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The Savior's Coronation in America

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beginning of the three days of darkness: “Behold, I am the Savior Anointed...⁸⁶⁰ I am the light and the life of the world.” Then he told them what he had accomplished during those three days while they waited in the dark:

and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning (3 Nephi 11:11b).

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When he joined the people who were gathered at the temple, it seems likely that he would have embraced some, then would have moved into the temple itself.

The people responded, perhaps automatically, in a way reminiscent of the way an ancient Lamanite king “did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth” (Alma 22:17).

12 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven (3 Nephi 11:12).

The scene that followed might most easily be visualized as it would have occurred at the conclusion of the drama’s coronation ceremony: as follows during the festival ceremony, the great doors of the temple were swung open, the veil before the Holy of Holies was pulled back, and the king was brought into the sacred chamber. The king—the adopted son and legal heir of Jehovah—sat upon the golden throne with his feet

⁸⁶⁰ The name “Jesus Christ” is an English translation of the Greek version of his name, so those words, “Jesus Christ,” are not what he would have said to the Nephites. “Jesus” is the Greek form of the name Joshua, which means “Jehovah saves” or “Savior.” “Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew “Messiah,” which means the “Anointed One.” So when Jesus introduced himself to the Nephites, what they heard was: “Behold, I am the Savior Anointed whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.” See LDS Bible Dictionary.

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“established” in the Ark as his footstool.⁸⁶¹ While sitting there, he gave a lecture in which he taught his people the meaning of the Law.

The Savior’s real coronation was probably like that. The Nephite Temples were built after the pattern of Solomon’s Temple,⁸⁶² so, as in Jerusalem, its Holy of Holies contained Jehovah’s throne, for “the throne in the sanctuary is considered as the image of the divine throne.”⁸⁶³

In Mormon’s account, this was not the dress rehearsal as it had been during the festival temple drama. The King was really Jehovah, the Eternal Priest and King of Israel. He had come to *his* temple. The Holy of Holies was *his* throne room. In it was *his own* throne. It is likely that the people who were present would have understood that what they were witnessing was the true enthronement—the reality for which the conclusion of the New Year’s festival drama was only a preparatory enactment.

When the Savior came to the Temple at Bountiful, we may suppose that he would have done precisely what the people would have expected him to do, that is, the veil before the Holy of Holies would have been pulled back, and their King—Jehovah-Messiah—the resurrected Savior—would have gone into the Holy of Holies and sat upon his own throne. If the room were arranged like the one in Solomon’s Temple, the throne would have been elevated above the floor, and there would have been a footstool there, a sacred box akin to the Ark of the Covenant, containing emblems of priesthood and kingship—perhaps the sword of Laban, the Liahona, the small plates, and other sacred symbols of divine authority. When the Savior sat upon his throne, his feet would have been “established” upon that footstool and his priesthood and kingship would have been acknowledged.

It was probably perfectly silent in the temple, but running through the minds of some may have been the words appropriate to this time during the temple drama:

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises:
sing praises unto our King, sing praises.
7 For God is the King of all the earth:
sing ye praises with understanding.

⁸⁶¹ For a discussion of the Ark of the Covenant as a footstool, see Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 210-11.

⁸⁶² 2 Nephi 5:16, Alma 16:13.

⁸⁶³ Wensinck, *Ideas of the Western*, 55.

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8 God reigneth over the heathen:

God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

9 The princes of the people are gathered together, even
the people of the God of Abraham:

for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is
greatly exalted (Psalm 47:6-9).

There the people came. One by one they came before the Savior, knelt before him, embraced by the overwhelming power of his love; they would have looked up through the brilliant light that is an expression of his love and that defines him as God—and into his smiling eyes. Each one touching his hands and his side.

