

# St. George Utah Temple Renovation



## SUMMARY

The St. George Utah Temple, originally dedicated in 1877, is a monument to the significance and persistence of sacred temple ordinances in Latter-day Saint doctrine and worship. Ordinances that bind God's children to Jesus Christ and bind them together as families were revealed to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois, but the Saints were forced to abandon their temple in Nauvoo due to violent persecution. The later construction of the St. George temple manifested the endurance of these sacred practices and provided a place for their standardization and expansion. The temple has since been renovated more than 10 times, always with the aim of continuing to offer these ordinances to a growing community.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Temples are sacred buildings where we make covenants that bind us to Jesus Christ and our families.
- The St. George Utah Temple is evidence of the Savior's love, the ongoing Restoration of His gospel, and the continuity of priesthood authority.
- Sacred ordinances have been performed in the St. George temple since its initial dedication in 1877. This renovation will allow sacred ordinances to continue in the temple for many years to come.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The St. George Utah Temple was a significant step in extending temple blessings to all people.

- **Temple ordinances written**  
Envisioning many temples, Church President Brigham Young directed that the temple ordinances be recorded in writing to ensure their consistency and long-term availability. In St. George, working under Young's direction, Wilford Woodruff, the first president of the St. George temple, and others made the first written record of ordinances that had been passed on by word of mouth since they were revealed to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. That effort continues to bless us today.
- **More ordinances for deceased individuals**  
St. George was the first temple where the endowment ordinance was performed by proxy for deceased individuals. It was also the first temple where proxy sealings were performed in which both spouses were deceased. (Baptisms for the dead had been performed in Nauvoo, and some sealings of living individuals to their deceased spouses had also been done there.)
- **Precursor to revelation**  
Wilford Woodruff's experiences as president of the St. George temple helped shape his views on

genealogy and prepared him to receive revelation that continues to influence temple worship today.

- **Distinction developed between general and temple worship**  
The St. George temple and the temples that followed it were reserved exclusively for temple ordinances and related meetings, unlike the Nauvoo and Kirtland temples, which were used for multiple types of worship and even civic meetings.

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ST. GEORGE UTAH TEMPLE HISTORY

### Temple Construction

In the years before his death, Brigham Young was focused on extending temple blessings to as many Latter-day Saints as possible. Constructing a temple in St. George enabled Brigham Young to share critical information about temple worship with the next generation of Church leaders. Its relatively short construction schedule is especially remarkable for a community with few resources in a harsh environment.

- **January 1871: Announced**  
Brigham Young proposes building a temple in St. George, the first since the exodus from Nauvoo.<sup>1</sup>
- **November 1871: Site dedicated**  
The temple site is dedicated by Brigham Young, and excavation begins.<sup>2</sup>
  - Brigham Young's plan for the St. George temple closely follows Joseph Smith's designs for the Nauvoo Temple, ensuring continuity of the temple experience across generations.
  - Construction of the temple becomes a motivator for pioneering Latter-day Saints in southern Utah to contribute to their community despite the harshness of life in the region. Church members throughout Utah contribute labor and materials to enable construction. Most construction workers are paid from goods donated as tithing and other Church offerings.
- **March 1873: Cornerstone laid**
- **June 1875: Font fabricated**  
Casting work on the font commences in Salt Lake City.<sup>3</sup>

- **June 1875: Exterior walls and parapet completed**  
Principal exterior masonry work is completed, and plastering begins.
- **August 1875: Font delivered**  
The font is transported from Salt Lake City and installed in the temple. It is transported in pieces by rail to Nephi and then by ox team to St. George in sweltering summer heat.
- **October 1875: Roof installed**
- **November 1875 – December 1876: Interior finish woodwork installed**

### Temple Dedication and Ordinance Work

The dedication of the St. George Utah Temple marked a key milestone in the Church's growth. Since then, many Latter-day Saints have attended the temple at great personal expense and sacrifice. In early years, travel to the temple could take weeks on rough roads by wagon. A portion of the road between communities in Arizona and St. George was nicknamed "the Honeymoon Trail" because so many Church members traveled that road to be sealed as husband and wife and participate in other temple ordinances.

- **January 1, 1877: Sections of the temple dedicated**
  - The baptistry is dedicated by Wilford Woodruff. An assembly room on the second level is dedicated by Erastus Snow. A sealing room on the upper level is dedicated by Brigham Young Jr.
- **January – April 1877: Temple ordinances documented**  
Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and other Church leaders transcribe the endowment ceremony.
- **January 9, 1877: Baptisms for the dead begin in the temple**
- **January 11, 1877: Endowment work begins in the temple**
  - Wilford Woodruff records that almost 25,000 baptisms for the dead; 12,000 endowments; and 3,800 sealings were completed in the temple during the first year.<sup>4</sup>

