

## Institute 3-31-20

## The Church of Christ is Organized—April 6, 1830

### Timeline

1830	Mar 26	Book of Mormon For Sale \$1.25 at Grandin's Bookstore
	April 6	Church organized (D&C 21 received)
	April	Baptism of Joseph Sr. and Luck Mack Smith, Martin Harris, and Orrin Porter Rockwell
	April 10	Church constitution, "Articles and Covenants," completed (D&C 20)
	June 9	First Conference of the Church
	June	The Lord commanded Joseph to begin translating the Bible
	Aug 25	Joseph paid \$200 for approximately thirteen acres (Milton Blackman, <i>Eyewitness Accounts</i> , 234)
1831	Jan	Joseph and Emma Move to Kirtland, Ohio

### Historical Requirements for a New Religion: Incorporation or Legal Society

In 1813 the State of New York passed an act specifying requirements to incorporate a religious organization. If a church had property that they wanted to keep in the church, then an incorporated set of rules were required. Incorporation required electing three to nine men as cooperation trustees (or managing officers for the temporal needs of the church), submitting an official title, and paying a fee. Historians have found no official documentation nor fees paid to incorporate the church. The only consistent evidence is a list of six baptized men who agreed to the organization—but that was not recorded until decades later and the known lists of the six men are not the same (Joseph Knight's recorded included: Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Samuel Smith, Peter Whitmer Jr. and David Whitmer). Furthermore, there was no need to incorporate without any church property in NY, so we assume, Joseph did not choose that legal option.

The second legal option was to form a "Religious Society." New York law stipulated no detailed on how to form a "Religious Society," but the organization of the "Church of Christ" follows a similar structure to many churches of the day. We can see similarities with other church organization. (These parallels will be clearer later, as we go through D&C 20 which functioned as a constitution for the church.) I've systematized David Stott's research as follows (*BYU Studies*, 49.2):

#### Presbyterian Guidelines:

- Elect two ruling elders
- Set apart elders
- Explain public worship
- Explain baptism

#### Methodist Religious Society:

- Find a permanent preacher

#### Baptist Guidelines:

- Unite in mutual covenant
- Articles adopted
- Church named
- Officers elected

### References of a New Church

Joseph Smith began receiving revelations about the future church possibly as early as the First Vision and Moroni's visitation. We also find references to the upcoming church in the early canonized revelations as early as 1828 (now in the D&C):

1. D&C 5:14 ". . . this the beginning of the rising up and the coming forth of my **church** out of the wilderness"
2. D&C 10:53, 67, 69 "If this generation harden not their hearts, I will establish my **church** among them . . . whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church . . . whosoever is of my **church**, and endureth of my **church** to the end, him will I establish upon my rock"
3. D&C 11:16 "Wait a little longer, until you shall have my word, my rock, my **church**, and my gospel, that you may know of a surety my doctrine."
4. D&C 18:4-5 In them [Book of Mormon] are all things written concerning the foundation of my **church** ... if you shall build up my **church**, upon the foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you."

There were other non-canonized revelations that referred to the importance of the date April 6, 1830. We learn of another commandment during that time that was only recorded in a Nauvoo newspaper article. It said Joseph and Oliver were given "the precise day upon which, according to [God's] will and commandment, we should proceed to organize his church once again" (*Times and Seasons*, Oct 1, 1842 article "History of Joseph Smith," 928-20).

Sometime in June of 1829 while Joseph was still living with the Whitmer's in Fayette finishing up the translation of the Book of Mormon, he received the revelation we know as D&C 18. There the Lord commanded Oliver to put together an inspired document to act as a "foundation of my church," from the writings of the Book of Mormon (D&C 18:3-5). Joseph also added to the document over the next several months. They finished it four days after the organization of the church.

### The Organization of the Church: Tuesday April 6, 1830, Fayette, NY

Ten years after the first vision, and ten days after the Book of Mormon was available for all to read, 24-year-old Joseph was prepared to organize the Church. Pres Gordon B. Hinkley observed: "This day of organization was, in effect, a day of commencement, the graduation for Joseph from ten years of remarkable schooling. It had begun with the incomparable vision in the grove in the spring of 1820" (*Ensign*, Ap 1980, 11). Joseph Smith's *History of the Church* account of the organization of the church is concise and clear:

Whilst the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer . . . we had received commandment to organize the Church . . . Accordingly we met together for that purpose, at the house of the above mentioned Mr. Whitmer (being \*six in number) on Tuesday the sixth day of April, AD One thousand, eight hundred and thirty (*HC*, 1:74-76).

