. I have studied the scriptures pertaining to that part of eternity before the earth was formed. Don't worry. I won't quote them all. But I will append some of those citations to the published text of this message. These unseen and timeless truths constitute "premortal pillars" that undergird the foundation of this Church.

The plan of redemption and possibility of an inheritance in the kingdom of God

Before the foundation of the earth, the plan of salvation was prepared.³ It included the glorious possibility of a divine inheritance in the kingdom of God.⁴

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

Central to that plan was the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In premortal councils, He was foreordained by His Father to atone for our sins and break the bands of physical and spiritual death.⁵ Jesus declared: "I . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. . . . In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name."⁶ Later, Paul added that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."⁷

Opposition from the adversary

Even before the world was formed, the Lord was opposed by Satan.⁸ He and

his minions have always fought against the Savior's sacred work and will continue to do so.

Foreordination for and conferral of the priesthood

Before the foundation of the world, each of us existed as spirit children with our Father in Heaven. Among us were noble and great men foreordained to bear the priesthood.⁹ Abraham,¹⁰ Jeremiah,¹¹ Joseph Smith,¹² and others¹³ were destined to become prophets of God. Also foreseen was that the blood of prophets would be shed in this holy cause.¹⁴ The manner of conferring the priesthood was to come down from the fathers "from the beginning of time, . . . even . . . before the foundation of the earth."¹⁵

Sisters empowered to glorify God

Sisters received special gifts. They, according to the Lord, were empowered "to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, . . . for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; . . . herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified."¹⁶ Think of it: When a mother bears and cares for a child, she not only helps the earth answer the end of its creation,¹⁷ but she glorifies God!

Children of the covenant

Children of the covenant were designated in the premortal realm. Paul taught that the Lord "hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."¹⁸

Blessings predicated upon obedience to law

Then conditions were established that allowed us to receive blessings from God—upon obedience to laws upon which those blessings were predicated.¹⁹

Sacred things to be revealed in the latter days

Another pillar pertains to revelation reserved for the latter days. The Lord had long planned to reveal “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”²⁰ Those things included revelations recorded in the Book of Mormon.²¹ They also included ordinances and covenants of the holy temple.²² To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord declared that “I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times.”²³

Redemption of the dead

The Lord revealed that “the ordinance of baptizing for the dead . . . was instituted from before the foundation of the world.”²⁴ Salvation was thus made available for those “who should die without a knowledge of the gospel.”²⁵ A welding link between generations was provided, that a whole, complete, and perfect union of dispensations, keys, powers, and glories should take place.²⁶

Brothers and sisters, these unseen but sure pillars were in place before the world was. They undergird the everlasting gospel—now restored in its fulness.²⁷ With such a foundation, this Church will not be moved from its place,²⁸ even through the Millennium.²⁹

II. Foundation of individual members of the Church*Christ is the only sure foundation*

Just as buildings and institutions have foundations, so do we as individuals have foundations that support our faith. Some are weak; some are strong. We can waffle “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed,”³⁰ or we can stand on a firm foundation and anchor ourselves with straps of spiritual steel, rooted and

grounded to the timeless pillars of the gospel.³¹

President Gordon B. Hinckley has asked that new converts be sustained in the Church by a friend and a call to serve and be nourished by the good word of God.³² Often we sing, “How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord, / Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!”³³ When we receive that nurturing word of God, we feast upon His love.³⁴

Remember: “It is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, . . . when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power . . . to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation.”³⁵

Firm foundations help us bear life's burdens

Even firm foundations cannot prevent life's problems. Wayward children cause parents to grieve. Some broken families don't get fixed. Gender disorientation is poorly understood. Married couples, for whatever reason, may not be blessed with children. Even in our day, “the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money.”³⁶ Some things just don't seem fair.³⁷

With strong underpinnings, however, we are better able to reach upward for help, even when faced with questions without easy answers. The poet so wrote:

Who Thou art I know not,
But this much I know:
Thou hast set the Pleiades
In a silver row;

Thou hast sent the trackless winds
Loose upon their way;
Thou hast reared a colored wall
’Twixt the night and day;

Thou hast made the flowers to bloom
And the stars to shine;

Hid rare gems of richest ore
 In the tunneled mine;
 But chief of all Thy wondrous works,
 Supreme of all Thy plan,
 Thou hast put an upward reach
 In the heart of Man.³⁸

Though we don't know all things,³⁹
 we know that God lives and that He loves us.⁴⁰ Standing on that firm foundation, we can reach up and find strength to endure the heavy burdens of life.

