

mekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God" (Moro. 8:25–26).

These four principles and ordinances of the gospel are "first" because they both initiate and enable the process of development from a spiritual rebirth to a divine nature.

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FIRST VISION

The First Vision of the Prophet Joseph SMITH is the beginning point, the fountainhead, of the RESTORATION of the gospel in this DISPENSATION. This theophany occurred in a grove near Palmyra, New York, in the spring of 1820.

Joseph's narratives record that when he was in his twelfth year he began to sense the need for redemption and investigated several religious groups. A short time after his family moved to Manchester, New York, he witnessed unusual religious excitement in the area, bringing divisions of allegiance in his community and family. As converts began filing off to one faith and another, he observed that their professed good feelings for each other were lost in "a strife of words and a contest about opinions" (JS—H 1:5–8). Confused and concerned, he asked himself, "If any one of them be right which is it? And how shall I know it?" (Backman, pp. 156, 162, 168; Jessee, p. 198).

Searching the scriptures, Joseph was influenced by an admonition to prayer in the epistle of JAMES. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James 1:5). "Never," he later recalled, "did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine" (JS—H 1:12). He retired to a secluded grove near his father's log-cabin farmhouse and knelt in prayer (Backman, p. 156).

A struggle with a satanic influence followed, but with divine help he survived it. As he continued to call upon God, he records, "I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me." Immediately he was delivered from oppressive darkness (JS—H 1:16). Within the light, he saw two personages "whose brightness and glory defy all description" and who "exactly resembled each other in features and likeness" (JS—H 1:17; WENTWORTH LETTER, Backman, p. 169). One of them spoke his name, pointed to the other, and said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (JS—H 1:17). In what followed, Joseph learned that through Christ, who had taken upon himself the SINS of mankind, he was forgiven of his sins. "Behold I am the Lord of glory. I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life" (Backman, p. 157). He was also assured of the reality and imminence of



First Vision, by Gary E. Smith (1979, oil on canvas, 24" × 30"). Unable to determine for himself what church or sect was right, fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith determined to ask God. Following his prayer, he recorded, "I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (JS—H 1:17). Courtesy Blaine T. Hudson.

Christ's second coming "to bring to pass that which [hath] been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and apostles" (Backman, pp. 157, 167, 169; Jessee, p. 6). When he recovered himself, Joseph asked which church he should join and was told to join none because they all taught "incorrect doctrines"; they had a form of godliness, but "denied the power thereof" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:5). Further, he was told "that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me" (JS—H 1:17–20; Backman, pp. 163, 169; Jessee, p. 213). As he left the grove, he recalled, "My soul was filled with love," and for many days "I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me" (Backman, p. 157).

Joseph's tranquillity was short-lived. At first, except from his family, he met only contempt from those who learned of his experience. He had not anticipated the bitter denunciations that this event would call forth.

On several occasions between 1832 and 1842, the young Prophet wrote or dictated accounts of the vision, each in a different setting, the last two for publication. Each record omits or adds some details. In 1832, for example, Joseph Smith wrote that prior to his First Vision he searched the scriptures and concluded that no society taught New Testament Christianity (Backman, p. 156; Jessee, p. 5). In the 1838 account he notes that he often said to himself, "Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together?" Later in this same account he parenthetically adds "(for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)" (JS—H 1:10, 18; Jessee, pp. 198, 200).

Latter-day Saints regard this vision as authentic and revelatory of the nature of God. In the biblical and scriptural context, they see it as parallel to the VISIONS OF MOSES or the theophanies recorded in the Book of Mormon. Joseph himself compared his experiences in and after the vision to those of PAUL (JS—H 1:24; *TPJS*, p. 151).

LDS teaching is, in the words of Stephen L Richards (a former counselor in the FIRST PRESIDENCY), "steeped in the verity of the First Vision." It undergirds the doctrine of an anthropomorphic God and theomorphic man, of the relationships of the persons of the Godhead, and of continual REVELATION. Mormon prayers, hymns, forms of worship, and eschatology are all rooted in this understanding. It renews the witness of the Hebrew prophets that visions are not the least but the most reliable mortal access to the divine; that

the majesty, glory, and power of God are "beyond description"; that the biblical record of face-to-face communion with God is more than a strained metaphor. It confirms the New Testament testimony of the apostles that GOD THE FATHER and JESUS CHRIST are separate persons who manifest themselves as they are to the sons and daughters of God; and that the Son is in the similitude of the Father, and the Father in the similitude of the Son.

[See also Visions of Joseph Smith, Jr.; Religious Experience.]

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MILTON V. BACKMAN, JR.

FOLK ART

Through a combination of religious and western American metaphors and images, the whole saga of the Church has been artistically represented, from its origins in 1820 in a grove near Palmyra, New York, to the present. Songs and stories about the migration to Utah and the colonization of the Great Basin, anecdotal biographies of Church leaders, folklore incidents of faith, and the miraculous and sometimes comical struggles of the pioneer Saints form integral parts of LDS culture (*see* ART IN MORMONISM). Mormon folk art perpetuates a sense of inclusiveness and serves to bind Latter-day Saints together and help define who they are. Overwhelmingly, Mormon folk art has been the work of a faithful, pragmatic people.

For Latter-day Saint artists, the migration west was "the worst of times and the best of times." Driven from Nauvoo, they faced the prospect of building a new Zion, a home in the mountains. Their folk art is richly expressive of connections to their past and of their unique experience on the frontier. When one pioneer woman, Bathsheba SMITH, packed her trunk for the journey into western territory, she carefully selected what to take and what to leave behind. Deep in the corner of her single trunk she placed her paints, paper, and brushes wrapped in cloth. She added her lace-making tools and fibers to make the beautiful delicate lace for which she was famous. These tools of