

The Savior's Healing Power upon the Isles of the Sea

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Through temple blessings, the Savior heals individuals, families, and nations.

In the 1960s my father taught at the Church College of Hawaii in Laie, where I was born. My seven older sisters insisted my parents name me “Kimo,” a Hawaiian name. We lived near the Laie Hawaii Temple when it served much of the Church membership of the Asia Pacific Area, including Japan.¹ At this time, groups of Japanese Saints began coming to Hawaii to receive the blessings of the temple.

One of these members was a sister from the beautiful island of Okinawa. The story of her journey to the Hawaii Temple is remarkable. Two decades earlier, she had been married in a traditional arranged Buddhist wedding. Just a few months later, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, thrusting the United States into a conflict with Japan. In the wake of battles such as Midway and Iwo Jima, the tides of war pushed the Japanese forces back to the shores of her island home, Okinawa, the last line of defense standing against the Allied forces before the heartlands of Japan.

For a harrowing three months in 1945, the Battle of Okinawa raged. A flotilla of 1,300 American warships encircled and bombarded the island. Military and civilian casualties were enormous. Today a solemn monument in Okinawa lists more than 240,000 known names of people who perished in the battle.²

In a desperate attempt to escape the onslaught, this Okinawan woman, her husband, and their two small children sought refuge in a mountain cave. They endured unspeakable misery through the ensuing weeks and months.

One desperate night amidst the battle, with her family near starvation and her husband unconscious, she contemplated ending their suffering with a hand grenade, which the authorities had supplied to her and others for that purpose. However, as she prepared to do so, a profoundly spiritual experience unfolded that gave her a tangible sense of the reality of God and His love for her, which gave her the strength to carry on. In the following days, she revived her husband and fed her family with weeds, honey from a wild beehive, and creatures caught in a nearby stream. Remarkably, they endured six months in the cave until local villagers informed them that the battle had ended.

When the family returned home and began rebuilding their lives, this Japanese woman started searching for answers about God. She gradually kindled a belief in Jesus Christ and the need to be baptized. However, she was concerned about her loved ones who had died without a knowledge of Jesus Christ and baptism, including her mother, who died giving birth to her.

Imagine her joy when two sister missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to her house one day and taught her that people can learn about Jesus Christ in the spirit world. She was captivated by the teaching that her parents could choose to follow Jesus Christ after death and accept baptism performed on their behalf in holy places called temples. She and her family were converted to the Savior and baptized.

Her family worked hard and began to prosper, adding three more children. They were faithful and active in the Church. Then, unexpectedly, her husband suffered a stroke and died, compelling her to work long hours at multiple jobs for many years to provide for her five children.

Some people in her family and neighborhood criticized her. They blamed her troubles on her decision to join a Christian church. Undeterred by profound tragedy and harsh criticism, she held on to her faith in Jesus Christ, determined to press forward, trusting that God knew her and that brighter days were ahead.³

A few years following her husband's untimely death, the mission president of Japan felt inspired to encourage the Japanese members to work toward attending the temple. The mission president was an American veteran of the Battle of Okinawa, in which the Okinawan sister and her family had suffered so much.⁴ Nonetheless, the humble sister said of him: "He was then one of our hated enemies, but now he was here with the gospel of love and peace. This, to me, was a miracle."⁵

Upon hearing the mission president's message, the widowed sister desired to be sealed to her family in the temple someday. However, it was impossible for her, due to financial constraints and language barriers.

Then several innovative solutions emerged. The cost could be reduced by half if members in Japan chartered an entire plane to fly to Hawaii in the offseason.⁶ Members also recorded and sold vinyl records entitled *Japanese Saints Sing*. Some members even sold homes. Others quit their jobs to make the trip.⁷

The other challenge for members was that the temple presentation was not available in Japanese. Church leaders called a Japanese brother to travel to the Hawaiian temple to translate the endowment ceremony.⁸ He was the first Japanese convert after the war, having been taught and baptized by faithful American soldiers.⁹

When the endowed Japanese members living in Hawaii first heard the translation, they wept. One member recorded: "We've been to the temple many, many times. We've heard the ceremonies in English. [But] we have never felt the spirit of ... temple work as we feel it now [hearing it] in our own native tongue."¹⁰

Later that same year, 161 adults and children embarked from Tokyo to make their way to the Hawaii Temple. One Japanese brother reflected on the journey: "As I looked out of the airplane and saw Pearl Harbor, and remembered what our country had done to these people on December 7, 1941, I feared in my heart. Will they accept us? But to my surprise they showed greater love and kindness than I had ever seen in my life."¹¹

Upon the Japanese Saints' arrival, the Hawaiian members welcomed them with countless strands of flower leis while exchanging hugs and kisses on the cheeks, a custom foreign to Japanese

culture. After spending 10 transformative days in Hawaii, the Japanese Saints bid their farewells to the melody of “Aloha Oe” sung by the Hawaiian Saints.¹²

The second temple trip organized for Japanese members included the widowed Okinawan sister. She made the 10,000-mile (16,000-km) journey thanks to a generous gift from missionaries who had served in her branch and had eaten many meals at her table. While in the temple, she shed tears of joy as she acted as a proxy for her mother's baptism and was sealed to her deceased husband.

