

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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Latter-day Saints are to refrain from blasphemy and the taking of the name of God in vain. Profanity and acrimony diminish spirituality and must be avoided: “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col. 3:8). People are not defiled, Jesus emphasized, by what goes into the mouth, but by what comes from the heart: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). Accordingly, Latter-day Saints are enjoined to avoid all forms of evil speaking of God, of the Lord’s anointed, and, by implication, of all that is his, for “in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (D&C 59:21).

[See also Profanity.]

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GARY L. BROWNING

BLESSING ON FOOD

Blessings on food are prayers to thank God for providing sustenance and to ask his blessings both on the food and on those who share it. In Mormon homes such blessings precede each meal and may be given by any member of a dining party, adult or child. In private these prayers are spoken orally, but may be spoken silently by individuals dining in public. All blessings on the food are addressed to God in the name of Jesus Christ. They are spoken from the heart as there is no prescribed prayer.

Latter-day Saints follow the patterns established by Christ and his disciples in blessings on food. When feeding the multitudes, Christ gave thanks for sustenance (Matt. 15:35–36) and blessed it (Matt. 14:19). Paul taught that food was to be received with prayer and thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3–5).

Biblical examples of praying over food are the basis for the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions of blessings on food or saying grace. Converts to Mormonism tended to continue these traditions from their prior faiths, and to be bolstered by the Latter-day Saint instruction on prayer: All things

are to be done “with prayer and thanksgiving.” Food and all “good things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart, . . . to strengthen the body and enliven the soul And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things” (D&C 59:7, 17–19, 21).

Petitioning God for blessings on the food to be eaten is typical of Mormon table blessings. This may include requests for nourishment and good health, for strength to do one’s work and God’s will and to be of service. Other blessings on the diners or on those who prepared the meal are also deemed appropriate.

In many cultures, breaking bread or sharing a meal with others is an act of hospitality. According to Latter-day scripture such sharing may also be a foretaste of the future Messianic banquet (D&C 58:8). Because family meals provide opportunities for sharing the deepest spiritual concerns and rejoicings, it is especially appropriate to begin such occasions with prayer and the invocation of the Spirit. In LDS families this prayer is customarily spoken at the beginning of the meal only, and not also following the meal, as is the custom among some people of other religions. Because there is no prescribed form for Latter-day Saint blessings on food, such blessings enable families daily to express their own feelings, thoughts, and words in intimate prayer and fellowship two or three times a day.

CHRISTINE QUINN CHRISTENSEN

BLESSINGS

The term “blessings” is used in two different ways in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In a broad traditional sense as used in many cultures, the word applies to all good things that come in a person’s life—the wonders of nature, the joys of family, the benefits of liberty and education—anything and everything that enriches life. Such blessings are often pointed to as a manifestation of God’s love for his children. Latter-day Saint writings are interspersed with this usage. In more specific terminology, blessings refer to ORDINANCES performed under PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY.

A PRIESTHOOD BLESSING may be given only

by those who have been ordained to the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD. In the Church, most boys at the age of twelve have the AARONIC PRIESTHOOD conferred upon them and are ordained to the office of DEACON. At age fourteen, they are usually ordained TEACHERS, and at age sixteen, PRIESTS. If the priesthood bearer continues to show faithfulness and worthiness, then at age eighteen, or anytime thereafter, he may receive the Melchizedek Priesthood with ordination to the priesthood office of ELDER. An elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood has authority to perform most priesthood functions in the Church, including giving priesthood blessings.

Each priesthood ordination, from deacon to apostle, is a type of priesthood blessing and is characterized, as are all priesthood blessings, by (1) the LAYING-ON OF HANDS by those in authority, (2) an invocation of the authority of the priesthood and the name of Jesus Christ, and (3) such words of blessing as follow the impressions of the Spirit.

This third element, that of spiritual impressions, is vital for any priesthood blessing. A fundamental doctrine of the Church is a belief that a worthy priesthood bearer, when giving a priesthood blessing, will receive promptings from the HOLY SPIRIT regarding what is to be spoken—not necessarily the exact words, but ideas or thoughts that he will then express as clearly as he can in his own words. This is the essence of a priesthood blessing, and distinguishes it from a PRAYER. A prayer seeks to communicate with God, either vocally or silently, and is rooted in the faith that God will hear the words or the thoughts and feelings and then, in his infinite wisdom and power, will respond. A priesthood blessing is based on trust that the priesthood holder, while speaking the blessing, will receive spiritual promptings regarding what is to be spoken and thus his words represent the will of God.

