

CLOTHED WITH GLORY: SACRED VESTMENTS AND THE RESTORATION

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Recently President Russell M. Nelson discussed the great blessings of temple service that have been restored in these latter-days. “Consider the great mercy and fairness of God, who, before the foundation of the world, provided a way to give temple blessings to those who died without a knowledge of the gospel. These sacred temple rites are ancient. To me that antiquity is thrilling and another evidence of their authenticity.”¹ Others have addressed the ancient roots of temple worship that President Nelson mentioned, including how sacred clothing constitutes one such restoration of ancient priesthood blessings. This article will focus on some of the reasons why restored practices of wearing sacred temple clothing are so important to Latter-day Saints. I will first discuss how sacred clothing is emblematic of the Savior and his redemption. Then I will review how some early Latter-day Saints seem to have been prepared for the introduction of Nauvoo period temple clothing before Nauvoo. Finally, I will discuss the revealed restoration of sacred vestments before the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Emblematic of the Savior and his Redemption

The Apostle Paul spoke of how the Saints “*put on* Christ” through baptism (Galatians 3:27). As we trust in the Savior, we *put off* the natural man by repenting of all our sins. We must be baptized by one having authority from God in order to enter into a valid covenant to follow Jesus Christ and become members of his Church. The symbolism of clothing also applies to other ordinances we receive through additional gospel covenants. President Nelson taught, “Wearing the temple garment has deep symbolic significance. It

represents a continuing commitment. Just as the Savior exemplified the need to endure to the end, we wear the garment faithfully as part of the enduring armor of God. Thus, we demonstrate our faith in Him and in His eternal covenants with us.”² He also states, “Temple clothing is unique, and it is special. It lets us carry the temple and its meaning with us in our daily lives.”³ To carry the temple with us is to retain a remembrance of what Jesus did and to help us always remember the covenants that we have made with him.

Joseph Fielding was an early convert to the Church of Jesus Christ and a missionary who accompanied Apostles Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde on the first Latter-day Saint mission to Great Britain in 1837. His sister, Mary Fielding, was concerned that her relatives in England would reject the message of the Restoration. In November, Mary wrote to her brother, Joseph, and described a dream she had.

She thought that some of the Elders had been to Jerusalem and had found the garment which Christ wore while on earth. It had been brought by them and was in the old Fielding home in Honidon, where, she said, she saw her brother Joseph wearing it. She felt a great desire to have it in her hands and persuaded Joseph to take it off, which he did. As Mary examined it, she turned it inside out and found it covered with blood. This sight greatly affected her, and she, in her dream, turned with emotion to her mother and said: “O mother, you remember it is said they scourged his back, and here are the marks of His blood left upon His garment.” She went on to say: “I mentioned this dream to Brother Joseph (Smith) who gave me this interpretation. He said it was evidence that you [Joseph Fielding] wore the priesthood of the Son of God, and you would have to endure His stripes.” Joseph [Fielding] observed and recorded that just about the time Mary had this dream, he was ordained an Elder. While the dream appeared somewhat alarming to Joseph, it greatly strengthened his faith. He felt that it would be an honor to suffer as the Savior had done.⁴

Taking upon us the clothing of the priesthood reflects our willingness to take upon ourselves the name of the Savior and faithfully serve him, even when it means we sometimes suffer persecution for his sake.

Visions of Nauvoo Temple Clothing before Nauvoo

The Kirtland Temple experience differed from that of Nauvoo in many ways. Others have discussed this in detail. Here I will simply note that unlike Nauvoo, the earlier Kirtland Temple did not involve the donning of sacred clothing. Notably, however, some converts in those early years experienced divine manifestations of angelic ministers wearing clothing that resembled that which would not be introduced until Nauvoo.

In January 1831, about the time he was baptized, Zebedee Coltrin had a vision, which he described in later years after he came to Utah: “Thinking on what I had heard I resolved to be baptized, and as I lay meditating [about 1 a.m.] the room became lighted up with a brilliant light, and I saw a number of men dressed in white robes like unto what we now call temple clothes. Soon the vision closed.”⁵ In the fall of 1833, while living in Canada, Elizabeth Comins Tyler had a vision in which “she saw a man sitting upon a white cloud, clothed in white from head to foot. He had on a peculiar cap, different from any she had ever seen, with a white robe, underclothing, and moccasins. It was revealed to her that this person was Michael, the Archangel. She was sitting in the house drying peaches when she saw the heavenly vision, but the walls were no bar between her and the angel, who stood in the open space above her.” Shortly after this occurred, Joseph Smith visited their family. He “informed her that she had had a true vision, and it was of the Lord. He had seen the same angel several times. It was Michael, the Archangel, as revealed to her.”⁶ Samuel Turnbow, about this same time, had a vision in which he saw that the Saints would receive their blessings in a future temple dressed in holy raiment, which in later years he recognized had been temple clothing.⁷

