



The Propbet's father, Joseph Smith Sr., was baptized on April 6, 1830. As his father came out of the water, the Propbet "covered his face in his father's bosom and wept aloud for joy."



Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost

“The baptism of water, without the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost attending it, is of no use; they are necessarily and inseparably connected.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In Joseph Smith’s time, the Susquehanna River flowed in large, winding bends through forests of hardwood trees and pine, surrounded by rolling hills and fields of grain. The largest river in Pennsylvania, it was a central part of the landscape around Harmony, Pennsylvania. Because the river was close to his home and offered quiet, secluded spots, the Prophet sometimes withdrew there to think and to pray.

It was to the bank of this river that the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery went on May 15, 1829, to pray about the importance of baptism. In answer to their prayer, John the Baptist appeared to them, conferring the Aaronic Priesthood on them and commanding them to baptize each other. The blessing they had been seeking could now be performed in the proper way and with the power and authority of God. Going down into the river, they baptized one another, with Joseph baptizing Oliver first, as John had directed. Joseph then laid his hands on the head of Oliver and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and Oliver did the same for Joseph. The Prophet recalled:

“We experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of

this Church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation” (Joseph Smith—History 1:73).

The blessings of baptism were soon extended to other believers. Later in the month of May, the Prophet’s younger brother Samuel came to visit Joseph and Oliver in Harmony. “We . . . labored to persuade him concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was now about to be revealed in its fulness,” the Prophet stated. Samuel received a testimony of the work, and Oliver Cowdery baptized him, after which Samuel “returned to his father’s house, greatly glorifying and praising God, being filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹ In June, the Prophet baptized his older brother Hyrum, who had long been a steadfast believer in the Prophet’s message. “From this time forth many became believers,” Joseph recorded, “and some were baptized whilst we continued to instruct and persuade.”²

The Prophet was especially grateful to see his father, Joseph Smith Sr., baptized. The Prophet had a deep love for his father, who had been the first to believe his message after he was first visited by Moroni. Joseph Smith Sr. was baptized on April 6, 1830, the day the Church was organized. The Prophet’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recalled: “Joseph stood on the shore when his father came out of the water, and as he took him by the hand he cried out, ‘. . . I have lived to see my father baptized into the true church of Jesus Christ,’ and he covered his face in his father’s bosom and wept aloud for joy as did Joseph of old when he beheld his father coming up into the land of Egypt.”³

On the day the Church was organized, many Saints who had previously been baptized received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught emphatically the need for both baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. “The baptism of water, without the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost attending it, is of no use,” he declared. “They are necessarily and inseparably connected. An individual must be born of water and the spirit in order to get into the kingdom of God.”⁴

Teachings of Joseph Smith

The ordinance of baptism is necessary for exaltation.

“God has set many signs on the earth, as well as in the heavens; for instance, the oak of the forest, the fruit of the tree, the herb of the field—all bear a sign that seed hath been planted there; for it is a decree of the Lord that every tree, plant, and herb bearing seed should bring forth of its kind, and cannot come forth after any other law or principle.

“Upon the same principle do I contend that baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God, ‘for except ye are born of water and of the Spirit ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God,’ said the Savior [see John 3:5]. It is a sign and a commandment which God has set for man to enter into His kingdom. Those who seek to enter in any other way will seek in vain; for God will not receive them, neither will the angels acknowledge their works as accepted, for they have not obeyed the ordinances, nor attended to the signs which God ordained for the salvation of man, to prepare him for, and give him a title to, a celestial glory; and God has decreed that all who will not obey His voice shall not escape the damnation of hell. What is the damnation of hell? To go with that society who have not obeyed His commands.

“Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved, and enter into the kingdom of God, except faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins, and any other course is in vain; then you have the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost.”⁵

“Upon looking over the sacred pages of the Bible, searching into the prophets and sayings of the apostles, we find no subject so nearly connected with salvation, as that of baptism. . . . Let us understand that the word *baptise* is derived from the Greek verb *baptiso*, and means to immerse. . . .

“. . . It may not be amiss to introduce the commissions and commands of Jesus himself on the subject.—He said to the twelve, or rather eleven at the time: ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you’: Thus it is recorded by Matthew [Matthew 28:19–20]. In Mark we have these important words: ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned’ [Mark 16:15–16]. . . .

“. . . ‘Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, . . . came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?—Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’ [John 3:1–5].