In the Church, formal priesthood blessings include the following:

BLESSING OF CHILDREN. When babies are just a few weeks old, they are usually given a priesthood blessing for the special purpose of conferring a name by which the baby will be known and bestowing promises based on spiritual impressions regarding the baby's future life. A quality of prophecy attends this process. If a baby's father is a worthy holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood, he will usually pronounce the blessing, but it may be

given by a grandfather, a family friend, or any other qualified priesthood holder chosen by the baby's parents. Babies are usually blessed in the presence of the congregation at a FAST AND TESTIMONY MEETING. However, the blessing may be given at other times and places, such as in a hospital or home, if there is a special need.

CONFIRMATION FOLLOWING BAPTISM. Two ordinances are required for admission to Church MEMBERSHIP. The first is BAPTISM. The second, CONFIRMATION, is performed shortly following baptism and is a type of priesthood blessing. Two or more men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood place their hands on the head of the person who has been baptized and, with one of the men serving as voice, the baptized person is confirmed a member of the Church and given the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST. Additional words of counsel or admonition are then expressed according to spiritual promptings.

SETTING APART TO CHURCH ASSIGNMENTS. Customarily, whenever any person is called to serve as a teacher or officer in any of the Church organizations, and always when a person is called to be a MISSIONARY or TEMPLE worker, persons holding proper priesthood authority place their hands on the person's head and the individual is set apart to the assignment. One of the priesthood bearers pronounces the blessing and expresses whatever counsel or thoughts he is impressed to say.

ADMINISTERING TO THE SICK. Blessings of health or comfort are given to one who is sick or injured. Two Melchizedek Priesthood men normally give this blessing in accord with James 5:14. The head of the sick person is anointed with a few drops of olive oil consecrated for this purpose. The two priesthood bearers then gently place their hands on the head of the afflicted person and the one sealing the anointing expresses promises of healing or comfort as he is impressed. Many incidents of dramatic and even miraculous healings have been recorded in Church history. Any worthy Melchizedek Priesthood bearer, when requested, may give such a blessing.

PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS. Each organized STAKE in the Church has one or more PATRIARCHS called to give patriarchal blessings to stake members. Normally this blessing is given just once in a person's life, usually when a person is young, most

often in the teenage years. However, the blessing may be given at any age from childhood to advanced years. The patriarchal blessing is a lifetime blessing of guidance, warning, encouragement, and reassurance. Men serving as patriarchs are spiritually mature high priests in the Melchizedek Priesthood who have been ordained especially for the sacred CALLING of giving patriarchal blessings.

FATHER'S AND HUSBAND'S BLESSINGS. Every Melchizedek Priesthood bearer who is a husband or father has the authority, through worthiness, to give a priesthood blessing on special occasions or in times of special need to members of his family—a husband's blessing to his wife or a father's blessing to a son or daughter. Such blessings may be suggested by the husband or father or requested by the one desiring the blessing. They are blessings of love, counsel, and encouragement. Like all priesthood blessings, these are given by the laying on of hands on the head of the one receiving the blessing.

SPECIAL BLESSINGS OF COUNSEL AND COMFORT. All priesthood officers in the Church, from GENERAL AUTHORITIES through STAKE PRESIDENCIES and WARD BISHOPRICS to home teachers, have authority to give blessings of counsel or comfort to Church members within their jurisdiction. These are official priesthood blessings given in the same manner and with similar spiritual promptings as other priesthood blessings. Persons desiring such a blessing usually request it of one of the local priesthood officers in the area where they reside.

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BRUCE B. CLARK

BLIND, MATERIALS FOR THE

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was always sensitive to individuals and their personal needs. He paid particular attention to those with handicaps



In 1941, Helen Keller was given a Braille copy of the Book of Mormon by President Heber J. Grant in the president's office. The Church produces a wide variety of materials for the blind. Courtesy University of Utah.

and healed many of their infirmities (e.g., Matt. 11:5). Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches similar sensitivity to people with special needs.

Since 1904, the Church has produced gospel materials for the blind and the visually impaired, and now all such people may obtain these materials in a wide variety of helpful formats.

Access to printed material is often inadequate for the visually impaired. To help overcome this lack, the Church produces materials on audiocassettes, in Braille, and in large-print versions. Audiocassettes are available at both standard and half-speed. Half-speed cassettes require the type of slow-speed cassette player that the Library of Congress lends to visually impaired persons in the United States.

The Church provides the scriptures on audiocassettes, in large type, and in Braille. It also produces courses of study and selected Church books in Braille and on audiocassettes. The words to Church hymns are available in Braille and on recordings.