Looking upon him, they saw a man—real and tangible as themselves—yet his person was wholly different from their own. He was white beyond anything they could imagine or describe. The whiteness was not a quality of his exterior, but of himself. He was pure light, there was no darkness in him, therefore, he was not full of light, but he was light. He was not full of truth, but rather the personification of truth. He was not the expression of love; he was the fulfillment of love, which is truth and light. For that reason, darkness could not be where he was but by definition must have fled from his presence. Therefore all that were within his presence must have become pure as he was pure.

They were clean—not because they were innately clean—but because he had forgiven them of all their past sins and had accepted only their present repentant, humble Selves into his presence. Therefore, they understood that they were clean. In that came the greater understanding that if they were to remain clean they must forgive as they had been forgiven. They must acknowledge that which was good in others and permit them to leave behind their sins, as each one of them had been permitted to leave behind his own sins when he came into the presence of the Savior.

As they knelt before him and held his hands in theirs, they realized that they could not comprehend such unbounded magnificence. They looked down at his hands and sought to comprehend him; they realized that he is the pure embodiment of truth and light and love. They were filled to overflowing with his love, and they were not afraid.

As they knelt before him, perhaps each one, like Nephi, “bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet.” As they held his feet in their hands—washing them with their tears, then caressing his feet with their fingers—their fingertips would have reached back to the place where the nail had been driven through his heels and into the wood of the

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cross.⁸⁶⁴ As each individual knelt there, within the unspeakable power of his love, their joy and their tears bore testimony to their souls that he is real—their fingers which touched the wounds testified that he is the resurrected God. Before leaving, some might tenderly wipe his feet with their own hair—feeling that to use anything else would be inappropriate.

Later, the memory of it would fill their souls with wonderment, for their finite minds could comprehend neither his glory nor the joy they felt in his presence. And their greatest desire was to be forever where he is.

Isaiah's words, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isaiah 52:7) call to mind that scene.

13 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

14 Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

15 And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come (3 Nephi 11:13-15).

There (probably in the Holy of Holies, and probably as he sat on his throne, with his

⁸⁶⁴ "In 1968, the bones of a crucified man were found at Giv'at ha-Mivtar just north of Jerusalem. These belonged to a man about 26 years old and 167 cm (5' 5 1/2") tall. The heel bones (calcanea) were still fixed together by a nail. An examination showed that the nail had first been hammered through a piece of Pistacia or Acacia wood and then through both heel bones before entering the cross made of olive wood. The lower leg bones were broken. There was the mark of a nail on one of the lower right arm bones (radius.)

"The nails were probably put through a plaque of wood to stop them tearing through the flesh. The weight of the body would have pulled the arm nails up the forearm to the wrist. The legs were broken against the side of the cross. All the weight of the victim's body would be on the arms causing death by suffocation." Peter Connolly, *A History of the Jewish People in the Times of Jesus from Herod the Great to Masada* (New York: Peter Bedrick, 1983), 51.

See also illustration on page 48 of: Jodi Magness, "What did Jesus' Tomb Look Like?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32, 1 (January/February, 2006): 38-49, 70.

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feet established upon the sacred box, elevated above the ground so the people could touch them conveniently), one by one (procession-like) twenty-five hundred people filed past him, and each touched his hands, his side, and his feet, obtaining for themselves a sure testimony of the reality of his divinity and of his resurrection. Then the people responded just as they did in the ceremonies described in King Benjamin's festival drama. They spoke in unison, in a declaration of belief that rings true as a covenant of fidelity.

16 And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

17 Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him (3 Nephi 11:16-17).⁸⁶⁵

It is significant that, when all who were present at the Bountiful Temple had seen, touched, and knew, then the shout of Hosanna resounded through the temple. Perhaps the people may also have sung:

22 The stone which the builders refused
is become the head stone of the corner.

23 This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.

24 This is the day which the Lord hath made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

25 Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord,
I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

26 Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord:
we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord.

27 God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light:
bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

28 Thou art my God, and I will praise thee:

⁸⁶⁵ See also: Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), ch. 19, "Christ among the Ruins," 407-34. Johnson points out that the word translated "save now," which he translates, "grant salvation," "has been made familiar through the Greek of the New Testament as 'Hosanna!'" Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 126-27. See "handle something" in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 120.