Two faithful parents

For example, I honor those special souls who face challenges of parenthood with unwavering faith in their Maker. To a family dear to Sister Nelson and me, a son was recently born. This child was afflicted with multiple anomalies affecting virtually every system of his little body. Two operations were required in his first week of life. More will be necessary. When I spoke with the child's parents, they did not ask, "Why did this happen to us?" Instead, they declared, "We know that this child is meant for us. God has entrusted this special baby to us. We will love him and care for him to the best of our ability." Thank the Lord for such parents!

A faithful wife

Not long ago, death came to the husband of a friend of ours, suddenly and without warning. Of her, these words were penned by her own sister:

"Searching the years and days just past, she is awestruck, recognizing specific skills and experiences put into her life by a loving Father, things that might have seemed circumstantial at the time but that have specifically prepared her to cope successfully with this heartbreaking loss. Rather than feeling abandoned and bitter, she feels cradled and cared for. . . . She said to me, 'When I see how carefully Heavenly Father has prepared and planned for my present circumstance,

how can I be frightened about my future? Surely He is putting into place today all that I will need to face the unknown times ahead.'"⁴¹

A faithful missionary

From a missionary I received an unforgettable letter. He wrote:

"I still am not certain why it was that I was [afflicted] with [cancer], particularly during the time I was serving the Lord on a mission, but I can say with all honesty and sincerity that I am eternally grateful to our gracious Heavenly Father for allowing me to have that experience. . . .

"Not a day goes by," he continued, "that I don't think about the days I spent lying in the hospital suffering through chemotherapy or grimacing with the pain from another operation. . . . Not a day . . . passes when I don't think of the days I spent studying the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, and remembering the overwhelming feelings of comfort and peace which I felt. I often think of the nights when I would retire to bed and pour out my soul to my Heavenly Father and thank Him for preserving my life."

Then the elder shared this wonderful news: "I returned to the doctor this week . . . and . . . he found no evidence of any disease in my body."⁴²

I love such faithful missionaries!

How firm our foundation? The foundation of this Church was forged long before the world was. It is strong. It is true. It is eternal. The foundation of one's individual faith, if anchored firmly to eternal truth, allows each of us to reach upward with an eternal perspective.⁴³ That faith will give hope when there is no hope. It will give us joy here and eternal life hereafter. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Each pile was 18 inches in diameter.
2. See John Forres O'Donnal, *Pioneer in Guatemala* (1997), 288.

