

## Jesus' baptism and coronation, LeGrand Baker

John the Baptist's assignment was given to him at the Council in Heaven. That is recorded in Isaiah 40. The last half of Isaiah, beginning with chapter 40 and continuing until the end of the book, is a poetic review of the ancient Israelite temple drama.<sup>1</sup> That is apparent because his constant references to the psalms and the sequence of the story he tells are the same as the Feast of Tabernacles temple rites.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40 begins at the Council in Heaven where Elohim is giving instructions to its members:

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1-2).

In these verses to "comfort" is to empower, just as it is in Isaiah 61:2-3 where to comfort is to perform the ancient coronation ordinances (wash, clothe, anoint, give a new name, and crown).<sup>3</sup> "God" in the first verse is Elohim. In the Old Testament, Jehovah is often shown as speaking to individuals, but that is not true of Elohim who is only represented as speaking to the Council in Heaven. That is also true in these verses. "Ye" is plural. The Father's instructions to the members of the Council include to "comfort" (make kings and priests) his people. That is further affirmed by the word "double" which is code for the birthright blessings.<sup>4</sup> In this temple context (as also

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<sup>1</sup>Our book, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship In the Old Testament and In the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Eborn Books, 2009) gives a reconstruction of the Israelite temple drama at the time of Solomon's Temple. The second half of the book shows that virtually every sermon in the Book of Mormon is based on the Nephite temple experience.

However, in the following footnotes, the references are to the page numbers in the 2011 second edition (paperback).

As will be shown when we get to 1 Nephi 20, there is an ancient, fraudulent insert in Isaiah's poem that runs from 44:28 through chapter 48. The insert was written during the Babylonian captivity and has caused Bible scholars no end of trouble since then. Because that part was obviously not written by Isaiah, scholars have attached the authorship of all of the second half of Isaiah to the Babylon period and have called its author "Second Isaiah" (some have claimed a third and fourth Isaiah also). However if one removes that insert and replaces it with 1 Nephi 20, then the continuity of the poem is restored and the last half of Isaiah, beginning with the Council in Heaven and concluding with the millennial reign of the Savior, becomes a magnificent poetic rendition of the Israelite temple drama.

<sup>2</sup>This assertion is based on the findings reported in *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?*.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of "comfort" as empowerment in the coronation ceremony see *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 340-42.

<sup>4</sup>That law is found in Deuteronomy 21:15-17, where it is explained

in Isaiah 61) it represents the birthright blessings of Abraham, which are “received of the Lord’s hand.”

The next several verses, still in the context of the Council in Heaven, tell of the assignment John the Baptist received there. This was apparently well known to the Jews, because each of the gospels quote it<sup>5</sup> as evidence of the legitimacy of John’s mission and also of the Savior’s divinity. Isaiah reads:

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:  
5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken *it*.  
6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass,<sup>6</sup> and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:  
7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.  
8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.  
9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be

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that the firstborn shall have a double portion even if he is not the favorite son and his mother is not the favorite wife.

5 Matthew 3:1-3, Mark 1:2-4, Luke 3:2-4, John 1:21-21.

6 One can get a good sense of the meaning of this simile by comparing it with similar usage in the Psalms:

7 When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever (Psalms 92:7).

15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more (Psalms 103:15-16).

4 The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

5 Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.

6 Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up (Psalms 129:4-6).

John’s own interpretation is this:

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:11-12).

not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

10 Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Isaiah 40:3-11).

Matthew gives the most complete account of Jesus's baptism. It reads:

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:13-17).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Psalm 2 gives the royal new name as "son" ("The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee [Psalm 2:7])." For a discussion of that new covenant name see *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition) 360-72.

The title, "My Beloved Son," is discussed in that book on pages 633-34. It begins with the Father introducing his Son to the Nephites:

7 Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name--hear ye him (3 Nephi 11:1-7).