I will divide our information on the organization of the church into four sections: Location, Number, Date, and the Meeting.

1. **Location:** Joseph's reference to the Whitmer's log house in Fayette, NY where he had lived during the last month of translation of the Book of Mormon. was actually packed with over 40 people (the numbers differ with each account—David Whitmer once claimed 70 members). There are other documents that include a different location—Manchester, NY. It really doesn't matter as Elder D. Todd Christofferson addressed these and other discrepancies between some of the records:

Recording mistakes, for example, have sometimes been seized on as evidence of misrepresentations or bumbling by the Prophet. For example, the Book of Commandments initially referred to Joseph Smith as "an elder" and Oliver Cowdery the same, rather than "First Elder" and "Second Elder" as found in the text of Doctrine and Covenants Section 20. The 1833 Book of Commandments suggested that the Church was organized in Manchester rather than Fayette, New York. The June 1839 Manuscript History of the Church says it was Nephi who appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 rather than Moroni. Now, however, with original manuscripts contained in the Book of Commandments and Revelations, published as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, and other early sources we can "peel back the onion" a little further. And we find that the supposed problems are nothing more sinister than clerical errors sometimes repeated by others ("The Prophet Joseph Smith," footnote 14, *BYU-Idaho Devotional*, 9-24-13).

2. **Number:** Joseph's reference to "\*six" people present at the organization may refer to the six male baptized members at that time who acted as legal witnesses: Joseph, Hyrum, and Samuel Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David and Peter Whitmer Jr. We currently do not have a document with their names from the decade of 1830 to 1840. The available lists record different names (the above list was dictated by Oliver, and recorded by Joseph Knight). There may have been up to nine baptized members at the meeting, but we know for sure these six. The rest of the people that gathered that Tuesday were interested supporters (including twenty from Joseph Knight's family and friends in Colesville—92 miles away). Emma did not travel up from Harmony.

**Baptized Members in 1830:**

Before April 6, 1830—6 to 9 baptized  
April 6-10? 1830—4 new members  
April 11, 1830—6 baptized by Oliver  
April 18, 1830—8 baptized by Oliver  
May end 1830—Newel Knight baptized  
June 9, 1830—27 total church members  
Sept 26, 1830—62 total church members  
Oct 17, 1830—70 to 80 baptisms

3. **Date:** The date had some special meaning as it was assigned by revelation. In 1830, April 6 was just five days before Easter, a full moon after the vernal equinox, and the day before Passover began (just as the Last Supper was on the preparation day for the Passover). It is possibly the Lord's birthday as section 20 begins: "The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh . . . the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April" (D&C 20:1). Elder James E. Talmage wrote: "We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, 1 BC" (*Jesus the Christ*, 104). Presidents Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball also mentioned April 6<sup>th</sup> as the anniversary of the Lord's birth (Conference Report, Apr 1973, 4; Apr 1975, 3-4). The day is held as doubly sacred by many members of the Restored church.

Jeffrey R. Chadwick and others who read D&C 20:1, do not share this interpretation and read it more generally as the date of the organization of the church (Chadwick, *BYU Studies*, 49.4). Some historians claim the words were used commonly to express the year. However, when I searched with the help of "google-book-search" through hundreds of eighteen and nineteenth century writings, I did not find the wording (or any combination of phrases) from D&C 20:1a-b to describe the date during that time. More research is needed for a complete search.

4. **Organization Meeting:** The official meeting for the organization of the church was simple but powerful. It commenced with: **Kneeling in prayer**, sustaining officers, sacrament, confirmation, testimony meeting, and Joseph received a revelation (D&C 21). Note the original name was the "Church of Christ," or "Church of Jesus Christ," but by this 1838 edited version in James Mulholland's script, the fuller name was recorded (D&C 115).

Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father we proceeded, (according to previous commandment) to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these they consented by an unanimous vote. I then laid my hands upon Oliver Cowdery and ordained him an Elder of the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." after which he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took, bread, blessed it, and break it with them, also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree. Some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord and rejoiced exceedingly. Whilst yet together I received the following commandment (*HC 1:77*).

What we refer to as, D&C 21 is the first revelation given to the church. It establishes the protocol “when my Prophet speaks.” This was the first time were the gift of the Holy Ghost was received in this dispensation (*History of the Church*, 1839, 1.76).

### **Baptisms: Possibly Day(s) after the Organization, April 6-16**

The handful of members from April 6, 1830, were joined by a few more over the next few weeks. The *History of the Church* records that the Prophet Joseph baptized four more shortly after the organization of the church:

Several persons who had attended the above meeting, became convinced of the truth and came forward shortly after, and were received into the Church: among the rest, my own father and mother were baptized, to my great joy and consolation; and about the same time, Martin Harris and Orrin Porter Rockwell (1.79).

Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Knight Sr. also described these four important baptisms: Joseph Sr. (59 yrs) and Lucy Mack Smith (55 yrs), Martin Harris (47 yrs), and Orrin Porter Rockwell (15 yrs). These four may not have been baptized on the same day as the records do not clearly state that nor were the accounts written immediately afterward. Joseph Knight remembered that Joseph Sr. and Martin Harris were baptized 33-39 miles away from Fayette, near the Smith home in Manchester / Palmyra. The most meaningful of the baptisms for Joseph was the baptism of his father. Lucy remembered that after baptizing his father, Joseph exclaimed: “Praise to my God! That I lived to see my own father baptized into the true church of Christ.” (Lucy’s *History of JS*, 168; HC, 1: 79).

Joseph Knight gives a few more details:

. . . They found a place in a Lot a small Stream ran thro [sic] and they ware Babtized [sic] in the Evening Because of persecution . . . Joseph [Jr.] was filled with the Spirit to a great degree . . . he burst out with . . . joy and seemed as though the world could not hold him. He went out into the lot and appeared to want to get out of sight of everybody and would sob and cry and seemed to be so full that he could not live. Oliver and I went after him and came to him and after a while he came in. But he was the most wrought upon that I ever saw any man. . . . His joy seemed to be full.” (Dean Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17 [Autumn 1976]: 37.)

As we discussed in our first lecture in this series, the prophet’s father, Joseph Sr., was a seeker of truth, a devoted Christian believer in God and the Bible. Yet he was not satisfied with religions of the day—even though earlier he helped organize a Universalist society in Tunbridge, VT with his father (Porter and Black, eds., *The Prophet Joseph*, 4-6). His seven inspired dreams all depicted his religious search to a find truth—but he always woke up hoping for more in the unknown future. The Smith home had the religious tension of family members attending different churches. For Joseph to unify their faith and provide baptism for his father was one of the happiest days in his life.

### **1829-1830, Articles and Covenants: D&C 20**

On Saturday, April 10, 1830, Joseph and Oliver finished the document known today as D&C 20. The prophet read it to the members gathered at the first Conference, June 9, 1830. They accepted it as the “Articles and Covenants” of the Church. It acted initially like a constitution for the church, similar to how the US Constitution functions for the government. It explained key doctrines and practices that would be observed in the church. This document is an example of how God works with us where we are. The original small church grew in size, name, organization, and needs—yet still this document is applicable especially in our core doctrines of the nature of God, creation, fall, repentance, priesthood offices, and ordinances.

To emphasize this document’s importance to the early church, we can look at the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, and find that it begins with the Lectures on Faith, followed by the Lord’s “Preface” (D&C 1:6) to the revelations. The next few revelations were organized in importance as follows (not as our current a semi-chronological order):

- D&C 1, The Lord’s Preface to the “Book of Commandments” (1833) / “Doctrine and Covenants” (1835)
- D&C 20, the “Articles and Covenants of the Church”
- D&C 107 on the Priesthood

The section is organized in a way to include the same information that other churches or “Religious Societies” were organized as discussed above. It reads almost as our creed and includes a similar emphasis to important beliefs and church organizations.

