

A Light Shall Break Forth

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In the early morning of a spring day in 1820, a young man resolutely walked toward a grove of trees near his home. No living mortal, especially not the young man himself, comprehended the eternal significance and consequence of what he was about to do, though prophets of old had looked forward to and foretold the event. The boy went to the quiet grove seeking the answer to a question that had perplexed him for some time. It was a question that his mother had often pondered herself. Once, when she had been extremely ill, she had thought, "I am not prepared to die, for I do not know the ways of Christ, and it seemed to me as though there was a dark and lonely chasm between myself and Christ that I dared not attempt to cross. . . . I covenanted with God that if he would let me live, I would endeavor to get that religion that would enable me to serve him right".

The question had to do with, as the young man later wrote in one account, his "all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to searching the scriptures believing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God thus applying myself to them. . . . I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind [and] my mind became exceedingly distressed for I became convicted of my sins and by searching the scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my owns sins and for the sins of the world; . . . therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go to obtain mercy".

With those questions about the salvation of his soul burning in his heart and mind, Joseph Smith knelt among the trees to pray. His inquiry about which church he should join was founded on his deep desire to be reconciled to God. As he attempted to pray, he was seized by a hideous power, and thick darkness enveloped him. Just when he imagined that he was doomed, he saw a pillar of light exactly over his head, above the brightness of the sun. When the light fell upon him, he saw God the Eternal Father in brightness and glory, who called him by name and, pointing to the other glorified Being, said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Joseph Smith--History 1:15-17).

On the occasion of the unveiling ceremony of the statue of Joseph at the First Vision which is in the atrium of the Joseph Smith Building here on campus, Elder Henry B. Eyring said:

"There are other figures not sculpted here which I would like you to imagine with an eye of faith. . . . God the Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to open this dispensation.

"From studying the various accounts of the First Vision, we learn that young Joseph went into the grove not only to learn which church he should join but also to obtain forgiveness for his sins--something he seems not to have understood how to do. And in more than one account, the Lord addressed the young truth seeker and said, 'Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee.' "

"This piece of art," Elder Eyring continued, "represents that moment when Joseph learned there was a way for the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ to be unlocked fully. Because of what Joseph saw and what began at this moment, the Savior was able, through this great and valiant servant and through others that He sent, to restore power and privilege. That power and privilege allow us, and all who will live, to have the benefit of Christ's Atonement work in our lives."

Elder Eyring then said: "I testify to you that Jesus is the Christ. I know He lives. I know Joseph saw Him. And I know that because He lives and because Joseph looked up and saw Him and because He sent other messengers, you and I may have the thing that the Prophet Joseph wanted as he went to the grove: To know, not just to hope, that our sins can be washed away".

Do you remember the moment when you learned there was a way for the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ to be unlocked fully for you? When you truly believed there was a way for you to be reconciled to God?

The light of the fulness of the gospel, heralded by a visit of the Eternal Father and His Beloved Son in answer to Joseph Smith's prayer 185 years ago in a grove of trees in New York State, ushered in the long-awaited restoration of all things, the dispensation of the fulness of times. On that spring morning, a light, no, I would say, *the light* of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, broke the chains of darkness. The world had been struggling in darkness for centuries. Brave religious reformers and statesmen and -women had begun to push back the shadows of superstition and falsehood, but it was not until Joseph Smith decided to ask a question about the fate of his own soul that the light returned to earth for all of us. Through Joseph Smith, Christ restored the true doctrine of the gospel and the authority and keys to administer the ordinances of the gospel and the kingdom. From that day, that light--the restored fulness of Christ's gospel--began its penetration to every corner of the world, to every heart, chasing away every doubt and shadow.

The Lord reminded Joseph Smith of the things He had taught His disciples when He was here on earth. After reviewing with them the Apostasy, the scattering of the Jews, and the perilous last days when the love of many would wax cold, Jesus gave the ancient Twelve reassurance that "when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth

among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel" (D&C 45:28).

Jesus Himself explained what the fulness of the gospel was when He visited the American continent:

"And this is the gospel which I have given unto you--that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

"And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; . . . that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. . . .

"And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. . . .

"Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do" (3 Nephi 27:13-14, 15, 20-21).