3. See 1 Nephi 10:18; Mosiah 15:19; Alma 12:25, 30; 18:39; 22:13–14; 42:26; Doctrine and Covenants 76:12–13.
4. To people of the Old World, the Lord said, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). People of ancient America were also taught that “they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world” (2 Nephi 9:18; see also Ether 4:19).
5. See John 17:5, 24; 1 Peter 1:19–20; Mosiah 4:6–7; 18:13; 3 Nephi 26:3–5; Doctrine and Covenants 93:7–9; Moses 5:57; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 5:43; 14:30–31.
6. Ether 3:14.
7. Ephesians 2:20.
8. See Joseph Smith Translation, Revelation 12:6–8.
9. See Alma 13:3, 5, 7; Doctrine and Covenants 132:28; 138:55–56; Abraham 3:22–23.
10. See Abraham 3:23.
11. See Jeremiah 1:4–5.
12. See 2 Nephi 3:5–15; Doctrine and Covenants 127:2; 138:53–55.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:53.
14. See Luke 11:49–51.
15. Abraham 1:3.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 132:63.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 49:16–17.
18. Ephesians 1:4; see also verse 5. Paul also taught that the power of God, “who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, . . . was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9; see also D&C 38:1–4; Abraham 3:22–26). It is important to note that the Book of Mormon serves “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord” (Book of Mormon, title page).
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21; 132:5, 11–12.
20. Matthew 13:35.
21. See 2 Nephi 27:10.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:40–41.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 124:41.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 124:33.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 128:5.
26. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.
27. See Acts 3:20–21.
28. See Daniel 2:28, 31–44; Doctrine and Covenants 65:2–6; 124:45.
29. See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (1982), 672.
30. James 1:6.
31. See Ephesians 3:17–19; Colossians 2:6–7.
32. See Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 71; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 51; see also Jacob 6:7; Moroni 6:4.
33. *Hymns*, no. 85; see also 2 Nephi 28:27–30.
34. See Jacob 3:2.
35. Helaman 5:12. Remember also that a wise man builds his house upon a rock and not upon shifting sand (see Matthew 7:24–27).
36. Helaman 7:5.
37. Whether things seem “fair” relates to the limits of one’s perspective. Paul taught, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).
38. Harry Kemp, “God the Architect,” in James Dalton Morrison, ed., *Masterpieces of Religious Verse* (1948), 46–47.
39. Compared with the omniscience of our Creator, we know relatively little about dinosaurs or the details of the Creation, for example. But this we do know: “Verily I say unto you, in that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things—things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof—things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven” (D&C 101:32–34; see also D&C 121:29–32).
40. See 1 Nephi 11:16–17.
41. Virginia H. Pearce, in *Why I Believe* (2002), 245–46.

42. Personal correspondence, 15 Jan. 2002.
43. Our mortal probation has been likened to the second act of a three-act play. When the curtain comes down on act two, the play is not over. Without the vision gained from acts one and three, the

second act could seem either too short, too long, too hard, or too confusing. When we know about all three acts, the second act acquires greater significance; thus the need for an eternal perspective.

Elder John M. Madsen

"He that hath eternal life is rich"

Almost 2,000 years ago a rich young man asked an extremely important question of the Savior: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16).

Having heard the Savior's instructions and His gentle invitation to "come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21), the rich young man "went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" (Matthew 19:22).

Tragically, millions in the world today still prize and choose "the riches of the earth" over the "riches of eternity" (D&C 38:39), not knowing or fully understanding that "*he that hath eternal life is rich*" (D&C 6:7; italics added) and that *eternal life is God's greatest gift to man* (see D&C 14:7). Simply stated, eternal life is to live forever as families in the presence of God (see D&C 132:19–20, 24, 55).

Know God and Christ to obtain eternal life

In His great Intercessory Prayer, the Savior gives to all mankind the key to obtaining eternal life: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

But how can man come to know the only true God? The Savior answers:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

I testify that the only way we and all mankind can come unto our Heavenly

Father and know Him, and thus obtain eternal life, is to come unto the Lord Jesus Christ and know Him.

The identity and role of Jesus Christ

But who *is* Jesus Christ that we should come unto Him and *know* Him? I know of no more wonderful summary of the identity and role of the Lord Jesus Christ than the declaration of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve entitled "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," from which I quote:

"[Jesus Christ] was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New. Under the direction of His Father, He was the creator of the earth. . . .

". . . He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. . . .

". . . He was the Firstborn of the Father, the Only Begotten Son in the flesh, the Redeemer of the world.

"He rose from the grave to 'become the firstfruits of them that slept' (1 Corinthians 15:20). As Risen Lord, He . . . ministered among His 'other sheep' (John 10:16) in ancient America. . . . He and His Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-promised 'dispensation of the fulness of times' (Ephesians 1:10). . . .

". . . His priesthood and His Church have been restored upon the earth—'built upon the foundation of . . . apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone' (Ephesians 2:20).