#### **Name of Church**

“The Articles and Covenants” opens with the name of the church “The Church of Christ” (20:1). Our prophet, Russell M. Nelson, asked us to be more careful and conscious about using the correct name of the church, it is interesting to note that the name of the church evolved—or at least it was recorded differently over the first eight years:

- 1830 “The Church of Christ” (D&C 20:1) and “The Church of Jesus Christ” (Non-members: Mormonite, Mormonism)
- 1831 Referring to members with the NT name: “saints” (D&C 43:18) began finding its way into vocabulary.
- 1834 “The Church of the Latter-day Saints”
- 1838 “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (D&C 115:3; 127:12; 128:21; and 136:2)

#### **D&C 20 Outline**

D&C 20:1-16 Historical Prologue  
20:17-37 History Doctrines  
20:38-67 Duties of Priesthood  
20:70-71 Children to be blessed  
20:82 Record Keeping

### First Historical References to First Vision and Moroni

As mentioned in an earlier lecture, Joseph began recording more details from his First Vision in 1832 and continued with six first-person accounts (John W. Welch and Eric Carlson, eds. *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005). This document includes the first “hint” of Joseph’s First Vision. Similar to his 1832 account, in D&C 20:5, Joseph accounts speaks of his preoccupation with desiring to know his standing before God and sought a remission of his sins. In 20:6, Joseph continues on to refer to Angel Moroni’s visit:

#### D&C 20:5-6

After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world;  
6. But after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness

#### 1832 Account of First Vision

My mind became exceedingly distressed, for I became convicted of my sins, and by searching the scriptures I found that mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatized . . . I felt to mourn for my own sins . . . I cried unto the Lord for mercy, for there was none else to whom I could go and obtain mercy. And the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness, and while in the attitude of calling upon the Lord . . . he spake unto me, saying, Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee.

More than the First Vision, the “Articles and Covenants,” discusses Book of Mormon for 40% of the section. The book was hot off the press, but it has a dominant position in the coming forth of the church (see D&C 20:17).

#### Religious Society Beliefs: D&C 20:17-36

The “Articles and Covenants” then turns to similar major topics we find in other Christian creeds:

Joseph and his family were involved with the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. So their statements of belief are points of departure for the Latter-day Saint Articles and Covenants. The LDS format has marked similarities, though content deeply differs. Protestant creeds generally began with God and moved to the fall, Christ’s redemption, the saving ordinances, and the believer’s moral duties. That also summarizes D&C 20:17-26 [36]. But this simple LDS credo eliminates all language about the God ‘without body’ and ‘parts’ as well as the strong descriptions that the Father and Son are together ‘one substance.’ Indeed, these phrases come from the later Christian councils, not the scriptures.

Joseph said that in 1820 the First Vision taught him the error of Christian creeds, and in 1830 he avoided their non-scriptural language in the first statement of Latter-day Saint beliefs” (Richard L. Anderson, *Studies in Scripture*, 1.112).

Look at this section to find points of doctrine in that are unique to the restoration?

20:17-18 *Who is God?*

20:19-20 *What was the Fall?*

20:21-24 *Why is there a Son of God?*

20:25-27a *What is the responsibility of believers?*

20:27b-28 *What is the Godhead?*

20:29 *What is repentance?*

20:30-34 *What is justification and Sanctification?*

20:35-36 *What is scripture?*

#### Policies and Procedures: D&C 20:37-84

The section continues with seven covenants made at the time of baptism from Moroni 6 with one edition. In 1829 after receiving the priesthood, Oliver had written a forerunner of portions of D&C 20 with instructions on baptism, administering the sacrament, ordaining teachers and priests (fulfilling D&C 8:1,11)

#### D&C 2:37

And again, by way of commandment to the church concerning the manner of baptism—All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and witness before the church that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church.

#### Moroni 6:2-4

2. Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. And none were received unto baptism save . . . . they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.

4 And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ

#### Priesthood: D&C 20:38-67

Priesthood responsibilities help the church become more Christ-like. It is a vehicle for service for both men and women. In magnifying our callings we seek to do His Will and keep our priorities straight. Priesthood is not only the power of God on earth, it is also God’s training ground for men. It wasn’t until 1877 that all young men were ordained to Aaronic priesthood callings. And in 1978 that all worthy males received these blessings. Women who have been endowed receive similar promises that we will discuss next week in the organization of the Relief Society.