

SECRET OR SACRED?

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF TEMPLE ORDINANCES

Temples are not regular places of Sunday worship for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They are quite different from the thousands of regular chapels all over the world that are used for Sunday services. Anyone, regardless of religion, may enter a Latter-day Saint meetinghouse and attend services. Visitors are also welcome to visit the temple grounds at any temple and attend open houses prior to dedication. However, because of the sacredness of temples as “houses of the Lord,” only members of the Church, who are in good standing are allowed to enter the temples. A member must be observing the basic principles of the faith and attest to that fact to his or her local leaders once every two years in order to enter a temple.

The sacredness of the temple anciently can be seen in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, Moses had the children of Israel carry with them the Tabernacle (a large, portable temple) as they wandered in the wilderness. King Solomon built the great temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. It was rebuilt and later substantially expanded, but again destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The New Testament gives an account of Jesus Christ clearing the temples when its sacredness was violated by people using its courts as a common market.

Latter-day Saint temples are considered houses of God, a place of holiness and peace separate from the preoccupations of the world. They provide a place where Church members make formal promises and commitments to God. They are also the place where the highest sacraments of the faith occur – the marriage of couples and the “sealing” of families for eternity.

A careful reading of the scriptures reveals that the Lord did not tell all things to all people. There were some qualifications set that were prerequisite to receiving sacred information. Temple ceremonies fall within this category. Latter-day Saints do not discuss the temple ordinances outside the temples. It was never intended that knowledge of these temple ceremonies would be limited to a select few who would be obliged to ensure that other never learn of them. It is quite the opposite, in fact. With great effort we urge every soul to qualify and prepare for the temple experience. Those who have been to the temple have been taught an ideal: Someday every living soul and every soul who has ever lived shall have the opportunity to hear the gospel and accept or reject what the temple offers. If this opportunity is rejected, the rejection must be on the part of the individual.

The ordinances and ceremonies of the temple are simple. They are beautiful. They are sacred. They are kept confidential lest they be given to those who are unprepared. Curiosity is not a preparation. Deep interest itself is no a preparation. Preparation for the ordinances includes preliminary steps: faith, repentance, baptism, confirmation, worthiness, a maturity and dignity worthy of one who comes invited as a guest into the house of the Lord.

We must be prepared before we go to the temple. We must be worthy before we go to the temple. There are restrictions and conditions set. They were established by the Lord and not by man. And, the Lord has every right and authority to direct that matters relating to the temple be kept sacred and confidential.