Temple excursions from Japan to Hawaii continued regularly until the Tokyo Japan Temple was dedicated in 1980, becoming the 18th temple in operation. In November of this year, the 186th temple will be dedicated in Okinawa, Japan. It is located not far from the cave in central Okinawa where this woman and her family sheltered.¹³

Though I never met this wonderful sister from Okinawa, her legacy lives on through her faithful posterity, many of whom I know and love.¹⁴

My father, a World War II veteran of the Pacific, was thrilled when I received my call to serve in Japan as a young missionary. I arrived in Japan shortly after the Tokyo Temple was dedicated and saw firsthand their love for the temple.

Temple covenants are gifts from our Heavenly Father to the faithful followers of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through the temple, our Heavenly Father binds individuals and families to the Savior and to each other.

President Russell M. Nelson declared last year:

“Each person who makes covenants in baptismal fonts and in temples—and keeps them—has increased access to the power of Jesus Christ. ...

“The reward for keeping covenants with God is heavenly power—power that strengthens us to withstand our trials, temptations, and heartaches better. This power eases our way.”¹⁵

Through temple blessings, the Savior heals individuals, families, and nations—even those that once stood as bitter enemies. The resurrected Lord declared to a conflict-ridden society in the Book of Mormon that unto those who honor “my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”¹⁶

I am grateful to witness the ongoing fulfillment of the Lord's promise that “the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people,”¹⁷ including to those “upon the isles of the sea.”¹⁸

I testify of the Savior Jesus Christ and of His prophet and apostles in these latter days. I solemnly bear witness of the heavenly power to bind in heaven what is bound on earth.

This is the Savior's work, and temples are His holy house.

With unwavering conviction, I declare these truths in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. The Laie Hawaii Temple was dedicated in 1919 by President Heber J. Grant. As an Apostle, he opened the Church in Japan in 1901. It was the fifth operating temple and the first temple built outside the continental United States.
2. As of March 2, 2023, there were 241,281 names inscribed on the monument.
3. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "Keep the Chain Unbroken" (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 30, 1999), 4, speeches.byu.edu.
4. Dwayne N. Andersen was wounded in the Battle of Okinawa. He served as mission president in Japan from 1962 to 1965 and was the first president of the Tokyo Japan Temple, from 1980 to 1982.
5. I met members of her family while my wife and I served as mission leaders in Tokyo. They provided me with this information from her personal family history accounts.
6. See *Dwayne N. Andersen: An Autobiography for His Posterity*, 102–5, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
7. See *Dwayne N. Andersen*, 104.
8. See Edward L. Clissold, "Translating the Endowment into Japanese," in *Stories of the Temple in Lā'ie, Hawai'i*, comp. Clinton D. Christensen (2019), 110–13.
9. The translator, Tatsui Sato, was baptized July 7, 1946, by a US serviceman, C. Elliott Richards. Tatsui's wife, Chiyo Sato, was baptized on the same day by Boyd K. Packer. Separately, Neal A. Maxwell fought in the Battle of Okinawa, and L. Tom Perry was among the first wave of Marines to go ashore in Japan following the peace treaty. Elders Packer, Maxwell, and Perry would become members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.
10. In Clissold, "Translating the Endowment into Japanese," 112.
11. In Dwayne N. Andersen, "1965 Japanese Excursion," *Stories of the Temple in Lā'ie, Hawai'i*, 114.
12. See Andersen, "1965 Japanese Excursion," 114, 117.
13. Later in this session of the October 2023 general conference, President Russell M. Nelson announced 20 new temples, including the Osaka Japan Temple, which will be the fifth temple in Japan.
14. During our mission in Tokyo from 2018 to 2021, amid the challenges of the COVID pandemic, her family extended love and care for me and my family, which we will forever be grateful for.
15. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 96.
16. 3 Nephi 25:2.
17. Mosiah 3:20.
18. 2 Nephi 29:7.