Through the truths revealed to Joseph Smith and his successors, we know that mortality is informed by eternity. We understand that there was indeed a divine plan in the beginning. That plan included a Savior, who took upon Himself our sins, our pain, our sorrow, our sufferings so that we could, through His sweet grace and our repentance and obedience, be reconciled once again to God. We can trust that Christ has been sent "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; . . . to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Can you feel the power of Joseph Smith's testimony when he said, "I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it"? (Joseph Smith--History 1:25). Not only could he not deny it, but he embarked on a life of persecution, criticism, and hardship because of it.

[Just three years after the calamity of Far West, the tragedy of Haun's Mill, and the injustice of Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith wrote the 1842 Wentworth letter that included what would eventually be known as the Articles of Faith. That letter also courageously included this prophecy: "The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say, the work is done" (*History of the Church*, 4:540).

On one occasion, the angel Moroni told Joseph Smith, "Your name shall be known among the nations, for the work which the Lord will perform by your hands shall cause the righteous to rejoice and the wicked to rage: with the one it shall be had in honor, and with the other in reproach; yet with these it shall be a terror because of the great and marvelous work which shall follow the coming forth of the fulness of the gospel".

Nothing exemplifies this promise of Moroni more than two statements from two different men. In 1854, Illinois Governor Thomas Ford wrote, "Thus fell Joe Smith, the most successful imposter in modern times: A man who, though ignorant and coarse, had some great natural parts, which fitted him for temporary success, but which were so obscured and counteracted by the inherent corruption and vices of his nature, that he never could succeed in establishing a policy which looked to permanent success in the future".

This truly is a case of a light shining in the darkness and the darkness comprehending it not. Joseph Smith wasn't establishing policy; he was doing God's work by restoring the truth that would "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

Contrast Thomas Ford's assessment of Joseph Smith with that of John Taylor following the martyrdom: "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. . . . He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord's anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood" (D&C 135:3).

Joseph Smith stood by Christ, and now the faithful stand by Joseph.

Isn't it grand and joyous to be alive in this last dispensation, when the light of the fulness of the gospel is sweeping over the earth? How many of you remember joking about missionaries in Russia? How many of you remember when dedicating a temple once a decade was the normal pace? What a blessing it is to be able to witness in our own lives the fulfillment of prophecy and to be part of this great work.

From the original six members of the Church who gathered in the Whitmer farmhouse in Fayette, New York, in 1830, the Church has grown to over 12 million members. Slightly over half the members now live outside the United States; 53 percent are female. The Book of Mormon is available in over 100 languages. Basic Church curriculum materials are available in 175 languages. While English is still spoken by half of the members of the Church, one third, or over 3.5 million members, speak Spanish. The other eight top languages in the Church are Portuguese, Tagalog, Cebuano, Japanese, Samoan, Ilokano, Korean, and Tongan.

Now, sisters, the organization of the Relief Society was a key part of the Restoration. We know the history--as sisters in early Nauvoo began to organize themselves to do acts of service and charity. We know Eliza R. Snow drafted a constitution, which Joseph Smith called the best he had seen, and we know that he offered the sisters something better. Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society to complete the organization of the Church. He taught the early Relief Society sisters that the purpose of the Relief Society was not simply to relieve the poor; it was to help save souls--to bring them to Christ and the fulness of the gospel. Joseph encouraged the sisters to expand their hearts and to be

charitable to one another. In many ways, Joseph and the early leaders of the Relief Society envisioned the work of the organization as helping women "[put] off the natural man" (or woman, in this case) and "[become] saint[s] through the atonement of Christ" (Mosiah 3:19).

Our dear sisters in Relief Society have always been an important part of this glorious wave of light and truth that has been sweeping the earth since 1830. The entire Church is blessed by the commitment and consecration of pioneers in every land who have received the fulness of the gospel; who have understood that "sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven" (*Hymns*, no. 27); and who, despite all trials and challenges, still sing with thankful hearts, "All is well! All is well!" (*Hymns*, no. 30).

Sister Jane Manning James was born a free black woman in 1822 in Fairfield County, Connecticut. She was baptized in 1841 and led a group of family members to Nauvoo, where she was welcomed by Joseph Smith, who told her, "You are among friends." The journey wasn't without difficulty. Jane wrote: "Our feet cracked open and bled until you could see the whole print of our feet with blood on the ground. . . . But we went on our way rejoicing, singing hymns, and thanking God for his infinite goodness and mercy to us in protecting us from all harm and healing our feet." Jane arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on September 22, 1847. She shared her own meager supply of flour with Eliza Lyman, who had nothing and was starving, saying, "I try in my feeble way to set a good example for all".