“This strong and positive answer of Jesus, as to water baptism, settles the question: If God is the same yesterday, to day, and forever; it is no wonder he is so positive in the great declaration: ‘He that believes and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believes not shall be damned!’ [Mark 16:16.] There was no other name given under heaven, nor no other ordinance admitted, whereby men could be saved: No wonder the Apostle said, being ‘buried with him in baptism,’ ye shall rise from the dead! [Colossians 2:12.] No wonder Paul had to arise and be baptised and wash away his sins [see Acts 9:17–18].”⁶

**In all dispensations, Saints have been baptized
in the name of Jesus Christ.**

“The ancients who were actually the fathers of the church in the different ages, when the church flourished on the earth, . . . were initiated into the kingdom by baptism, for it is self evident in the scripture—God changes not. The Apostle says the gospel



Alma baptizing in the waters of Mormon. Joseph Smith taught, "Before the Saviour came in the flesh, 'the saints' were baptised in the name of Jesus Christ to come, because there never was any other name whereby men could be saved."

is the power of God unto salvation unto them that believe; and also informs us that life and immortality were brought to light through the gospel [see Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 1:10]. . . .

"Now taking it for granted that the scriptures say what they mean, and mean what they say, we have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible that the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfil its requirements, the same; and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same: therefore, as Noah was a preacher of righteousness he must have been baptised and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of the hands, etc. For no man taketh this honor upon himself except he be called of God as was Aaron [see Hebrews 5:4]. . . .

". . . It will be seen and acknowledged that if there was sin among men, repentance was as necessary at one time or age of the world as another—and that other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If, then, Abel was a righteous man he had to become so by keeping the commandments;

if Enoch was righteous enough to come into the presence of God, and walk with him, he must have become so by keeping his commandments, and so of every righteous person, whether it was Noah, a preacher of righteousness; Abraham, the father of the faithful; Jacob, the prevailer with God; Moses, the man who wrote of Christ, and brought forth the law by commandment, as a school master to bring men to Christ; or whether it was Jesus Christ himself, who had no need of repentance, having done no sin; according to his solemn declaration to John:—now let me be baptised: for no man can enter the kingdom without obeying this ordinance: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness [see Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 3:43]. Surely, then, if it became John and Jesus Christ, the Saviour, to fulfil all righteousness to be baptised—so surely, then, it will become every other person that seeks the kingdom of heaven to go and do likewise; for he is the door, and if any person climbs up any other way, the same is a thief and a robber! [See John 10:1–2.]

“In the former ages of the world, before the Saviour came in the flesh, ‘the saints’ were baptised in the name of Jesus Christ to come, because there never was any other name whereby men could be saved; and after he came in the flesh and was crucified, then the saints were baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, that they might be buried in baptism like him, and be raised in glory like him, that as there was but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and father of us all [see Ephesians 4:5–6], even so there was but one door to the mansions of bliss.”⁷

**Children who die before the age of accountability
do not need to be baptized; they are redeemed
by the Atonement of Jesus Christ.**

“Baptism is for remission of sins. Children have no sins. Jesus blessed them and said, ‘Do what you have seen me do.’ Children are all made alive in Christ, and those of riper years through faith and repentance.”⁸

“The doctrine of baptizing children, or sprinkling them, or they must welter in hell, is a doctrine not true, not supported in

Holy Writ, and is not consistent with the character of God. All children are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and the moment that children leave this world, they are taken to the bosom of Abraham.”⁹

*The Prophet Joseph Smith described the following as part of a vision he received on January 21, 1836, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 137:1, 10: “The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof. . . . I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.”*¹⁰

**After baptism by water, we receive the Holy Ghost
by the laying on of hands.**

“The gospel requires baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, which is the meaning of the word in the original language—namely, to bury or immerse. . . . I further believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, [as evidenced] by Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:38. You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Savior says, ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ [John 3:5.]”¹¹

*Daniel Tyler recalled an address the Prophet gave in Springfield, Pennsylvania, in 1833: “During his short stay he preached at my father’s residence, a humble log cabin. He read the 3rd chapter of John. . . . Explaining the 5th verse, he said, ‘To be born of water and of the Spirit’ meant to be immersed in water for the remission of sins and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost thereafter. This was given by the laying on of the hands of one having authority given him of God.”*¹²

“Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”¹³

“Baptism is a holy ordinance preparatory to the reception of the Holy Ghost; it is the channel and key by which the Holy



The Holy Ghost is “given by the laying on of the hands of one having authority given him of God.”

Ghost will be administered. The Gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, cannot be received through the medium of any other principle than the principle of righteousness.”¹⁴

“What if we should attempt to get the gift of the Holy Ghost through any other means except the signs or way which God hath appointed—would we obtain it? Certainly not; all other means would fail. The Lord says do so and so, and I will bless you.

“There are certain key words and signs belonging to the Priesthood which must be observed in order to obtain the blessing. The sign [taught by] Peter was to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, with the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost; and in no other way is the gift of the Holy Ghost obtained [see Acts 2:38].