Joseph Smith related,

A man came to see me in Kirtland and told me he had seen an Angel, and described his dress. I told him he had seen no Angel, and that there was no such dress in heaven, he grew mad and went into the Street, and commanded fire to come down out of heaven to consume me—I laughed at him and said, you are one of Baals prophets, your God does not hear you, jump up and cut yourself; and he commanded fire from heaven to consume my house.⁸

On the 27th of March, 1836, during one of the dedicatory services of the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, many of the Saints reported divine manifestations, including the visitations of angels. As a young boy, Elam Cheney, who had helped to work on the temple during its construction, was permitted to attend. "Elam noticed that while he was speaking the Prophet looked up as if he was looking at someone, so Elam looked in that direction and saw six personages, three on each side of the room. Their appearance attracted his attention as they were dressed so differently to what he was accustomed to seeing. They had white moccasins on their feet and white caps on their heads. He asked his mother who they were and she said she could see no one. He told her they were dressed in white. He always remembered how they looked and how they were dressed. Later on when he went to the temple to receive his own endowments he discovered that the clothing that those six personages wore, were like the temple clothes."⁹ Sometime around 1833 and several years before her family joined the Church of Jesus Christ, Eliza Gibbs saw a female angel "clothed in a pure white robe such as I have seen in latter days."¹⁰

In 1857, "President Brigham Young related the circumstances of their seeing a circle of about 40 persons dressed in white robes and caps in the upper story of the temple in Kirtland during the Spring of [1836] after the endowments. There was no person in that room at the time that was mortal, yet the room was filled with light and many personages did appear clothed in white and frequently went to the windows and looked out so the brethren in the street could see them plainly." Brother Brigham was not alone in this experience. "Brother Young and Truman Angell stood together in the street and looked at them a long time. W[illiam] W. Phelps says he saw them for 3 hours. They were visible by all the brethren present."¹¹

Wilford Woodruff, then on a mission in Tennessee, had not been able to attend the dedicatory services. He had been asked by the Prophet to remain in the mission field to care for the local branches in order that other Church leaders could participate in the dedicatory services. Brother Joseph had told him that he would not lose any blessings for having to do so. During this time, he records that he received a divine visitation: "I knelt down and prayed. I

arose from my knees and sat down. The room was filled with light. A messenger came to me. We had a long conversation.” The angels then showed him a vision of some of the signs of the last days. “I saw the resurrection day. I saw armies of men in the first resurrection, clothed with the robes of the Holy Priesthood.”¹² Several years later, on 18 October 1840, while serving an apostolic mission with George A. Smith in London, Woodruff and his companion were attacked by evil spirits. In his journal he recorded, “While forming a determination to warn the people of London & overcome the powers of Darkness by the assistance of God; A person appeared unto me which I considered was the Prince of Darkness or the Devil. He made war with me & attempted to take my life. He caught me by the throat & choked me nearly to death. . . . As he was about to overcome me I prayed to the father in the name of Jesus for help. I then had power over him & he left me though much wounded. 3 personage[s] dressed in white Came to me & prayed with me & I was immediately healed & delivered from all my troubles.”¹³ Woodruff, who shared this experience several times in later years, reported that the three unidentified messengers in white “were dressed in temple clothing. They laid their hands upon our heads and we were delivered, and that power was broken, so far as we were concerned.”¹⁴

Alfred D. Young recorded a series of visions he had in 1841 in which he was shown the Saints dressed in “the robes of the priesthood . . . white robes with white coverings on their heads.”¹⁵ Henry Savage was a convert to the Church in Great Britain who joined the Church in 1844. Shortly after his baptism and several years before he migrated to the United States, he had a vision. “I saw as it were an avenue of light reaching up from my presence into the heavens, and descending in the pillar of light, was a company of glorious beings dressed in white robes with caps on their heads that were different than any other head dress I had ever seen before; yet I had traveled in eastern lands where people wore the turban and the fez. These beings descended and embraced me and the vision closed.” In later years, after he migrated to Utah, he was able to attend the temple, which he saw as a fulfillment of what he had been shown in his earlier vision.¹⁶ It appears that for some early converts, these

manifestations helped prepare them to receive the restored ordinances of the temple.