There are countless stories just like this one among our early pioneers. My humble prayer is that when I meet Jane Manning James or the others, I can put on the altar of sacrifice for the kingdom something equal to her bleeding feet and her last pound of flour.

During my mission in the Philippines, I had the opportunity to share an apartment with one of the Filipino missionaries. When the first patriarch was called for the Philippines while she was serving her mission, Perla had the opportunity to receive her patriarchal blessing. I remember when she returned to the apartment after her blessing, her eyes glowing with light. I asked her what was the most special part of receiving a patriarchal blessing. She said, "Now I finally know who I am." She explained that during many years of Spanish rule, Filipinos were made to feel that they were not as good as Spaniards and that even though the Americans who followed were more benevolent than the Spanish, Filipinos still felt inferior. "Now," she said, "I know I belong to the Lord's family and am not inferior to anyone."

After being released from her mission, Perla obtained a master's degree and married. She was often recruited to go abroad to teach, as are many Filipinos. Perla always felt that even though their financial circumstances were desperate, she needed to stay in the Philippines and build the kingdom there. When her husband was called to be the stake president, she wrote me a short note. She said, "Now that my husband is the stake president, the presiding authority asked that my callings be reduced so that I can support him in his work. I hardly know what to do. All I do now is teach early morning seminary, gospel doctrine, spiritual living and lead the choir."

When I had the opportunity to do my dissertation research in Nigeria, I was excited to go to a country where the gospel was so new. The official work of the Church began in Nigeria not long after the 1978 revelation on the priesthood. I spent much of my time in

Nigeria in Lagos. Sister Faustina Haizel, a Ghanaian living in Nigeria, was the Relief Society president. At that time one of the important elements of being Relief Society president was being able to read the English lesson manual and teach the Relief Society curriculum. Faustina taught almost every Relief Society lesson.

I remember one humorous occasion. When it was time for Relief Society, there were only four sisters in attendance--one of the American missionaries, the wife of the Australian mission president, me, and Faustina. The lesson was on the blessings of the temple. Faustina was prepared and started giving the lesson. About halfway through the lesson, she stopped and said, as Africans do: "Ah! What am I doing giving this lesson? I am an African sister who has never seen a temple much less gone inside one, and I am giving this lesson to three white women who have all been to the temple." We all laughed at the irony of the situation, but I knew how much the temple meant to Faustina. Before I left Nigeria, she gave me a copy of her birth certificate with instructions that should she die before having the opportunity to go to the temple, I should take the birth certificate and do her temple work.

I am not going to need to do Faustina's temple work by proxy. Instead, we were able to go together to the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple just three years ago. And now, from her window in the Church area office in Accra, Ghana, she looks out over the beautiful Accra Ghana Temple. Imagine the miracle it is for the Saints in Ghana to see this temple finally come to pass. What a marvelous work and a wonder, for just about 18 years ago the Church operation in Ghana was completely closed. The Ghanaian government had heard propaganda about the LDS Church and decided to seize the Church's assets and to close chapels and all other Church buildings. The radio and television media bombarded people with horrible stories about the Church. They said Joseph Smith was a criminal who died in prison. They said the Church persecuted blacks. They said the temples were places where evil things happened. During this difficult period, the Saints met quietly in one another's homes and kept the faith. During this time, Faustina wrote to me, saying, "The gospel is a pill I have swallowed, and it is already working its good in me. Do not worry about me. I will always be faithful."

Jane, Perla, Faustina--incredible examples of what occurs when the light of the fulness of the gospel breaks forth in a person's life.

We can feel the blessings of the Restoration in every aspect of our lives as the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ provide an anchor and guide for us and our families. We are blessed to know that all things here on earth are more clearly and fully seen in the light of the restored gospel. The light that is spreading across the world is a light that lifts burdens and overwhelms the powers of darkness. This light of the gospel will lift our spirits, improve the way we feel about ourselves, illuminate our countenances, and inform our thoughts and actions. It provides answers, comfort, and peace. It can change everything about us if we will let it, as Faustina said, "work its good" in us.