- **April 1877: First dedication of the entire temple pronounced**
  - Daniel H. Wells, second counselor to Brigham Young, offers the dedicatory prayer in the opening session of general conference, held in the St. George temple. Brigham Young, despite his failing health, offers a few remarks.
- **Fall 1877: Ordinances performed for prominent world leaders**
  - In response to visions and dreams of prominent US leaders, Wilford Woodruff and others perform temple ordinances for prominent deceased people in US and world history, including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Burns, Christopher Columbus, John Wesley and George Washington. Lucy Bigelow Young is baptized for Martha Washington and “seventy (70) of the Eminent women of the world.”<sup>5</sup> This effort signals an expansion of temple ordinances to all people. (Years later, a subsequent revelation to then Church President Wilford Woodruff directs members to research their genealogy and perform ordinances following kinship lines.)
- **August 1878: Tower struck by lightning**
  - The original steeple is damaged by lightning. In 1882, it is replaced by a new tower designed by architect William H. Folsom. In 1994, the wood tower is replaced with one made of fiberglass and metal.
- **1938: Significant modification made to floor plan**
  - Endowment rooms are moved from the basement to the main level. A large assembly room on the main level is replaced by smaller rooms incorporating murals.
  - These changes align the St. George temple with other operating temples in the early 20th century.
  - Architects Young and Hansen design the modifications.
- **1975: Annex enlarged and staircase added to west side**
  - This work significantly increases the capacity of the temple and adds new sealing rooms.
  - Part of the renovation enables the temple to use the film version of the endowment instruction rather than using live actors.
  - Much of the 1870s design aesthetic in the temple’s interior is obscured by 1970s design choices. Church architect Emil Fetzer designs the renovation.
  - Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Church in 1975, presides at the rededication in November of that year.
- **2019 – 2023: Efforts made to stabilize entire structure**
  - New annexes are added on the north and west.
  - A bride’s exit is added for wedding ceremonies.
  - The baptistry suite is enlarged and an independent baptistry entrance is created.
  - New interior finishes are implemented that follow 19th-century design patterns.
  - Traffic flow and wayfinding are improved.
  - Major mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems are replaced.
  - New trees are planted, and landscaping and site features are improved.

## Renovating the Temple

Since its dedication, the St. George Utah Temple has been renovated more than 10 times. Four significant renovations improved functionality, increased capacity, and incorporated technologies to further its sacred purposes.

- **1917: Temple annex enlarged**
  - Partition walls are added in the basement and main level to allow concurrent ceremonies and additional comfort.
  - Architects Don Carlos Young and Ramm Hansen, who later design the Mesa Arizona Temple, design the modifications.

## Interesting Facts and Figures

- The St. George area is the historic home of the Paiute tribes. Some tribal members participated in temple construction and early ordinance work in the temple.
  - Parowan, the oldest Latter-day Saint settlement in Southern Utah, was founded in 1851. St. George was founded in 1861.
  - Truman O. Angell was appointed temple architect by Brigham Young, and he remained heavily involved in design and construction.
  - On Jan. 31, 1871, when Brigham Young announced the plan to build the temple in a meeting with the St. George Stake high council and other local leaders, Erastus Snow shouted, "Glory, hallelujah!"
  - St. George had roughly 1,100 residents in 1871.
  - The temple was constructed by skilled local craftsmen using local materials. Stone and lime for plaster came from local quarries. Wood came from Mt. Trumbull, Arizona, which required construction of a new road. Glass for windows and metal for nails and the roof came from Salt Lake City.
  - Brigham Young personally paid for the temple baptismal font. The font and oxen were cast by Davis and Howe Foundry in Salt Lake City and freighted to St. George by wagon. The font was in six pieces. Christian Christensen, one of the freighters, recalled: "Apostle Orson Hyde went in and saw the font in place and came out weeping with joy. He thanked God that he had lived to see another font in place in a temple of the Lord."<sup>6</sup>
  - A few construction workers left signatures and time capsules in the walls of the temple. One contained original inspirational poetry they had written.
- 1 See Kirk M. Curtis, "History of the St. George Temple" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1964), 23, citing Juanita Brooks, "To the Glory of God," *Arizona Highways* (Arizona State Highway Department, 1947), 1.
  - 2 See Curtis, "History of the St. George Temple," 30.
  - 3 See "Castings for the Temple," *Deseret Evening News*, June 17, 1875, 3.
  - 4 See Wilford Woodruff, Journal (January 1, 1873 – February 7, 1880), Wilford Woodruff Papers, 1877 year-end summary, 296, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/a7e13e76-da8b-4991-a0f5-a7fa1f3c223e/page/b3dce41f-dfe4-4094-a629-32391a0100f2>.
  - 5 See Wilford Woodruff, Journal (January 1, 1873 – February 7, 1880), Wilford Woodruff Papers, Aug. 21, 1877, 274, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/a7e13e76-da8b-4991-a0f5-a7fa1f3c223e/page/b8aa5b0b-698d-4842-9748-a56143920457>.
  - 6 C. L. Christensen, "How the Temple Font Was Taken to St. George," *Deseret News*, Aug. 29, 1931, 8.