Pattern of Temple Garment Revealed to Joseph Smith

On October 5, 1840, Joseph Smith taught the Saints about the importance of divinely revealed ordinances that were first revealed by God to Adam and in subsequent dispensations. “God will not acknowledge that which [H]e has not called, ordained, and chosen . . . the ordinances must be kept in the way God has appointed, otherwise [the] priesthood will prove a cursing instead of a blessing.”¹⁷ In a revelation on January 19, 1841, the Lord commanded the Saints to build a temple so that he could reveal sacred ordinances that were necessary for “the glory, honor, and endowment” of his people. He told them, “And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house, and the priesthood there” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:39, 42).

According to a number of accounts, Joseph Smith was directly involved in the preparation of the sacred clothing to be used in subsequent Latter-day Saint temple worship. Sources indicate that several trusted sisters, including Emma and Bathsheba Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Elizabeth Allred, assisted in these preparations.

Esther Johnson was present at a meeting where the Prophet Joseph explained the importance of the temple garment. “She was at the meeting at Nauvoo when [Joseph Smith] presented the garment to the Church, and held it up before them and said it was the exact pattern of the one the angel showed him, and was called ‘The Garment of the Holy Priesthood,’ and must be worn all through life, and would be a protection to them against all physical and spiritual dangers if they were always faithful to the covenants they made with the Lord. He explained all the features pertaining to it and told them it should never be changed from that pattern.”¹⁸

Elizabeth Warren Allred was a seamstress and was approached by the Prophet Joseph while her family lived in Nauvoo. He had previously received a divine pattern and “told her that he had seen the Angel Moroni with the garments on and asked her to assist him in cutting out the garments. They spread unbleached muslin out on the table and he told her how to cut it out. She had to cut the third pair, however, before he said it was satisfactory. She told the prophet

that there would be sufficient cloth from the knee to the ankle to make a pair of sleeves, but he told her he wanted as few seams as possible and there would be sufficient whole cloth to cut the sleeve without piecing.”¹⁹ According to another account, “They were cut out by the Prophet Joseph Smith and under his direction. They then asked him who showed him how, and he said, ‘An angel of the Lord.’ He stood over them while they were cut out. He also said, ‘The angel Moroni drew aside his robe and showed his marks.’”²⁰

Following the martyrdom, the Twelve, under the direction of Brigham Young, led the Saints in completing the Nauvoo temple and introducing the temple ordinances to the Saints. This included teaching the Saints how to properly prepare temple clothing. William Clayton recorded that on December 14, 1845, Young reproved some of the Saints because they had not followed these instructions with sufficient care.

He then observed that he should henceforth have all the cloth, which was intended for robes, garments and aprons, brought and either cut or made in this Temple under the superintendence of those who know how to do it right. There are scarcely two Aprons alike nor two garments cut or marked right, and it is necessary to observe perfect order in this thing and it never can be done unless we take this course.²¹

Following the Authorized Pattern

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the power and authority “to administer in spiritual things” resides in the Melchizedek Priesthood (Doctrine and Covenants 107:8). The President of the Church is the president of the High Priesthood and holds “the keys of all spiritual blessings of the Church” (verse 18), and from the President of the Church “comes the administering of ordinances and blessings upon the Church” (verse 67). As the one who holds and is authorized to exercise all restored priesthood keys, he provides divinely authorized direction regarding how temple ordinances are administered, including the use of temple clothing. Those keys have continued in the Church since the time of Joseph Smith and continue to be used for the blessing of the Saints throughout the world. When changes are made, these

are done by revelation and under the direction of those who have every right to do so.

In 2020 the First Presidency of the Church issued the following statement to Church members:

From time to time, the First Presidency has made adjustments to the temple ceremonies and procedures in order to improve the temple experience for members and help all who enter to feel a closer connection to God within these sacred spaces.

As part of the temple experience, members put on ceremonial clothing with doctrinal and symbolic significance that can be traced back to temple worship in the Old Testament (see Exodus 28 and Leviticus 8).

Some adjustments have been made to temple clothing. These adjustments don't reflect changes to temple symbolism or doctrine but are intended to make the temple experience more simple, comfortable, and accessible by making the clothing easier to put on, care for, and afford.²²

The importance of individuals not deviating from or modifying how such clothing is worn, only as directed by those who are authorized to do so, is illustrated in the account of Orson Pratt Brown:

I dreamed that I had joined one of the secret societies, and I had died, and over my temple burial clothes I had the Masonic emblems; the robe and apron and other emblems that made up the burial clothes of the Masonic order. I thought I went up to a great gate in a wall that surrounded a large city and there met the gate-keeper, and I thought that he was dressed in temple robes.

He looked at me and said, "Who are you? What are you doing, and where are you from?" I told him all and that I had come to get entrance into that large city. "Did you come to get into this city with those clothes on?" "Yes, but I have my temple clothes under these."

