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## A Theophany Resplendent

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*By James E. Talmage, of the Council of the Twelve*

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The spring of 1820 stands recorded as a time of transcendent import in the chronicles of both heaven and earth. For many centuries the human mind, heart, and soul, had been beclouded by false precept and darkening dogma respecting Deity. Through apostasy and its inseparable ignorance mankind had actually lost the knowledge of God. This dire condition had been foreseen and predicted by holy prophets, apostles and seers, and by the Lord Christ himself.

By human search alone man cannot find God. The knowledge of Deity and Divine attributes once lost by the race can never be recovered save through a new revelation from the heavens.

When, at the season named, the pure-hearted, truth-seeking lad, Joseph Smith, sought seclusion in the grove to pray for guidance in a matter that he considered of vital importance to his soul, he moved to action the supreme powers of both good and evil.

Evil first vented its rage upon the youthful suppliant, he was buffeted by Satanic fury, and all the agencies of darkness conspired to terrify and deter. Feeling that without the intervention of a mightier power he would be utterly destroyed, he called all the more earnestly upon God for aid. Let the lad's own words tell the wondrous story:

"Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

"It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me 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.*"

The question about which Joseph had been most troubled, and for answer to which he had sought the Lord in obedience to scriptural precept and promise (see James 1:5), was as to which of all the contending sects and churches of the time was the Church of Christ. The Beloved Son, Jesus the Christ, instructed him to refrain from joining any of the sects, as their

teachings were the precepts of men, at best but a form of godliness devoid of the power thereof.

The Scriptures extant hold no record of a theophany, or personal manifestation of Deity, so glorious as was this. On three earlier occasions, each marking the inauguration of a distinctive dispensation of Divine purpose and authority, had the Voice of the Eternal Father been heard, attesting the Godship of Jesus Christ. These were severally:

- (1) At the time of our Lord's baptism in Jordan.
- (2) At His transfiguration.
- (3) When, as a resurrected and glorified Being, He ministered to the descendants of Lehi on the American continent.

In all these manifestations, the Father was heard but not seen, so far as Sacred Writ avers. In the latest attestation of the Son's authority by the Father the Two stood side by side.

It is consistent with the distinguishing supremacy of the Last Dispensation—the Dispensation of Fulness—into which all authority and powers of earlier dispensations are to be gathered and restored, that its beginning should be signalized by Divine disclosures of surpassing purport and significance.

The appearing of the Eternal Father and His Son Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith, in the spring of 1820, marked the end of a long era of apostasy and ignorance, except as unbelief or sin yet enthralls the individual soul.

Through that transcendent event, the knowledge of the personality of both Father and Son was again given to man.

The plain and ennobling truth that God is literally in the physical form and image after which man has been created was established anew.

Thereby, also, was the fact reaffirmed that in His dealings with the human race the Father operates through Jesus Christ the Son. "Hear Him" was the Father's commandment to Joseph, and through Joseph to the world. In harmony therewith stands the testimony of Christ given of old: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

The theophany of 1820 demonstrated that the Church of Christ was not existent upon earth, and furthermore that for its reestablishment a special delegation of power and appointment was requisite.

It marked the ushering in of the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, of which the olden prophets had spoken, and which shall continue until the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth to inaugurate the Millennium of consummation and peace.