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Epilogue

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Epilogue

For Latter-day Saints, the story of Christopher Columbus does not begin with his birth in 1451; nor does it end with his death in 1506. Because they believe that everyone associated with this earth lived as spirit children of our Heavenly Father in a premortal state before they came to earth, they believe that Columbus lived before he came here. And because they believe that life continues after death, they believe he is now in the Spirit World awaiting the resurrection with millions of other spirits who have passed from this life.

But Latter-day Saints are more involved in Columbus' life than just believing that he lived in a premortal state and waiting for him to be resurrected. They believe that he was an instrument in the Lord's hand to discover the Americas to the Europeans. That in turn brought the Founding fathers here to establish the United States of America. Its freedoms made it possible to restore the Church of Jesus Christ to the earth. And there is still more.

They have a tradition that President Wilford Woodruff, while he was serving as the President of the St. George Temple, was visited by the spirits of several great men who requested him to perform vicarious baptism for them in the temple. Speaking of that experience, President Woodruff said:

the spirits of the dead gathered around me, wanting to know why we did not redeem them. Said they, "You have had the use of the Endowment House for a number of years, and yet nothing has ever been done for us. We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy, and we never apostatized from it, but we remained true to it and were faithful to God." These were the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and they waited on me for two days and two nights. I thought it very singular, that notwithstanding so much work had been done, and yet nothing had been done for them. The thought never entered my heart, from the fact, I suppose, that heretofore our minds were reaching after our more immediate friends and relatives. I straightway went into

the baptismal font [in the temple] and called upon brother McCallister to baptize me for the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and fifty other eminent men, making one hundred in all, including John Wesley, Columbus, and others. (*JD* 19:229)

On the same day these ordinances were performed, President Woodruff records in his journal that he baptized brother McCallister “for 21, including Gen Washington & his forefathers and all the Presidents of the United States that were on my list except Buchanan Van Buren & Grant. . . . Sister Lucy Bigelow Young went forth into the font and was Baptized for Martha Washington and her family and seventy (70) of the Eminent women of the world. . . . There were Baptized in all to day 682” (*Woodruff, Journal* 7:367–69). All these proxy ordinances are performed for the dead so they as spirits in the Spirit World may accept or reject them.

As President Ezra Taft Benson presided over the Church in 1992, the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ epic voyage, it seems appropriate to quote his appraisal of the man and the other “eminent men” whose temple ordinances were performed by President Woodruff:

The temple work for the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence and other founding fathers has been done. All these appeared to Wilford Woodruff when he was President of the St. George Temple. President George Washington was ordained a High Priest at that time. You will also be interested to know that according to Wilford Woodruff’s journal, John Wesley, Benjamin Franklin, and Christopher Columbus were also ordained High Priests at the time. When one casts doubt upon the character of these noble sons of God, I believe he or she will have to answer to the God of heaven for it. (Benson 604)

Notwithstanding the mistakes he made in his life and the human faults he had, Christopher Columbus was a man of notable spiritual sensitivity. Given the powers of repentance and forgiveness, it should come as no surprise that President Wilford Woodruff vicariously had his endowments done and ordained him a High Priest three days after he was baptized for him.