"You cannot come here with those clothes on; there is only one thing to do. That is to return to where you came from, repent of this condition and those strange things you have been doing, and take off those clothes, then come back with those clothes that belong to the house of the Lord."²³

The Future Glory of Zion

The righteous in Isaiah are promised to be clothed with the “garments of salvation” and the “robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10; Doctrine and Covenants 109:80). The Lord promised ancient Saints that those who “have not defiled their garments . . . shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4). John saw the righteous dead, including martyrs, given “white raiment” (Revelation 3:5), “white robes” (Revelation 6:11), “fine linen clean and white,” which is emblematic of the “righteousness of the saints” (Revelation 19:8). Nephi prayed, “Encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness” (2 Nephi 4:33). The resurrected righteous are to be “clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14). Latter-day revelation teaches that when the Lord Jesus returns, all shall see him “in the clouds of heaven, clothed with power and great glory; with all the holy angels” (Doctrine and Covenants 45:44). His ancient Apostles will return with him “in a pillar of fire, being clothed with robes of righteousness, with crowns upon their heads, in glory even as I am.” Not only they but all the righteous dead will receive a crown and “be clothed upon, even as I am, to be with me, that we may be one” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:13). In his dedicatory prayer in the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith prayed that at that day we may be caught up in the cloud to meet the Lord, “that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed with the robes of righteousness, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy for all our suffering” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:76).

Isaiah wrote of Israel’s future redemption, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into the uncircumcised and the unclean” (Isaiah 52:1). Joseph Smith explained Isaiah “had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of the priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost” (Doctrine and Covenants 113:8).

The 1845 proclamation of the Twelve Apostles captures this same vision of Israel’s future redemption, which is intricately tied

with the blessings to be administered in the temple. Speaking of the Latter-day remnant of Lehi's seed,

The despised and degraded son of the forest, who has wandered in dejection and sorrow, and suffered reproach, shall then drop his disguise, and stand forth in manly dignity, and exclaim to the Gentiles who have envied and sold him: "I am Joseph; does my father yet live?" Or, in other words: I am a descendant of that Joseph who was sold into Egypt. You have hated me, and sold me, and thought I was dead. But lo! I live, and am heir to the inheritance, titles, honors, priesthood, sceptre, crown, throne, and eternal life and dignity of my fathers, who live for evermore. He shall then be ordained, washed, anointed with holy oil, and *arrayed in fine linen, even in the glorious and beautiful garments and royal robes of the high priesthood*, which is after the order of the Son of God; and shall enter into the congregation of the Lord, even into the Holy of Holies, there to be *crowned with authority and power* which shall never end.²⁴

It may seem somewhat curious that Moroni would be the angel to revealed the correct pattern of temple clothing. What does Moroni have to do with temple work? But as the divine herald of the restoration of gospel covenants to the house of Israel, this does not seem inappropriate. It was, we recall, Moroni who, invoking Isaiah's words, invited us to "Awake, and arise from the dust" and "put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled" (Moroni 10:31).

Notes

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2. Russell M. Nelson, *Teachings of Russell M. Nelson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 364.
3. Nelson, *Teachings of Russell M. Nelson*, 372.
4. Don Cecil Corbett, *Mary Fielding Smith, Daughter of Britain: Portrait of Courage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 107.

5. Zebedee Coltrin, High Priests Record, Spanish Fork, Utah, 5 February 1878.
6. *Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 3 (Feb. 1, 1892): 93.
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11. Wilford Woodruff Journal, Nov. 8, 1857, in Scott Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 5:120.
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14. Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 1:218.
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17. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 40–41.
18. Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin LeBaron, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, MS 36, Box 74, Folder 16, Marriot Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
19. Eliza Maria A. Munson Statement, in James Allred, “Early Pioneer History,” in MSS SC 1593, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
20. George A. Smith Statement, in James Allred, “Early Pioneer History” in H. Michael Marquardt Papers, MS 36, Box 74, Folder 16, Marriot Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
21. William Clayton diary, Dec. 14, 1845, in Heber C. Kimball journal (kept by William Clayton), in Elden J. Watson, ed., *Brigham Young Addresses, 1801–1877: A Chronological Compilation of Known Addresses of the Prophet Brigham Young*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Privately published, 1971).
22. First Presidency, “Improving Our Temple Experience,” *Liahona*, Apr. 2020, 40.
23. O. James Brown Klein, *Orson Pratt Brown (1863–1946). His Five Wonderful Wives and Their 34 Children*, 2 vols. (Mesa, AZ: O. James Brown Klein, 2002–2007), 1:179.

24. *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: To All the Kings of the World; to the President of the United States of America; to the Governors of the Several States; and to the Rulers and People of All Nations* (New York, NY: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1845), 2–3; emphasis added.