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thou art my God, I will exalt thee.
29 O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good:
for his mercy endureth for ever (Psalm 118:22-29).

Perhaps they sang other psalms appropriate to this phase of the New Year's festival. If so, then Psalm 7 may have been among them. "So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about: for their sakes there return thou on high."⁸⁶⁶ Perhaps the people also sang this "enthronement Psalm"⁸⁶⁷:

1 The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble:
he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved.
2 The Lord is great in Zion;
and he is high above all the people.
3 Let them praise thy great and terrible name;
for it is holy.
4 The king's strength also loveth judgment;
thou dost establish equity,
thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob.
5 Exalt ye the Lord our God,
and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.
6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,
and Samuel among them that call upon his name;
they called upon the Lord, and he answered them.
7 He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar:
they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them.
8 Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God:
thou wast a God that forgavest them,
though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.
9 Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill;

⁸⁶⁶ Psalm 7:7.

⁸⁶⁷ Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 70.

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for the Lord our God is holy (Psalm 99:1-9).⁸⁶⁸

Then Jesus, their King, did exactly what Jehovah was represented as doing during the temple drama. He appointed a new ruler to represent himself in his sacral kingdom. In the drama, Jehovah appointed the king; but here, in reality, it was the resurrected Christ who appointed Nephi and the others of the Twelve:

18 And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth.

19 And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet.

20 And the Lord commanded him that he should arise. And he arose and stood before him.

21 And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven. ...

41 Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth (3 Nephi 11:18-21, 41).

When the Savior came to the temple, he made the Twelve the leaders of the church and apparently the heads of the governing body of a new theocracy. Lundquist wrote that a temple's building, rebuilding, or restoring was essential to the legitimizing of a new government.⁸⁶⁹

Whether the people had come for a temple dedication we can only conjecture. However, what we can know, is that the Savior used this occasion to establish a new government for his kingdom. The next thing he did also followed the pattern of the drama.

⁸⁶⁸ Johnson's comment about the 99th Psalm is relevant here:

"The point of view which the Psalm reveals is thus perfectly clear, and may be summed up by saying that, after the long vicissitudes of the Wandering and the Settlement, Yahweh is now firmly established in Zion, where, manifesting His presence as 'He that is seated on the cherubim' through the instrumentality of the Ark, He is to rule over the earth as the universal King; and, what is more, the achievement of justice and righteousness amongst His own chosen people is to be the guarantee of His actual presence as a King who is resolved that His rule shall be just and equitable" (Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 71-72).

⁸⁶⁹ Lundquist, "Legitimizing Role of the Temple," 179-235.

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Just as at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama, apparently while Jesus was sitting on his throne, he delivered an address to the people. In 3Nephi, the text of the sermon the resurrected Christ spoke is in two parts: the Beatitudes were a synopsis of the whole meaning of the ancient temple rites, and the remainder of the American Sermon on the Mount was a review of the temple covenants and a very practical statement about how one might live them—the object of the rites and the object of the sermon being the same.⁸⁷⁰

Again Jesus did what they would have anticipated he might do. In the festival after the coronation, the seventh day concluded with rejoicing and feasting—as did this day. When Jesus had finished teaching, “Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.” When they brought it, he blessed it and caused that there was enough for the disciples and all the multitude to eat “until they were filled”:

1 And it came to pass that Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him.

2 And while they were gone for bread and wine, he commanded the multitude that they should sit themselves down upon the earth.

3 And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat.

4 And when they had eaten and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude.

5 And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name (3 Nephi 18:1-5).

The following day was like the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama. The Savior came to them, and again he did what the ritual of the temple drama said the king would do. On that day there was a great feast, and all the food was provided by the king himself. It represented his power and authority to rule with generosity, equity, justice, and mercy. Symbolically, in the drama this was a return to paradise where the people might eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life.