I remember a particularly dear family I taught in the Philippines. First the oldest son was baptized, then the parents, then the youngest brother, then the youngest sister. Their home was a small structure in the shadows of a large church and other tall buildings. But I can testify that as the light of the gospel penetrated that small, humble home, even the shadows cast by the buildings around it seemed to be removed in the radiance of the joy of those who lived the gospel within its tiny frame.

Now, sisters, with the many blessings we receive because of the Restoration, we also have the obligation to share the light of the fulness of the gospel with others. Let me offer this analogy. With few exceptions, I am a very careful driver. I try to be cautious and courteous. But some months ago I crossed lanes in front of someone and came a little too close. I just hadn't been paying attention. In the past, the few times I've done that I have been embarrassed but soon got over it. But this time I was profoundly mortified and the feeling stayed for days. Why? Well, when I purchased a new vehicle two years ago, I decided to be a loyal employee and get BYU license plates. Now when I cut someone off, my BYU plate is right in the face of the other driver. Now when I don't seem to know where I'm going, my BYU plate is right out there. The worst situation was several months ago when a friend and I decided to go to a play at Pioneer Memorial Theater at the University of Utah, BYU's friendly rival. We wanted to have dinner at a nearby restaurant, and I was having trouble finding the right streets and parking spots. The stress was almost more than I could stand. I hoped that if any University of Utah fans saw my strange driving, they would be like Elaine Anderson, a member of the Women's Conference committee, and be less inclined to blame my erratic driving on BYU. I felt I was being held to a higher-than-ever driving standard because I was now labeled "BYU." I felt loyal and did not want my university--which was now clear to everyone on the road--to be dishonored by my behavior. In fact, I practically wanted to give the plates up, it was so stressful.

But those experiences made me think about another label I have taken upon myself that is far more significant and eternal than a BYU license plate. Every Sunday when we take the sacrament we "witness unto . . . God, the Eternal Father, that [we] are willing to take upon [us] the name of [his] Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments" (Moroni 4:3). Not one of us is "received unto baptism save [we take] upon [us] the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, . . . [and] relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who [is] the author and the finisher of [our] faith" (Moroni 6:3-4).

I have been asking myself more often, because of a simple decision to buy a BYU license plate, what am I doing with His name? President Hinckley was once asked, "Since you do not use the cross, what is the symbol of your religion?"

President Hinckley replied that "the lives of our people must become the most meaningful expression of our faith and, in fact, therefore, the symbol of our worship."

President Hinckley went on to say: "No sign, no work of art, no representation of form is adequate to express the glory and the wonder of the Living Christ. He told us what the symbol should be when He said, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' (John 14:15).

"As His followers," President Hinckley said, "we cannot do a mean or shoddy or ungracious thing without tarnishing His image. Nor can we do a good and gracious and generous act without burnishing more brightly the symbol of Him whose name we have taken upon ourselves. And so our lives must become a meaningful expression, the symbol of our declaration of our testimony of the Living Christ, the Eternal Son of the Living God" ("The Symbol of Our Faith," *Ensign*, April 2005, 3, 6).

Isaiah said it this way:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

"And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"
(Isaiah 60:1-3).

The Restoration, the light breaking forth to those in darkness, began with Joseph Smith's prayer in 1820. In a tribute to Joseph Smith in 1845, Parley P. Pratt exhorted the Saints:

"He has organized the kingdom of God.--We will extend its dominion.

"He has restored the fulness of the gospel.--We will spread it abroad.

"He has kindled up the dawn of a day of glory.--We will bring it to [meridian] splendor.

"He was a 'little one,' and became a thousand.--We are a small one, and will become a strong nation.

"In short, he quarried the stone. . . . We will cause it to become a great mountain and fill the whole earth".

I bear to you my testimony of the reality of the Atonement, of a living Christ, of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who ushered in this dispensation of the fulness of times. I bear testimony of the reality and power of the Restoration and the blessings it brings to our individual lives. Now, for the sake of our own souls and for the sake of our families and for the sake of all the honest in heart who are looking for truth and light and watching us, I pray that we might feel the desire to "break forth" the light of the fulness of the gospel in all that we do. I pray, sisters, just as Joseph Smith encouraged his friends, that we can "go on in so great a cause" (D&C 128:22), in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.