“There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. Had he not taken this sign or ordinance upon him, the Holy Ghost which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him. [See Acts 10:1–48.] Until he obeyed these ordinances and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of hands, according to the order of God, he could not have healed the sick or commanded an evil spirit to come out of a man, and it obey him; for the spirits might say unto him, as they did to the sons of Sceva: ‘Paul we know and Jesus we know, but who are ye?’ [See Acts 19:13–15.]”¹⁵

*In December 1839, while they were in Washington, D.C., to seek redress for the wrongs done to the Missouri Saints, Joseph Smith and Elias Higbee wrote the following to Hyrum Smith: “In our interview with the President [of the United States], he interrogated us wherein we differed in our religion from the other religions of the day. Brother Joseph said we differed in mode of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. We considered that all other considerations were contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*¹⁶

**The gift of the Holy Ghost brings peace, joy,
divine guidance, and other gifts into our lives.**

“We believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost being enjoyed now, as much as it was in the Apostles’ days; we believe that it [the gift of the Holy Ghost] is necessary to make and to organize the Priesthood, that no man can be called to fill any office in the ministry without it; we also believe in prophecy, in tongues, in visions, and in revelations, in gifts, and in healings; and that these things cannot be enjoyed without the gift of the Holy Ghost. We believe that the holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that holy men in these days speak by the same principle; we believe in its being a comforter and a witness bearer, that it brings things past to our remembrance, leads us into all truth, and shows us of things to come; we believe that ‘no man can know that Jesus is the Christ, but by the

Holy Ghost.’ [See 1 Corinthians 12:3.] We believe in it [this gift of the Holy Ghost] in all its fullness, and power, and greatness, and glory.”¹⁷

*In February 1847, nearly three years after the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred, he appeared to President Brigham Young and gave him this message: “Tell the people to be humble and faithful and sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach [you what] to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits. It will whisper peace and joy to their souls, and it will take malice, hatred, envying, strife, and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness, and build up the kingdom of God. Tell the brethren if they will follow the Spirit of the Lord they will go right.”*¹⁸

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review pages 89–90, in which the Prophet Joseph Smith expressed the feelings he had when he and Oliver Cowdery were baptized and when his father was baptized. What memories do you have of your baptism or the baptisms of family members and friends? Consider recording these memories in your journal or life history.
- The statements on pages 91–94 are taken from messages Joseph Smith gave to people who had already been baptized. Why do you think baptized members of the Church need to be reminded of these truths? What new insights have you gained as you have studied these teachings?
- What might you say to a friend who believes that baptism is not necessary? What might you say to a friend who believes

that infants need to be baptized? (For some examples, see pages 94–95.)

- Read the second complete paragraph on page 95. Why is baptism “good for nothing” without the gift of the Holy Ghost? Joseph Smith said, “There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost” (page 97). From your experience, what are some of the blessings that can come into our lives when we have the gift of the Holy Ghost?
- Review the second paragraph on page 97. Why is the mode of baptism a significant difference between the restored Church and other churches? Why is the gift of the Holy Ghost a significant difference? In what ways are “all other considerations . . . contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost”?
- Study the last paragraph in the chapter (page 98). Think about how you can live to be worthy to receive and recognize the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

Related Scriptures: John 15:26; Romans 6:3–6; 2 Nephi 31:13; 3 Nephi 11:18–41; Moroni 8:1–23

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 1:44; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 19, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *History of the Church*, 1:51; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 23, Church Archives.
3. Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 9, p. 12, Church Archives.
4. *History of the Church*, 6:316; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:554–55; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
6. “Baptism,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 1, 1842, pp. 903–5; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; italics deleted; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
7. “Baptism,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 1, 1842, pp. 904–5; punctuation modernized; italics deleted; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:499; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:554; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 137:1, 10; vision given to Joseph Smith on Jan. 21, 1836, in the temple in Kirtland, Ohio.

11. *History of the Church*, 5:499; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
12. Daniel Tyler, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor*, Feb. 1, 1892, pp. 93–94; spelling and punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
13. *History of the Church*, 3:392; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
14. *History of the Church*, 3:379; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
15. *History of the Church*, 4:555; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
16. *History of the Church*, 4:42; from a letter from Joseph Smith and Elias Higbee to Hyrum Smith and other Church leaders, Dec. 5, 1839, Washington, D.C.; the president of the United States at the time was Martin Van Buren.
17. *History of the Church*, 5:27; first and third sets of bracketed words in original; from "Gift of the Holy Ghost," an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, June 15, 1842, p. 823; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
18. Quoted by Brigham Young, in Brigham Young, Office Files, Brigham Young, Vision, Feb. 17, 1847, Church Archives.