⁸⁷⁰ The sermon is discussed in the next chapters.

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In his account, Mormon made a point of telling us that the events of this day followed that same pattern. Jesus himself provided the food for the entire multitude:

6 Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude;
7 But he truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink (3 Nephi 20:6-7).

This bread and wine did, in fact, represent the fruit of the tree of life and the waters of life, as the Savior explained:

8 And he said unto them: He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled (3 Nephi 20:8).

The symbolism was unmistakable. The Savior had symbolically—and literally—reintroduced the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve back into their paradisiacal Garden home, where they could be in God’s presence and eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life and drink from the river of the waters of life.

During his stay with the Nephites, their Savior-King had actualized the final events of the festival drama by instituting a new age—a time of peace and prosperity that endured for much of the next 200 years.

There is one more detail in Mormon’s account that rings with singular significance. He tells us that on each of the two occasions when Jesus came to the multitude, he was dressed differently. The first time:

And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them (3 Nephi 11:8).

The next day, when he came again, he did not wear a robe (singular), but garments (plural):

25 And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his

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countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof (3 Nephi 19:25).

Mormon does not explain the difference; he only mentions it in passing. However, it may be that the different clothing was appropriate for the different occasions. The first day (equivalent to day seven of the festival drama) was the day of coronation, when Christ not only acted the part of the newly anointed king but also established Nephi and the others of the Twelve as sacral priests and kings. The next day, like the eighth day in the temple drama, was a day of celebration, ushering in a new age when the king had established peace and prosperity. It is possible that his “garments” were appropriate to such a celebration.

As one considers both the events of the Savior’s coming to America and the concluding events of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama, one realizes that the correlation between them is much too close to be a coincidence—and since the Prophet Joseph could not have known the details of the ancient festival from any source except Mormon’s gold plates, this account of the Savior’s coronation as the Eternal King of the newly established era of peace is another strong academic testimony of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon as an ancient book.

Thus the story itself bears witness that the authors of the Book of Mormon were privy to all the sacred rites and ordinances which were necessary to salvation. It appears that Mormon’s purpose as editor of the volume was to use the pattern of the New Year’s enthronement festival as one more testimony that Jesus *is* King, that he *is* the Anointed Savior and the Only Begotten Son of the Living God. The account in 3 Nephi is a testimony of the Savior and an account of the precision and rectitude of the events of his American coronation.

As already observed, the great Bible scholars of the last century believed that the ancient coronation ceremony was about the people as well as about the king and queen. When the king was anointed and adopted as a child of God, that ordinance symbolically represented the anointing and adoption of each individual who participated in the ceremony. Ultimately, perhaps the best evidence that they were correct in that belief is the way Mormon reports the beginning of the Savior’s lecture on the Law and the gospel:

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1 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve), and he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them. ... (3 Nephi 12:1).

The point here is that the Savior had only just been giving specific instructions to Nephi and the Twelve, but when he gave the coronation lecture, he addressed the entire multitude.

The lecture began with the Beatitudes. There are several differences between the Beatitudes in the Bible and those in the Book of Mormon. One of the most often repeated differences is the use of the word *all*. An example is Matthew’s “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” There, “peacemakers” may be read as a generic characteristic. But in the Book of Mormon’s “And blessed are *all* the peacemakers ...” with the word *all* focusing on each individual. “Peacemakers” may be a generic term, but “all peacemakers” separates those in the group into individual persons—and it is as individuals that “they shall be called [named] the children of God.” That is a very significant difference.

The other most frequently found difference is that the Matthew Beatitudes are several loosely connected sayings that some scholars believe were put in their present form by a later editor. But in 3 Nephi each one begins with the word “yea” or “and.” Those words are conjunctions that string the Beatitudes into a single coherent and sequential statement—emphasizing that the Beatitudes are to be understood as a unit—and that the sequence it represents is for *all* the people, reminding his audience that these are the personal requisites of eternal priesthood and sacral kingship.