This introduction is the same as that spoken many times by Heavenly Father. It is also the same as Jehovah spoke in the second psalm, sung at the coronation services of the festival drama, when he declared that the king is a son of God. Here, in 3 Nephi, the royal name-title "Son" is used in precisely the same way—as part of the coronation service in which Christ is enthroned as Eternal King. Consequently, the words spoken by the Father, "this is my Beloved Son," would have been understood by the people to be an announcement that Christ is God, but it also would also have been understood as the ceremonial announcement that he is Jehovah, the King of kings. A whole series of psalms had predicted his coming, as Mowinckel has outlined:

Yahweh's enthronement day is that day when he 'comes' (Psalm 96. 13; 98. 9) and 'Makes himself known' 98.2), reveals himself and his 'salvation' and his will (93.5; 99. 7), when he repeats the theophany of Mount Sinai (97.3ff.; 99.7f), and renews the election (47.5) of Israel, and the covenant with his people (95.6ff.; 99. 6ff.). The mighty 'deed of salvation' upon which his kingdom is founded is the Creation, which is alluded to in a rather mythic guise (93.3f.).

The Prophet Joseph clarified the meaning of the dove:

He was trusted & it was required at his hands to baptize the son of Man. Who ever did that? who had so great a privilege & glory?—son of God into the waters of baptism & beholding the Holy Ghost—in the sign the form of a dove—with the sign of the dove. instituted before the creation Devil could not come in sign of a dove.—Holy Ghost is a personage in the form of a personage<sup>8</sup> —does not confine itself to form of a dove—but in sign of a dove.<sup>9</sup>

John the Beloved’s description of the Savior’s baptism is much alike the Prophet’s clarification:

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

33 And I knew him not:<sup>10</sup> but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God (John 1:32-34).

There John said the “Spirit” “abode upon him,” “remaining on him.” What John saw was clearly not a bird but something whose form resembled a descending white dove with outstretched wings. Peter explained even further:

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:34-42).

The New Testament does not elaborate on Peter’s statement that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power,” but we get a sense of what that means by John’s testimony in D&C 93:

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Thus the people in America heard the voice of the Father declaring that Jesus is his rightful Heir—Eternal Priest and King—“my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name.”

<sup>8</sup>It is instructive to note that the word the Prophet Joseph chose here is “personage,” just as in lecture 5 of *Lectures on Faith*.

<sup>9</sup>Diary of Willard Richards, quoted in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 160. B. H. Roberts edited and filled out the sentences of this statement in *History of The Church*, 5: 260 - 261. His edited version was later reprinted in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 275.

<sup>10</sup>The word “not” was removed by the Prophet Joseph in his Inspired Version of the Bible.

15 And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son.

16 And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father;

17 And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him (D&C 93:15-17).

This ordinance was to “fulfill all righteousness (zedek)” as Nephi explains:

5 And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!

6 And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?

7 Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments.

8 Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove.

9 And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them.

10 And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?

11 And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.

12 And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, *like unto me*; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do (2 Nephi 31:5-12, emphasis added).

The Savior’s baptism was strikingly like his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. We have five accounts of the Savior’s coronation on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter, and Joseph Smith’s inspired version. Each adds details the others do not. The following is a composite of those accounts using only the unique parts of each:

28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray (Luke 9:28)

2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light (Matthew 17:2)

9:3And his raiment became shining, exceeding white, as snow; so white as no

fuller on earth could whiten them.

9:4 And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses, or in other words, John the Baptist and Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. (JST Mark 9:3-4)

32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him (Luke 9:31-32).

5 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee [Melchizedek Priesthood], and one for Moses [Aaronic Priesthood], and one for Elias [Elijah: sealing power] (Mark 9:4-5).

34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud (Luke 9:34).

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only (Matthew 17:5-8).

34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.

35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

36 And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen. (Luke 9:34-36).

9 And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead (Mark 9:9).

Peter's personal testimony, which he wrote in anticipation of his own death, confirmed the event as a coronation ceremony:

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;

14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these

things always in remembrance.

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty [kingship].

17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory,<sup>11</sup> when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Peter 1:12-19).

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<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of the royal clothing, and of “honor and glory” representing names of the garments of priesthood and kingship see *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 349-58.